Europe’s Contending Identities

How “European” are Europeans? Is it possible to balance national citizenship with belonging to the European Union overall? Do feelings of citizenship and belonging respond to affiliations to regions, religions, or reactionary politics? Unlike previous volumes about identity in Europe, this book’s answers to these questions offer a more comprehensive view of the range of identities and new arguments about the political processes that shape identity formation. The founders of European integration promised “an ever closer union.” Nationalists respond that a people should control their own destiny. This book investigates who is winning the debate. The chapters show that attitudes toward broader political communities are changing, that new ideas are gaining ground, and that long-standing trends are possibly reversing course.

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Europe’s Contending Identities

Supranationalism, Ethnoregionalism, Religion, and New Nationalism

Edited by

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ANTHONY M. MESSINA
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To my son, Caio, my wife, Isabel, and our Portuguese and American families abroad and at home.

Andrew C. Gould

To my extraordinary son, Michael, who is becoming increasingly sure of his identity.

Anthony M. Messina
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Several lively conversations between the editors inspired the collaboration that eventually culminated in this volume. Although we initially approached the project from somewhat different intellectual starting points, we quickly became enthused about the possibility of working together to convene a group of distinguished scholars who would reflect upon and share their wisdom about the prospects for the emergence of a mass European identity against the backdrop of the persistence of ethnoregional, religious, and nationalist identities within the member-state countries of the European Union. For reasons upon which we elaborate in the Introduction, our impulse from the start was to privilege the role of politics in potentially impeding or facilitating the emergence of a robust European identity.

Other than the essay by Marco Cinnirella and Saira Hamilton, which originally appeared in the journal *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30, 3 (2007), all of the volume’s chapters were presented at a conference at the University of Notre Dame’s London Center during October 17 and 18, 2008. In addition to the contributors to the book, the conference was enriched by the presence and participation of Mabel Berezin, Jytte Klausen, AbdoolKarim Vakil, Jonathan Laurence, and Juan Diez Medrano. We were especially pleased and honored to host Tariq Ramadan as the conference’s keynote speaker. Thanks to the intellectual vitality of all the participants, the quality of intellectual exchange at the conference not only met but exceeded our very high expectations.

The dynamic nature of the issues raised in this volume was underscored from late 2009 forward – or approximately a year after our London conference – when several countries within the eurozone area found it impossible to refinance their sovereign debt without being rescued by third parties. This post-2009 turn of events appeared to pose a dilemma for our project: Was the festering crisis significantly eroding European political and social solidarity and thus making the question of a European identity – the central question
of our volume – moot? As we note in the Introduction, the question is not moot; popular feelings of Europeanness and attachments to Europe have hitherto remained relatively steady even as Europe’s governments impose austerity measures and disagree about how to move forward. Although the crisis has severely tested and continues to strain intermember-state and even intersocietal relations, there is still no empirical evidence that suggests that it has significantly or permanently reversed the established trend toward a dual mode of identification – national and European – among EU citizens. If anything, the relevance of European identity is increasing as national electorates and leaders wrestle with the challenges of whether and how to build new mechanisms and institutions to facilitate greater cross-border economic and political cooperation.

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