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What is the European Union? A Cultural Shared Risk Community!

On the Research Agenda of European Union Cultural History

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Abstract

In this commentary, the author continues his first reflections on European Union cultural history, which opened up this field and introduced the theory of 'paradoxical coherence'. Revisiting sociological and cultural-historical works by Ulrich Beck and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, he argues that the EU can be seen as a 'cultural shared risk community', the sources of identity-building and sense-making consisting of the European citizens' shared cultural risks and fears. From this he suggests a new agenda for cultural-historical research on the EU.

Keywords

European Union cultural history; cultural shared risk community; paradoxical coherence; research agenda; commentary.

WE NEED TO DEFINE THE EU (AGAIN)

On 31 January 2020, 'Brexit' closed the longest chapter of the relationship between the European Union and Great Britain (Geddes 2013; Clarke, Goodwin and Whiteley 2017; George 1998). It is the first time that a member state has left the Union. Over the last few years, political debates in the EU have centred on the rise of nationalism and populism (Krastev 2017), migration (Betts and Collier 2018; Chaichian 2014), terrorism (Schmale 2016), climate change (Lewis and Maslin 2015; Kersten 2014) and most recently the 'Covid19' pandemic. We live in an era of fear of threats, sometimes real and sometimes fictitious (McIntyre 2018). Indeed, the thinkable dissolution of the EU is a frightening vision, because it would lead to an even more uncertain future. This situation is the reason to once again pose an 'old' question. It has to be asked once more, but in a new form. The debates on the European Union's future depend on answers to the question of what the EU is. What it is at the moment determines the range of possible future developments.

In this respect, recent European Studies have stressed the reversible and paradoxical character of EU history. Scholars have started to deconstruct the EU centric bias of earlier works (Kaiser and Varsori 2010; Patel 2013, 2018). Older works up to the 1990s included widespread interest in comprehensive EU theories. In contrast to that, from the 2000s until the time around the 'Brexit' referendum, scholarship no longer attempted to give a full or more comprehensive answer to the title question (Wiener, Börzel and Risse 2019; Bieling and Lerch 2012). Recent surveys of integration theory (ibid.) make me suppose that the 'pre-Brexit' period was a time in which society and politics seemed to not need a global theoretical concept of the EU. However, this has changed quickly over the past four years. In the current crisis after 'Brexit' and in the midst of the 'Covid19' pandemic in Europe, we have an urgent need for theoretically knowing what the EU actually is.

In this commentary, I take up my research in European Union cultural history (Pichler 2018, 2019, 2020) and suggest a new research agenda derived from it. So far, my focus herein has been the introduction of the theory of 'paradoxical coherence'. This theory interprets the EU as a distinct cultural system, which has produced a new form of cultural sense-making and community-building. Negotiating the ever-present conflict between nationalism and supranationalism, the EU established a new mode of coherence-building. It can be described as paradoxical coherence. I think that this perspective can give us a fresh answer to our question. It is my hypothesis that the EU has emerged as a 'cultural shared risk community' around the key risk inherent in the paradoxical coherence constellation. This puts new aspects at the top of the research agenda.

Subsequently, this agenda is developed in three steps: First, I discuss the history of the characterisation of the historiographic subject of the EU since 1968. The next section takes up research on the 'risk society' (Ulrich Beck) and 'latency' (Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht). I take inspiration from both when then defining the notion 'cultural shared risk community'. In a third step, the 'nature' of the EU as such a community is analysed. My conclusion gives a concise formulation of a new research agenda.

THE HISTORY OF THE CHARACTERISATION OF THE EU A HISTORIOGRAPHIC SUBJECT

European integration history emerged as an independent field in the late 1960s. In 1968, Walter Lipgens published a seminal edition of World War II resistance fighters' plans for post-war European integration, written in German (Lipgens 1968). It was followed by an expanded, English edition that included various sources of European integration history in four volumes (Lipgens 1985-1991). These works sparked off an international research

debate on European integration history (Kaiser 2010; Seidel 2010). That first phase of European integration history was characterised by the initial description of the European Community as a historiographic subject (Pichler 2018, 2020). The construction of the EC as such a subject was closely linked to projective utopias of finality. This alleged characterisation intersected with the projection of an 'ever-closer community'. Frequently, discourse drew a picture of the EC as the initial de facto realisation of what had been imagined in pre-1945 Europe by the resistance fighters – a clearly teleological and EC-biased narrative.

Then in 1982, the EC supported the establishing of a network of scientists, the 'European Union Liaison Committee of Historians' (European Union Liaison Committee of Historians 2019). The committee has been editing the *Journal of European Integration History (JEIH)* (European Union Liaison Committee of Historians 1995-2020) since 1995. This marks the beginning of the period in which European integration history has encompassed an intersectional sphere between EU institutions and science. Hence, since the installation of the *JEIH*, European integration history moved on to become European Union history, in a narrower sense. European integration history, understood as EU history, has become the mainstream. This led to an even stronger, affirmative teleology of the 'ever closer union'. In short, the EU had been 'invented' historiographically in a rather uncritical and biased way.

The most recent development saw a critical shift in perspective, probably even a shift in paradigm. Articles and books by scholars like Wolfgang Schmale, Kiran K. Patel, Guido Thiemeyer, Isabel Tölle, Michael Wintle, and the author of this commentary have seriously questioned the older narrative. In his seminal works, Schmale introduced a concept of EU history as a 'hypertext', seeing it as discursive and contingent construction (Schmale 2001, 2008, 2018). Even more critically, Patel has stressed the EU's 'synecdochic' qualities (Patel 2013, 2018). According to him, the EU has only been one of a number of different forms of institutions involving international and supranational cooperation in Europe after 1945. Of these, the EC/EU would have been only the one that has most successfully self-fashioned its appearance in the discourse. Thiemeyer and Tölle empirically questioned the EU's novelty in history (Thiemeyer and Tölle, 2011; Tölle 2016; Thiemeyer 2010). Also, Wintle has used a non-teleological, cultural notion of the EU (Wintle 2009, 2016; Wintle and Spiering 2011). On balance, today the EU appears as a historic phenomenon, the nature of which is being critically questioned. Its scientific characterisation and definition are open again.

The question 'What is the EU?' is ripe for a new answer. The question is key in the research agenda of European Union cultural history (Pichler 2018, 2019, 2020). I defined this history as '*[t]he cultural history of the way the conflict of nationalism vs. supra-nationalism is handled in EU discourse. It is the way coherent meaning is produced in this discursive network of historical poly-directionalism in post-1945 decades*' (Pichler 2018, 7-8). The novelty lies in the attempt to go a crucial step further than previous critical research. First critical EU research brought forward the aforementioned breaking-up of the established EU centrism and bias. What discourse did not do is bring in a more comprehensive, theoretical view of EU history in cultural-historical terms. Such a view must maintain distance from EU biasing, and moreover it must ask for the role the EU played as a distinct phenomenon in history.

This is where the agenda of EU cultural history comes into play. The examination of the EU starts as a distinct cultural entity, which is theorised as having produced the novel form of cultural sense-making of paradoxical coherence. Crucially, the balancing of the threat inherent to the interactions between nation-state and supranationalism implies the ever-

possible reversibility of EU history. This should avoid teleology and assumes a constantly dynamic interplay of integrative and disintegrative aspects. Paradoxical coherence is

(...) a description of the form of coherence which is produced by the EU cultural system, emerging from the oscillation between nationalism and supra-nationalism in history; as a spatially and temporally transformative, contingent 'freezing' of conflicts in historical time between both discursive forces. (Pichler 2018, 9)

This line of thought has to be seen before the backdrop of the discourse of the classic theories of European integration, such as federalism (Große Hüttman and Fischer 2012; Kelemen 2019), functionalism and neofunctionalism (Nieman et al. 2019; Wolf 2012) and (liberal) intergovernmentalism (Bieling 2012; Moravcsik and Schimmelfennig 2019; Steinhilber 2012), as well as in relation to more recent approaches like network theories (Schmale 2008) or (multi-level) governance theories (Börzel 2019; Knodt and Große Hüttmann 2012) of the EU. The notion of paradoxical coherence is not a substitute for these theories. Conversely, in many ways it is heuristically complementary to them, as it theorises the cultural-historical sphere. It grasps the cultural flux in the economic, political and governance structures of the EU. However, I am highly critical of the strongly teleological narratives of EU history that were derived from the classic theories, most of all in the early years of integration history up to the 1990s (Schmale 2001, 225-226; Ziegerhofer 2012, 52-55).

In contrast, I see the EU as a phenomenon that has a cultural 'sui generis' form (i.e. paradoxical coherence). Yet it should not be viewed as a teleological explanation or even the 'best' form of European integration. This EU history is open-ended, reversible and pulsating. This perspective implies posing the title's question in a modified way. If we assume that, first, EU integration gave birth to a distinct cultural-historical framework of sense-making; and that, second, this new mode of sense-making is moreover paradoxical coherence, then the question of the EU's 'nature' is in fact a question of how the risk-handling between nationalism and supranationalism has made a cultural community of the EU.

Consequently, this lets me presume that it has been *exactly* that management of the risk of the loss of coherence between nationalism and supranationalism that has been the EU's community-building force. It is this *shared cultural risk*, the potential loss of national identity and/or European identity, which has made the EU a cultural community. Hence, my hypothesis is that the EU is a *cultural shared risk community* in this sense. My approach looks at the EU as a cultural community, whereby risk shapes its potential for community building because risk can establish coherence; risk causes disintegration in the case of the loss of coherence. Elaborating upon this view, I revisit Ulrich Beck's influential theory of the 'risk society' and Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht's concept of 'latency'.

THE DEFINITION OF 'CULTURAL SHARED RISK COMMUNITIES'

Beck's influential book '*Risikogesellschaft. Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne*' (English: 'Risk society. On the way to another modernity') was published in 1986, in the context of the disaster of Chernobyl (Beck 1986). In it, the author introduced a framework of modernisation, claiming that his contemporary world of 1986 would have been on the way towards a 'new' form of society. In that new society, the structuring factors would be no more class differences and the related social perils of hierarchic class systems (such as unemployment, or the disparity between wealth and poverty) but global invisible risks (like environmental harms, pollution, new illnesses, and atmospheric degradation, including

today's global warming). Beck's works struck a nerve in the culture of the 1980s and 90s, during the final phase of the Cold War (Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael 2012). Furthermore, Anthony Giddens contributed to the risk society debate (Giddens 1990, 1999). It makes sense to focus on Beck's work because it was the root of this discourse. Beck's understanding of risk was developed neither strictly deductively and logically, nor purely inductively and empirically. More, his key book is a narrative of the risk society, conceptualised in the context of his time. Due to this eclecticism, Beck did not give a concise definition of the risk society. The following quote from a lecture, which he gave on *'Weltrisikogesellschaft, Weltöffentlichkeit und globale Subpolitik'* (i.e. 'Global risk society, global public sphere and global sub-politics'), comes most closely to a defining statement:

Risk society – thought through – means world risk society because its axial principles – its challenges – are perils produced by civilisation that cannot be delimited, neither spatially nor temporally nor socially. In this way, the general conditions and foundations of the first, industrial modernity – class antagonism, nation-states, moreover of linear, technical-economic rationality and control – were undermined and neutralised. (Beck 1997, 12. Author's translation).

Hence, a risk, according to Beck, can be a social one (like unemployment) as well as an ecological one (like the global spread of environmental contaminants). His risk society was a social system structured by tentatively invisible and latent, fear-inciting global and equalising risks, e.g. air pollution or nuclear energy. Beck put that 'new' world of 1986 in sharp contrast to nineteenth century industrialised societies, which in his view would have been structured by the distribution of wealth. However, I am to suggest that the differences, historically, had much more nuanced forms (Osterhammel 2014; Radkau 2014).

In Beck's view, the risk society is one in which risk forms a community-building factor. Risks are collective, at the same time real and discursively constructed, threatening latencies that structure the social world. A risk gives a community socio-cultural patterns of invisible and fear-inciting threats, resulting in attempts to control the risk through risk anticipation (Rosa et al. 2015). Using the notion of the risk society, Beck and his successors constituted a new realm in discourse, i.e. the discourse of the risk society. Until today, his notion has thus worked like a highly functional terminological 'jar'. The term produces an outer semantic boundary, like the walls of a vessel, containing and constituting a new space-time, that of the risk society. This theory-as-jar notion is driven by a well-known force: collective imagination (Schmale 2001, 2008).

Within the demarcated space-time of Beck's risk-jar, people could imagine the risk. It was imagined as patterns of threats, perils, fears and the attempt to control them through anticipation of the future. All of that together formed the community around the risk. All risks within the jar are cultural ones. Unemployment, the pollution of our environment, and also modern global warming and the EU's multi-faceted crisis are fear-inducing, culturally effective threats, countered by modes of (attempted) risk governance. In their global and European cultural totality, they have triggered a discourse of a re-evaluation of the 'Western' cultural model and its associated modes of community building; this includes liberal democracy, of which the EU is the primary European version. Hence, the urgent question is this: How is the EU such a 'jar' that holds a specific risk?

In his work after the turn of the millennium, Beck also focussed on the EU (Beck and Grande 2007). Being written from a turn-of-the-millennium point of view, the 'cosmopolitan Europe' described by Beck and Grande of course does not reflect recent

European crisis history. Their concept integrated the theory of the global risk society and a cosmopolitan view of the nation-state in Europe; however, it still restricted itself to Beck's older notion of risk (Beck and Grande 2007, 197-213).

Taking up the interpretation of risk as a force of community building, I now want to theoretically penetrate beneath the surface of its mode of how risks affect collective imagination. How do risks constitute communities as 'imagined communities' (Anderson), of which the EU is also an empirical example (Anderson 1983; Schmale 2008)? The crucial matter is the threat that a risk imposes upon cultures. Risks cause a massive discourse of constructed yet real cultural threats. Today, their key quality is their invisible, global latency. Demarcating one's own community from the 'others', this latency constitutes the space-time within the jar, also in the case of the EU. The latency of the risk gives the jar its distinct internal patterns. We therefore need to better understand how such latencies work.

Here, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's work on latency provides us with the necessary insights. Gumbrecht is a German literary and cultural scientist. His studies on cultural moods, presence, materiality and aesthetics touch on periods from the Middle Ages to the twenty-first century (Gumbrecht 2013, 2011, 2006, 2004). In his more recent works, he put a special emphasis on the idea of latency, which was already theoretically worked on by thinkers as varied as Freud, Bloch, Parsons and Weber. According to Gumbrecht, the time after 1945 gave birth to a specific form of a *Gegenwart*, a contemporary time in which the always present, paradoxical latency of the hidden yet perceptible past of the Nazi era had been prevalent.

In the twentieth century, the notion of latency, respectively the German term *Latenz*, was used to generate theories covering an immensely broad spectrum of different phenomena. Freud used it to describe 'children's sexuality' (Mayer 2016), whereas philosopher Bloch understood it as part of his framework of a philosophy of utopias as not-yet-realised resources of the past and present (Bloch 1978). Sociologist Parsons gave the notion a more distinct reading. He described a social system's ability to maintain and renew central values as 'latent pattern maintenance' (Parsons 1970). The influential social scientist Weber mentioned it more peripherally (Weber 1980). In this context of latency/*Latenz* as such a polysemic theoretical term, Gumbrecht re-introduced it as a cultural-historiographical notion:

When I speak of "latency" instead of "repulsion" or "oblivion" I mean the kind of situation the Dutch historian Eelco Runia calls "presence", which he uses the metaphor of the stowaway to illustrate (...) (Runia 2011). In a situation of latency, when a stowaway is present, we sense that something (or somebody) is there that we cannot grasp or touch – and that this "something" (or somebody) has a material articulation, which means that it (or he, or she) occupies space. (Gumbrecht 2013, 23)

Analytically, Gumbrecht's latency is a risk-theoretical notion of culture. Illustrated by the metaphor of the stowaway are situations of cultural risks in which history is defined by latent threats that we are more or less aware of. The potential threat and cultural harms that the remembrance and *Aufarbeitung* of the Nazi past did (or also could have done) in the post-war period made a situation that this notion of latency accurately analyses as cultural risks: risks of pain, of social upheavals, of re-traumatisation, of confusion and of 'disturbing' the quiet and comfortable present of post-war life when reintroducing Nazi history. The Germans and Europeans in general, as well as other communities of the Cold War era, faced such cultural risks. They had to measure them, had to prevent and

anticipate their potentially harm-causing consequences. Finally, they had to deal with them or not deal with them. In this sense, latency describes something that is there while being not there. The notion encompasses theories of how cultural risks integrate communities and construct cultural identities – or in cases of failed risk governance, disintegrate communities and threaten identities.

How can cultural risks work historically as community-building forces? The answer lies in the ambivalent character of risks, which Beck was already aware of. In each contemporary time, a cultural risk, imposing a possible threat to our community, forces us to imagine possible harms together as we try to anticipate the future, commonly in the form of scientific predictions (Beck 1992). The major cultural implication of this form of collective imagination is that it constitutes building blocks of communal identities. Let us think of some empirical examples from twentieth century European history. The identities of the communities built by green political parties since the 1970s depended on the communal anticipation of an increase in environmental pollution in a probable future (Dobson 2007). As another example, feminist communities in the post-war period were also kept together by communal images of possible dark times ahead, in which patriarchal structures would still hold power in Europe (Freedman 2002). On a supranational legal level, the establishment of the EU in the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 explicitly mentions a vision of a common European future in its preamble, in which democracy, human rights, and economic prosperity are contrasted with another menacing, sinister future to avoid (Council of the European Communities and Commission of the European Communities 1992, 3-6).

These examples illustrate the fascinating community-building force of cultural risks. In their latency, they make us think of the future together and imagine ourselves as a cultural community. Hence, such cultural risks, above all, are *shared cultural risks*, making the hereby-constituted communities *cultural shared risk* communities. It is only the seemingly contradictory but in fact coherence-producing presence of the risk that causes our common images of the future. Cultural shared risk communities can be both stable and fluid. In cases of successfully coping with their risks, they have a tendency to grow to become more stable forms (e.g. nation-states, international organisations, or *the EU*). At least, as a minimum requirement, persisting communities discursively produce a shared identity that has the envisioning of the future as its narrative.

Times of crisis are the most likely periods for history to stabilise such communities. The more threatening or the more existentially fear-evoking the crisis appears, the more probable is the historical stabilisation of such communities. Those are the periods when the fluidness of their common utopias has the best chance to crystallise into a more stable framework. Conversely, in non-successful cases, the community can be lost to disintegration. However, there is no historic law of teleology that must lead to 'ever closer' communities. Hence, I define cultural shared risk communities *as communities that are structurally built for the biggest threat(s) they communally face and/or fear*.

THE EU AS A CULTURAL SHARED RISK COMMUNITY

I now turn to the EU as such a cultural shared risk community. Let us apply the concept to the union as a community. So far EU cultural history research has brought forth two results. First, a structural hypothesis on the character of the European Union describes its cultural system as a historically distinct one. Its key feature is the need to permanently balance the latent core conflict between nationalism and supranationalism. Secondly, I suggested that this system established a new mode of cultural sense-making, i.e. paradoxical coherence. Hence, we have a theoretical hypothesis on the EU's structure as a culturally

institutionalised system of the production of meaning. Moreover, we also have a theory on the specific mode of sense-making. What we do not have is an answer to the once more urgent question 'What is the EU?', namely as a cultural community.

I suggest that in the framework of the paradoxical coherence concept, the EU can be seen as a cultural shared risk community. My definition of shared risk communities proposes to see them as the communities, which most probably become consolidated in times of crisis. The more pressing the crisis, the more likely is the stabilisation of such communities, or dissolution should they fail. Structurally, the communal good, in fact the cultural wealth and key resource of such a community, is the imagination of the perils their members face together. The fears and sometimes shocks they are forced to deal with produces the cultural material from which to imagine in discourse their common pasts, presents and, most importantly, futures. Indeed, it is always the biggest and most existential threat(s) of such a crisis setting that decides the success or failure of the whole endeavour of community building.

What does this imply for the European Union? In EU cultural history, we think of the union, going beyond earlier critical research, as a distinct cultural system. At its heart lies the permanent need for balancing the relationship between nationalism and supranationalism. Thus, the biggest threat – threatening to destroy the whole system of the successful production of meaning in community building – is the worst thinkable case inherent to this constellation. This is its shared cultural risk. Now, what is this shared cultural risk for the union? When we interpret the EU as such a community, its shared cultural risk, arising from its systemic character established and institutionalised in more than six decades of EU integration history, is the total loss of paradoxical coherence, i.e. failing to balance the conflict between nationalism and supranationalism. All cases of crisis in EU history were cases in which the EC/EU acted as such a community.

I have to put this argument in clearer form. A cultural shared risk community is not a community which must *a priori* and fully consciously know about or fully intentionally and methodologically attempt to deal with its shared menace. Rather, it must be a community with communal operations that *in fact* target this menace. Hence it is not an issue of purely enlightened thinking, but instead an issue of delineating, cultivating and finally facing this community-building risk together. Usually, this has as many explicit layers as implicit layers. Looking at the EU through this lens, its existential threat and menacing vision of the future is the always-possible inability to balance the core conflict of nation-state vs. supranationalism.

If the EC would not have had found the 'Luxembourg Compromise' in 1966 that safeguarded coherence between nation-state and supranational bodies in the form of the agreement on veto rules, the common agricultural policy, and a weakening of the European commission, the threat would have become real (Gehler 2018, 116-123; Loth 2014, 120-162; Schmale 2008, 105-130). The threat was the disintegration of the paradoxical coherence established in the first one and a half decades of integration. The menace was there as the latent, culturally shared risk and at the same time potential cultural wealth. That was the paradoxically coherent structure of early European integration culture.

If the EC of the mid-1980s would not have been able to come out of 'Eurosclerosis' by adopting the Single European Act with its agenda setting for the single market, the European political cooperation, and the common foreign and security policy, the menace also could have become a painful reality (Gehler 2018, 280-284; Loth 259-309; Schmale 2008, 121-130). Again, the threat was there; in fact, it formed the cultural-historical landscape that had to be measured, imagined and visited communally. In that case, the

whole cultural concept behind the concept of 'Eurosclerosis' illuminated and embodied the paradoxical coherence of the situation of the 1970s and early 1980s. The 'patient' Europe was seriously ill, but the 'cure' was present as a resource to grow healthy again.

As such a community, the EU was and is a community that evidently works with and on its biggest fear and threat. The communal imagination of this menace constitutes its cultural wealth. Its cultural wealth is not being the world's largest economy in terms of global trade; much more it is the discourse on fears and futures – they are the EU's characteristic and distinct building blocks of identity. In this sense, as a half consciously and half subconsciously institutionalised collective of threat imagination, the EU is a cultural shared risk community.

Let us come to the most recent history of the contemporary EU. In a thought-provoking essay, Ivan Krastev (2017) recently asked what would come 'after Europe'. His narrative perfectly captures the EU's current situation as a cultural shared risk community. Asking what would come after the EU should the EU disintegrate means systematically and methodologically thinking of our shared future in face of this threat. The current topics that stand for the shared risk in discourse are migration, climate change, terrorism, the rise of populism and dealing with the 'Covid19' pandemic. The good news is that today's crisis might be the most fundamental since 1952, but structurally it is not a new one. Again, in all concerned discourses of crisis (migration, climate change, terrorism, the rise of populism, financial stability after the pandemic) the task to solve is to re-establish the paradoxical coherence of the nation and supranationalism. There is good reason to stay calm and optimistic, because the EU already has almost seven decades of experience in playing this game. At this point of crisis history, coherence is still far from being safeguarded, but such an understanding of the underlying cultural processes is perhaps helpful.

CONCLUSION: A NEW RESEARCH AGENDA

I come to my conclusion, a concise formulation of the research agenda of EU cultural history. Considering the EU a cultural shared risk community, the crucial issue is not strictly measuring its history in terms of integration *or* disintegration. To gain a more accurate view, we must above all ask how the EU's shared risk has been managed in fruitful or non-fruitful ways. So, the *history of the emotion of fear* and the *imagination of the future in past integration history* in the EU are the most urgent aspects. This adds to current research, in a specific and – I think – clarifying way. If we interpret the EU as a cultural shared risk community, the cultural wealth of which is its shared discourse on the fear of a menacing future, then the mentioned two aspects ought to be at the top of the research agenda.

Regarding the first theme, the history of emotions is a dynamic one in the new cultural history (Matt 2011; Wierzbicka 2010; Reddy 2009). Both EU cultural history and the history of emotions could benefit from asking whether and how fear, being together and communally frightened in terms of anticipated dystopias for Europe, was significant at different stages of EU integration. Very likely, shared fear characterised the EC/EU and influenced both its development as a distinct entity and its balancing of integrational and disintegrational forces. At this point, this is a fundamental desideratum.

Concerning the second topic, more recent research has already explored imaginations of the future in European integration history (Greiner 2014; Hauser and Schachner-Blazizek 2015). Lippens' classic editions of sources fundamentally collected imaginations of European utopias and contrasted them with potential dystopias. Examining how such

mechanisms worked in the EU as a cultural shared risk community appears to be a rewarding endeavour. It could empirically clarify how images of the future influenced the EC/EU's distinct development and the interplay of integration and disintegration. The history of the future in the EU will be of utmost importance for its factual future in the time after 'Brexit' and the 'post-pandemic' period.

Combining these two pivotal subjects of research, we can precisely formulate the research agenda of EU cultural history. In this new field of research, the EU is seen as a *cultural shared risk community*. The *paradoxical coherence* of the EU as a distinct community comes from how the EU managed or failed to balance the key conflict between nationalism and supranationalism. The *shared risk* is the permanently possible loss of paradoxical coherence. This shared risk-management is the EU's cultural heartbeat. To understand this history, EU cultural history aims to thoroughly research – for the period from the foundation of the ECSC in 1952 to the present – how this happened. The *history of European fears and the history of both European utopias as well as European dystopias* are the fundamental cultural patterns for inquiry.

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