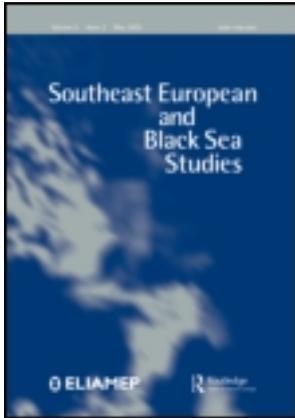


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### European stories. Intellectual debates on Europe in national contexts

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process of regionalism and in particular at the potential of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation while Slawmir Raszewski argues that it is the concern over energy diversification that has raised the geostrategic importance of the Black Sea as an alternative energy corridor for the European economies.

The essays above indicate that rather than speaking about the complementarities or conflict among the EU's policies it is better to highlight the complexity and inter-link of issues and policies in EU's Black Sea frontier. The book fills in a gap in the literature on the region as a whole, as published work so far has focused on major countries such as Russia's and Turkey's EU track, on the South Caucasus rather than the Black Sea subregion or has taken an issue focused approach (energy, security, environment). The book by debating the policy evolution and characteristics of EU's political and sectoral policies for the Black Sea as a distinct region and looking into the security conditions in which these policies evolve, presents the reader with a well documented picture of the evolution of EU's Black Sea since 2004 and the emergence of the European Neighborhood Policy.

The essays included are a useful resource to researchers, students, and policy makers interested in European policies in the eastern neighborhood and in Black Sea regional dynamics.

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**European stories. Intellectual debates on Europe in national contexts**, edited by Justine Lacroix and Kalypso Nicolaidis, Oxford University Press, 2011, 432 pp., ISBN 0199594627

The first thing that strikes the reader when opening the volume on *European Stories* is the jacket illustration. The imagery is a collage of Europe's dance, the continent's geography woven into the movement, supplemented by the European Union's logo of circling stars hovering above city lights and against the background of an azure blue cover design.

As the intellectual journey begins, the reader is taken across a 12 country tour-de-force, spanning from Norway to Greece, across Poland and Romania, over to Spain, Ireland and Turkey. The country sample allows for encompassing comparative leverage, which the international cast of editors and contributors have admirably sustained throughout the 400 pages plus book.

When giving a taster of the book the focus is on how European integration has been dealt with by public intellectuals between 1957 and 2009. For experienced hands in European politics both the point of departure and the arrival date is no coincidence. They bridge the Treaty of Rome with the Treaty of Maastricht, the introduction of the single currency, EU enlargement in 2004 and 2007. All the four cornerstones tell us something about the constitution of progress in the formation of post-World War II European identities. For the authors they also serve a secondary purpose, namely as an intellectual benchmarking exercise. Consequently, they ask

what is the wider final destination and political objective, in French *finalité*, of the European integration process?

The 24 contributors argue that such public debate and intellectual inquiry is shaped by people who seek to inform and contribute to the narrative of the continent's common interests, its diversities and growing dissonances. But they also aim higher in a normative sense when undertaking to identify what their and our level of ambition is in today's Europe? The method chosen to deliver on this ambitious agenda is the instrument of individual country stories, presented within historical contexts, cultural dynamics, religious prisms and economic imbalances. Such a combination of approaches and signposts is a tall order.

But it must be said that reading *European Stories* is an intellectual journey worth the effort. The stories change as the episodes elide: what constitutes a European [public] intellectual? German, French and Italian visions of Europe go hand in hand with reflections on British peculiarities regarding the 'Question of Europe' as well as those countries returning to Europe (e.g. Poland, Romania and the Czech Republic) but finding themselves being caught between old fears and new European challenges.

Books on Europe with high-minded intellectuals as their protagonists are not often page turners; this one on *European Stories* is! Why is that the case? Most importantly, because the authors combine a deep expertise in political institutions across the continent with an impressive familiarity of European, cross-border history, interspersed with philosophy and social theory. In doing so, the narrative presented by the cast of international authors does neither shy away from illuminating intellectual ghettos in individual countries, such as the underdog culture frequently visible in Greece, Ireland and Portugal or to what degree Europe risks becoming the problem and not the solution for present-day crisis across the continent.

Ultimately, *European Stories* is about country-specific story telling with a normative agenda attached. It seeks to advance the transnational debate on European integration, inside but not exclusively within the prism of the EU. Such an invitation to engage in this public debate adds legitimacy to the integration project, irrespective of being a member of the EU, a candidate country such as Turkey or an outlier like Norway.

Formulating the cornerstones of such a narrative today includes defending the assets and achievements of European integration during the past 50 years for the coming decade. Important as it is, that proposition in itself does not necessarily make for an attractive story in the future. Many tangible benefits of European integration have become culturally rooted in societies and institutionally anchored in political economies across the continent. The generation of founding fathers (there were hardly any mothers involved) has given way to political leaders, corporate representatives and intellectual advocates, whose primary experience is not anymore the Second World War and its immediate aftermath, but the fall of the Berlin Wall, 9/11 and the financial crisis of 2008/09.

As intellectual journeys in time and space across the European continent motivate us to think twice and deeper, the stories told and the narratives shaped by intellectuals and ordinary citizens today often hold additional elements that are not explicitly addressed, but lurk between many lines and the book's chapters. One such an element concerns the notion of European solidarity. The volume's tapestry of European stories thus includes an unspoken advocacy for European solidarity. Indeed, such solidarity comes with normative conditions attached, e.g. regarding

democracy principles, adherence to the rule of law and transparent economic governance.

At a time when the euro zone crisis risks calling into question fundamental achievements of the 11-year old single currency, when the new Hungarian media law under Prime Minister Viktor Orban is shifting the goal posts towards authoritarian government and visa liberalization again stops at the Shengen borders between Denmark and Germany, France and Italy the clarion call for defending existing achievements is loud and clear. Less articulate are the voices that advocate a notion of European identity and principles of reasoned intellectual debate that include solidarity as a tangible benefit and political objective of European integration. How difficult it is currently to define such principles of European solidarity is exemplified by the public debates and polemic interventions surrounding tax payer financed rescue packages for Greece, Ireland and Portugal.

*European Stories* is an ambitious, erudite and eloquent contribution to an emerging field of scholarly inquiry and intellectual debate that seeks to bridge the polyphony of European narratives in a comparative perspective and across academic disciplines. Such a sweeping survey deserves congratulations for their initiators because they think big, outside the box and are aiming high. We are just at the start of bridging these intellectual divides and geographical boundaries in Europe. However, neither the authors nor the readers should sit on their laurels. The economic, fiscal, political and cultural challenges in Europe today are real and risk creating new dividing lines across the continent. We all have our work cut out and await with curiosity the paperback edition!

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