Foreword

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The rise of nationalism within European countries, including the UK, has run in parallel with the wider, and at first sight contradictory, process of European integration. The interplay between the two phenomena is a particularly fascinating and topical object to analyse, as illustrated by UKIP's striking results in the May 2014 European elections and the EU's role in the debate about Scottish independence.

Contributions in this issue of *Graat On-Line* focus on two very different types of nationalist parties, whose attitudes towards the European Union are also distinct. Parties from the different nations of the UK, the Scottish National Party (SNP), Wales' Plaid Cymru (PC) and Northern Ireland's Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) have all embraced Europe, although sometimes fairly recently, as a way to strengthen their case for self-determination *vis à vis* their central government. Instead one of the main policies of the far-right British National Party (BNP) and the populist United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) is to withdraw Britain from the European Union in order to "regain sovereignty".

These two attitudes correspond more or less to the now traditional distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism, although UKIP claims to support a civic type of nationalism. The SNP, PC and the SDLP define their nationalism as civic, that is inclusive, tolerant and liberal, based on territory rather than ethnicity. Hence the SNP made sure every resident in Scotland aged 16 and above could vote in the referendum on independence on 18 September 2014, whereas Scots living in England or elsewhere could not. Civic nationalism can accommodate other senses of belonging, whereas ethnic

nationalism, such as is promoted by the BNP, is based on descent, blood, language and can be much less tolerant and much more exclusive of other identities.

As Cauvet, Simpkins and Bory show in their respective articles, the SNP, PC and SDLP have used their pro-European commitment for political needs. Supporting membership of the EU has allowed them to increase their legitimacy both inwards and outwards. Domestically, supporting independence within the European Union was a way of reassuring potential voters while making their claims for economic and political viability more credible. Separatism within the EU would appear as less of a leap in the dark if it took place within the comfort and security of the EU. In their dealings with the British government and their campaign for independence, both the SNP and PC could claim that their interests in Europe were insufficiently protected by London, a case made much stronger by the Coalition government's growing estrangement from Brussels. The SDLP's use of Europe to strengthen their position and redefine Irish nationalism, documented by Cauvet, predated the SNP and PC's conversions to membership of the EU (in the 1980s). John Hume's model of nationalism was actually, he argues, one of post-nationalism within a broader Europe entity, a step which neither the SNP nor Plaid Cymru have taken, although Plaid Cymru is keen to embrace a civic nationalism not limited to promoting the Welsh language. A common feature of these three parties is nevertheless that they see no contradiction between their love of their nation, their willingness to achieve self-determination through independence or reunification on the one hand, membership of a wider grouping of nations sharing some of their sovereignty on the other. It is also noticeable that the SNP, though playing the anti-Establishment, anti-London card during the Scottish referendum campaign, never played the anti-Brussels one in the way UKIP does.

Indeed the case of the BNP and UKIP is very different. Hostility to Europe is common to both parties, although UKIP is keen to distance itself from the BNP's aggressive ethnic nationalism. UKIP was originally a Eurosceptic offshoot of the Conservative party whose very *raison d'être* was to campaign in favour of withdrawal from the EU, although it managed to widen its policies to appeal to a wider electorate (Ford and Goodwin, 2014). Both UKIP and the BNP claim to speak for a post-imperial union and defend a "British" exceptionalism incompatible with European integration. In practice though, they are as close to English nationalists as can be—even though UKIP did win 10% of the votes and one seat in Scotland in the 2014 European elections, they won less

than half of what they achieved in England. English nationalism, as Ben Wellings has shown, has been shaped by the defence of sovereignty as well as anti-Europeanism. It was a reaction to both economic and political developments in the EC/EU in the 1980s and the process of devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, which left open the "English question" (Wellings, 2010). Both parties therefore demand immediate withdrawal from the EU, which they accuse of being an alien entity bent on destroying national sovereignty, wasting money and encouraging immigration. The difference between the two parties, rather more than UKIP's claim to want to control rather than to eliminate immigration and to support a civic nationalism, is that it opposes European integration but supports economic globalisation and free trade. In contrast with nationalist parties in the component parts of the UK, the BNP and especially UKIP have fed a widespread Euroscepticism, already present in the mainstream Conservative party and the media, which has now become "systemic" (Gifford, 2014).

Yet, the paradox for both parties is that Europe, especially the European Parliament, which they reject as illegitimate but where the BNP got two seats in 2009 (lost in 2014) and where UKIP is now the largest British party, has provided them with new visibility and resources which they would never have been able to get at home, if only because of the first-past-the-post electoral system in use nationally (but not for European elections, which are under proportional representation). These opportunities have also been seized by the SNP, PC and, until it lost its seats, the SDLP, to which the Brussels institutions offered new platforms for mobilisation and cooperation across Europe.

Comparing not just attitudes towards Europe but also the manipulation of the European issue for party political purposes by the different nationalist parties in the United Kingdom in the context of a radicalisation of British Euroscepticism therefore proves particularly important and fruitful. This set of articles hopes to be a stone in the building of knowledge about these complex issues.

References

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