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To cite this article: Wolfram Kaiser (2021): Counter-narratives in the European Parliament: Far Left and Far Right Groups and European 'union' in the 1980s, Journal of Contemporary European Studies, DOI: [10.1080/14782804.2021.1902291](https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2021.1902291)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2021.1902291>



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Published online: 25 Mar 2021.



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Counter-narratives in the European Parliament: Far Left and Far Right Groups and European ‘union’ in the 1980s

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes a temporal perspective for understanding the dynamics of political mobilisation around narratives and counter-narratives of European ‘union’, which extends back to the Cold War period. As a starting point, it focusses on the narratives by far left and far right Groups about European ‘union’ in the European Parliament during the 1980s. Analysing narrative entrepreneurs and their storytelling during six debates on reforming the European Communities in the mid-1980s, it shows that the far right at the time latched three functional purposes on to its pro-integration narratives: reducing immigration, facilitating economic reform, and providing security against the communist threat. In contrast, large parts of the far left opposed further integration with counter-narratives. It seems that under changing scope conditions like the end of the Cold War and the transformation of the EC into the EU, narrative entrepreneurs were subsequently able to reappropriate their relatively stable narratives for very different functional needs.

KEYWORDS

European Parliament; Euroscepticism; counter-narratives; Group of the European Right; Rainbow Group

‘The only legitimate purpose of building a political Europe is [the] defence ... [of] a European area of European peoples [with] a European identity and culture. ... The defence of Europe is the prime responsibility of all Europeans and cannot be confined to any one national frontier or country.’ Taken out of context, this appeal to European shared values and responsibilities could well be a quote from the manifesto of a centrist European party for the 2019 European Parliament (EP) elections. In reality, Jean-Marie Le Pen as a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) formulated this demand in the debate about ‘European Union’ on 17 April 1986 – the very same racist leader of the French Front National (FN), who claimed at around that time that ‘the superiority of Europe’ was down to Europeans living in temperate climates and having developed their intelligence ‘at the expense of unlimited sexuality’ (cited in Schain 1987, 247). This is a politician, moreover, who is generally remembered for his unrelenting attacks on the newly created European Union (EU) and the Euro following the 1992–3 Maastricht Treaty (Chambeau 2007).

Many social scientists argue that at least in affluent countries with considerable levels of immigration, support for, and opposition to global cooperation and organization can be explained by a basic divide between ‘cosmopolitan’ and ethno-centric worldviews, preferences and associated narratives about lessons from the past and visions of the future (Strijbis, Helmer, and de Wilde 2018). The same basic divide between liberal-progressive and ethno-nationalist attitudes and associated narratives appears to dominate political contestation over the future of the EU (e.g. Hooghe and Marks 2007). In this perspective, opposition in some form to the EU or the Euro tends to be

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understood predominantly as the far right targeting institutionalised European 'union' as the embodiment of liberal-progressive attitudes and policies (e.g. Almeida 2010, 239).

This view has been strongly shaped, however, by the post-Cold War experience of rising far right populism and opposition to the EU's 'deepening' or even its very existence. In contrast, this article proposes a longer term temporal perspective (e.g. Gilbert and Pasquucci 2020) for understanding the dynamics of political mobilisation around narratives and counter-narratives of European 'union', which extends back to the Cold War period. Such a perspective will eventually allow us to explore, by comparing different points in time, how narrative entrepreneurs defined here as actors who shape apparently cohesive narratives with a start and endpoint to promote their political visibility and electoral success, have employed – and are continuing to employ – their storytelling over time; and how their storytelling may at least in part have been – and continue to be – influenced by two important scope conditions: the shift in the structural international environment from Cold War to diffuse forms of multilateralism and the changing institutional nature of the EU from the more limited European Communities (EC) to an EU that could be portrayed as a quasi-federal 'super-state'.

As a starting point for creating such a longer term temporal perspective on narrative entrepreneurs and their changing storytelling over time, this article focuses on the 1980s as a period of heated debate about the EC's competitiveness, socio-economic reform, and constitutionalization, which eventually shaped the internal market programme and the EC's transformation into the EU in 1992–3. Moreover, it compares far left and far right political parties to test and explore the widespread contemporary association of far right political parties with counter-narratives to European 'union' in historical perspective. Within the broader framework of the late Cold War, the article analyses forms of contestation of the pro-integration 'Nobel' narrative (Manners and Murray 2016) that then dominated mainstream politics in the European Parliament (EP) in particular.

To do so, the article draws on the qualitative analysis of narratives utilised by members of the well-established Communist Group as well as two newly constituted groups on the fringes of the EP after 1984, the Rainbow Group on the left and the Group of the European Right. The analysis covers six parliamentary debates about EC reform, which followed the adoption by the EP in 1984 of its Draft Treaty on European Union (DTEU) developed in a complex process during the first directly elected EP (Kaiser 2021) under the leadership of Altiero Spinelli, the Italian federalist and former Commissioner (1970–6), who – although not a member of the Italian Communist Party – had been elected to the EP on their list. These six debates, which helped crystallize the positions of EP Groups on constitutionalizing the EU, were on the European Council's Dooge Report about European Union (17 April 1985); on the same day, on the European Council in Brussels (17 April 1985); on the Italian EC presidency (11 June 1985); on the European Council in Milan (9 July 1985), which decided by majority vote to set up an intergovernmental conference (IGC) to discuss and propose treaty changes; on the European Council in Luxembourg (11 December 1985), which debated the IGC results; and on the EP's position (16 January 1986) on the resulting Single European Act (SEA), which among other reforms introduced majority voting in the Council and limited legislative powers for the EP for internal market legislation. Given the relatively marginal institutional position of the EP in the EC at a time, when it did not have any legislative co-decision powers and its proceedings were not widely reported in the media, these debates allowed political groups and individual MEPs to develop narratives in an institutional setting that was not (yet) highly confrontational.

Qualitative narrative analysis of the debates shows the far right at the time actually promoted narratives of European integration that supported the EC as an engine of economic liberalization to reform allegedly overregulated welfare states, especially in France and Italy; as a protective shield against the communist Soviet Union; and potentially at least as a forum and an instrument for limiting immigration from outside of Europe. In contrast, large sections of the far left fostered more rigid counter-narratives opposed to the quasi-federalist DTEU agenda. They were either radically *sovereigniste* and criticized the EC from a traditional communist and left-socialist perspective as a capitalist plot at the expense of workers or they demanded (as in the case of the Green Alternative

Link (GRAEL) within the Rainbow Group) the EC's decentralization denouncing its growth paradigm and the environmental destruction that it allegedly produced.

It turns out, then, that narrative entrepreneurs have utilized 'Europe' as a notional cultural space to project widely differing imagined futures for the EC/EU as a regional integration organisation. When telling stories about 'Europe', radical parties on the left or right critical of the EU or of some of its main features can draw on a varied repertoire of well-established narrative topoi, or thematic elements that relate in an often implicit, but recognisable way to more coherent storylines or plots. They can use these to attack different varieties of the pro-integration 'Nobel' narrative about the EU as a guarantor of peace (as well as welfare) which earned it the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize. As in the case of Le Pen, their narratives as such can remain quite stable, but become repurposed for different functional needs: for example, from supporting demands for more defence integration in the Cold War to later being used to oppose policies like monetary union or even membership of the EU after the Maastricht Treaty.

The article first discusses the political Groups as narrative entrepreneurs before moving on to the qualitative analysis of their contributions to the six EP debates. The conclusion hypothesizes that it likely required the momentous transformation of the end of the Cold War and the nature and impact of the Maastricht Treaty for the far right to develop into a Euro-populist direction. This in turn probably changed the way in which the far left and far right parties in the EP and beyond used well-established storylines for fast-changing functional purposes.

Ever closer union? Declining reform consensus in a more fragmented EP

In the period until its first direct election in 1979, the EP's demands for institutional reform (Tulli 2017; Pasquinucci 2013) drew on the 'Nobel' narrative of European integration as a project to secure peace and enhance the welfare of citizens in (Western) Europe, primarily through the creation of an integrated market and common rules for economic exchange. This mainstream pro-integration narrative was strongly embedded in the federalist tradition which had its origins in ideas of the European enlightenment about the creation of 'perpetual peace' (Immanuel Kant) through the federation of states. Due to the self-selection of strongly pro-integration national MPs as delegated MEPs, moreover, the EP's reform demands were also strongly influenced by notions of democratizing the EC through constitutionalizing it, chiefly by creating a proper European parliamentary system in which reduced powers and influence of national parliaments would be fully compensated with increased powers for the EP at EC level. These quasi-federalist notions still influenced the EP's initiation and drafting of the DTEU in the early 1980s nearly as much (Kaiser 2018) as they had shaped the European Political Community draft treaty prepared by the ECSC Ad hoc Assembly in 1953 (Guerrieri 2016).

The DTEU did not *directly* impact on the SEA or the Maastricht Treaty. Despite the EP's incipient politicization and increasingly fierce competition among the Groups for key posts like EP president, however, the DTEU process did enhance cross-party cooperation from the centre-left to the centre-right – cooperation that despite conflicts at the start of Spinelli's 1980 initiative (Corbett 1998; Cardozo and Corbett 1986) were chiefly and effectively coordinated between him (Graglia 2008; Burgess 1986) and the European People's Party (EPP) (Kaiser 2020) as the second largest and traditionally most fervently pro-integration Group in the EP (Kaiser 2007). This cross-party cooperation also laid the foundations for the informal 'grand coalition' between the Socialists, as the largest Group, and the EPP, which developed during 1984–9 and was to shape EP politics for a long time to come.

Although it was not ratified, the DTEU nevertheless constituted an important marker in the constitutional politics of European integration, understood here as 'the struggle between a wide range of actors over constitutional choice ... in a legally, institutionally and discursively pre-structured context' (Christiansen and Reh 2009, 4). The DTEU contributed important ideas and concepts to the repertoire of options for constitutionalizing the EC, which co-shaped the reform

trajectory up to the 2009 Lisbon Treaty (Nickel 2016) including, for example, the first legal definition of the principle of subsidiarity (Capotorti, Jacqué, and Jacobs 1986; Bieber, Jacqué, and Weiler 1985).

In these different ways, the centrist pro-integration majority in the EP, while aggressively repeating their allegations about a ‘democratic deficit’ of the EC, used the DTEU to push the member-states hard to give the EP substantial legislative powers. Their institutional agency in consistently making reform demands has largely been ignored by historical-institutionalist accounts (e.g. Berthold 2005) that explain growing EP powers with member-state governments drawing on national constitutional templates. Moreover, the DTEU made a huge contribution to crystallizing different visions of, and options for, what had loosely been referred to as European ‘union’ since the early 1970s. As such, it constituted a flagship project for the deepening of European integration, and in its construction through continuous storytelling. It encouraged the renewal of pro-integration narratives that already included florid routine references to the ‘founding fathers’ of early post-war integration like Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman, Alcide De Gasperi, and Konrad Adenauer. At the same time, the DTEU’s strong quasi-federalist thrust also led to the affirmation of traditional counter-narratives as in the form of the Soviet-influenced communist variety, as well as novel forms of critical storytelling about the EC embedded in the new social movements, especially among the recently created Green parties.

Following its 1984 election, this narrative contestation took place in a Parliament that was fast becoming more pluralistic than it had been in the 1960s. This process had started with the Italian and French communists in 1969 and 1973, respectively, who had previously been excluded from representation by the pro-integration majorities in the respective national parliaments. It was further strengthened as a result of Northern enlargement in 1973. The accession of the United Kingdom (UK) led to the inclusion of British Conservatives, who were broadly in favour of integration, but sceptical about the federalist trajectory and who formed their own Group, and of Labour Party members many of whom were increasingly hostile to UK membership. Moreover, many Danish MEPs were completely opposed to any form of political union, and the Irish Fianna Fáil started to work with the French Gaullists, who traditionally favoured an intergovernmental form of European cooperation. When Greece joined the EC in 1981, the socialists were initially opposed to membership, as were – for different reasons – some MEPs on the extreme left and right of Greek politics.

The first and second direct elections in 1979 and 1984 resulted in the further fragmentation of the EP (Bomsdorf 1980; Claeys and Loeb-Mayer 1979). The alternative non-communist left emerged as a new political force. It was led by the German Greens, formed in 1980, which had first won seats in the Bundestag in 1983 (Mende 2011; Klein and Falter 2003). At the same time, Le Pen’s FN, founded in 1972, achieved an electoral breakthrough in 1984 with 11% of the vote and 10 seats under the favourable conditions of proportional representation for EP elections. While the French and British socialist parties moved towards more centrist pro-integration positions between 1983–4 and 1989, the resulting formation of the Rainbow and European Right Groups in 1984 created yet more potential for counter-narratives to the European Union in the quasi-federalist form of EC constitutionalization.

Toeing the Soviet Union’s line, the communists in France and Italy had originally opposed Western European integration as a product of American capitalist interests and an extension of the American alliance system after 1945. Some Italian communists dissented from the party line after the Hungarian Uprising in 1956. The turn towards ‘Europe’ and Eurocommunism only occurred during the 1960s, however. This overcame resistance among the pro-Western majority in the national parliament to the representation of communists in the EP (Pons 2010). After the first oil shock in 1973, the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) increasingly realized the limitations of the nation-state for the implementation of socialist policies in times of socio-economic crisis (Dunphy 2004, 77). When Altiero Spinelli resigned as Italian Commissioner to get elected to the Italian parliament and the EP on the PCI ticket in 1976, he encouraged the communists to embrace federalism. A shared preference for the EC’s constitutionalization and strong support for the DTEU process united them with their traditional enemies on the centre-right, the Christian Democrats. The

communists even helped to elect the Italian Christian Democrat Emilio Colombo to the EP presidency in 1977.

Their formal allies in the Communist Group until 1989, which comprised 41 MEPs and was the fourth largest in the EP, were the French Parti Communiste Français (PCF). These moderated their strict anti-integration stance only to a very limited extent after 1962. Under the continued strong influence of the Soviet Communist Party, the PCF essentially remained hostile to the EC until the end of the Cold War (Lazar 1988; Callot 1988, 312). In 1977, it supported direct EP elections only as a 'tactical compromise' (Dunphy 2004, 93). The PCF continued to rail against the dominance of American and German capital, was 'strongly nationalistic and anti-German', rejected more EP powers, and opposed most new policy initiatives from monetary union to common defence (Irving 1977, 418).

In contrast to the communists, most political parties in the Rainbow Group had grown out of the new social movements of the 1960s and 1970s and did not have the same long-standing and externally influenced ideological commitments on European integration to overcome or defend. The Rainbow Group was so heterogeneous that it consisted of three technical groups. Of its 20 MEPs, 12 belonged to the Green Alternative Link (GRAEL), which in turn comprised Green Party MEPs from Germany (7) and Belgium (2) as well as two Dutch and one Italian MEP. The Green parties' values have been loosely captured as supporting 'sustainable society', emphasizing 'the interconnectedness of life', having a 'global outlook', and demanding the 'fundamental pursuit of global peace' (Hines 2003, 310) – none of which strictly required them to take a particular stance on European integration and EC reform (Mende 2020). As transnational activism was initially confined primarily to the grassroots and organized environmental movement rather than party politics, moreover, the newly formed Green parties still had to develop EC-level cooperation (Dietz 2013). Their collaboration in the EP with far left and regionalist parties in the Rainbow Group was a pragmatic choice (Bomberg 1998, 103): the more radical German Greens did not want to be at the mercy of the reformist Belgian MEPs (Kitschelt and Hellemans 1990; Kitschelt 1988) for their numerical survival as a political Group in the EP with all its advantages.

Positions within the GRAEL on 'Europe' ranged from demands for withdrawal from the EC to various proposals for reform from within. They normally pitted what have been called 'Green-Reds' with a far left and frequently communist background against the more reform-minded 'Green-Greens' who prioritized the transnational nature of environmental degradation and the need for commonly agreed protection measures (Bowler and Farrell 1992, 135). At the same time, the MEPs in the GRAEL, which had a high turnover because of the so-called rotation principle used by the German Greens, were torn between their identity as a radical movement, which required them to keep a distance to what they denounced as old-style party politics and 'pragmatic (parliamentary) imperatives' (Bomberg 1998, 102) if they wanted to have any kind of influence in the EP.

The Group of the European Right with 16 MEPs in turn comprised 10 French FN MEPs, 5 Italian MEPs from the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), and 1 Greek MEP. The MSI was a neo-fascist party co-founded by Pino Romualdi in 1946 (Grimm 2016), who was a directly elected MEP from 1979 until his death in May 1988. The MSI mainly mobilized former supporters of the fascist regime and monarchists. During the 1970s and 1980s, it also positioned itself as a party of traditional values of Church and family to win over Christian Democrat supporters disillusioned by their party's cooperation with the communists in the so-called historic compromise from 1976 to 1979. In its foreign and European policy, the MSI supported the Italian centre-right's foreign policy choices of NATO and Western European integration (Mammone 2015). With Italy remaining a country of emigration, mostly to other EC countries from the 1950s onwards, the MSI was not particularly concerned about immigration to Italy until the 1980s (Tarchi 1997).

In contrast, the French FN was only formed in 1972 through the merger of several small national-conservative political parties. From the start, it mobilized anti-immigration sentiment primarily directed against people from former colonies and Algeria. Social scientists still discussed in the 1980s whether the FN was a single-issue anti-immigration movement rather than a populist party

(Mitra 1988, 47). Its programme for the 1984 European elections constituted a 'complex platform' propagating 'national regeneration' through reform of the French economic and social system (Roy 1998). Most importantly, however, it identified immigration 'as a major social, political and economic evil afflicting French society' (Mitra 1988, 47). Among FN voters in these elections and afterward, the salience of immigration-related issues was five times as high as for voters for other political parties. At the same time, the FN did not at this point propagate Gaullist notions of a strictly intergovernmental Europe or repeat Charles de Gaulle's derogatory comments about an allegedly politically irresponsible Brussels technocracy.

Narrative topoi: democracy, social economy, and security

Between 1984 and 1989 the EP's agenda and debates were largely structured and dominated by the emerging informal grand coalition between the Socialists and Christian Democrats. The DTEU passed by the EP in February 1984 had created a strong programmatic trajectory for EC constitutionalization, which continued after the second direct election. As a result of the EP's internal organisation and rules, the smaller groups on the ideological fringes had limited influence on the reports in the Institutional Affairs Committee created in 1982 to deal with EC reform.

Moreover, these groups were ideologically fragmented, suffered from lower voting cohesion and experienced frequent absenteeism. Many German Greens and French FN MEPs, for example, were not present much in Strasbourg and Brussels. This in turn allowed individual MEPs or small groups within the Groups to some extent to capture their narrative-making on EC reform. Thus, the MSI co-founder Romualdi, who had been an official in the Nazi German puppet state, the fascist Republic of Salò during 1943–45 (Ferraresi 1996), as one of its Vice Chairs normally spoke on EC reform for the European Right. Similarly, MEPs from the Danish People's Movement Against the EU, which had formed for the 1972 EC referendum campaign and wanted Denmark to leave the EC, regularly claimed a large part of the speaking time allotted to the Rainbow Group.

Additionally, depending on their size, the smaller Groups had limited time in the plenary debates. Speeches in the EP varied from 10 min for the leaders of the larger groups and committee rapporteurs to just 1 min for individual MEPs without a functional role. As a result, their speeches hardly allowed MEPs from the small groups to develop more cohesive master narratives or counter-narratives with historical depth and a fully elaborated vision of the future. In these circumstances, the analysis of their speeches only allows for the identification of narrative topoi, or key themes, of their counter-narratives to the EP's majoritarian, quasi-federalist narrative of the European Union. These topoi were nevertheless connected to prevalent larger narratives and so could make sense to the audience in the EP and in their constituency and home country, helping to make cultural, socio-economic and political ideas seem significant, plausible and legitimate (Kaiser 2015, 365; Pieter De and Trenz 2012, 544). These narrative themes primarily evolved around notions of democracy, social economy, and security, to be discussed in turn.

Regarding the issue of legitimate democratic structures and practices, the Christian Democrats had been at the forefront of defining these in traditional parliamentary terms for the EC from the start of post-war integration. On the political left, the socialist parties in Italy and Belgium also had strong federalist inclinations, which were also broadly supported by many liberal parties. In essence, the shared majoritarian EP narrative as enshrined in the EPC and DTEU draft treaties was informed by a vision of European parliamentary democracy with strong powers for the EP and effective executive policy-making by the Commission that would eventually depend on parliamentary support – a vision that largely replicated structures prevailing in the member-states and foreshadowed what political scientists later called 'multilevel governance' (Hooghe and Marks 2001): an EU that would not completely supersede the member-states and at the same time, accommodate, protect, and interact with organized regions.

Crucially, during the second directly elected EP, all Italian MEPs from the Communist and European Right Groups broadly supported this vision, which Spinelli as a leading European federalist

had strongly pushed. For the Italian communists, Sergio Segre, who succeeded Spinelli as chair of the Institutional Affairs Committee after his death in 1986, made this case most pertinently, for example, in the debate about the Italian EC presidency on 11 June 1985, before the Milan summit. Romualdi (9 July 1985) similarly agreed on the need for 'a true union, a political union' in the debate following the summit. He explicitly rejected the notion of what was then discussed as a multi-speed Europe, 'in which people come and go ... depending on their special needs or interests'.

In the debate about the IGC's results on 11 December 1985, Romualdi sharply criticized the member state governments for refusing to increase the EP's powers. In this speech, the MSI politician, distancing himself from the constitutional conflict between federalists and confederalists, even evoked a new European nationalism when talking about the necessity to turn 'our beloved and glorious nations into a new Nation, a united, free and truly independent Europe'. While now guised in post-war terms of parliamentary democracy, the far right, crucially, could draw on a long legacy since the late nineteenth century of ethno-cultural, essentialist-racist definitions of Europe (e.g. McMahon 2016, 170) and repeated attempts including by Nazi Germany in the middle of the Second World War, to use external threats for appeals to European 'unity' as well as technical and military cooperations (Kaiser and Schot 2014, 135–8; Kuhl 1997, 66–70).

As Romualdi's interventions show, the narrative of Europeans as an ethnic kin group having to stand together in the face of adversity could comfortably be connected at the time to the idea of the EC as a protector against non-European immigration and it could easily be made compatible with notions of European political 'union', however ill-defined. Although FN MEPs did not contribute much to the six debates about EC reform during 1985–6, they too did not draw on nationalist French narratives at the time which would have required Gaullist insistence on strictly intergovernmental institutional structures.

In the six debates about EC reform during 1985–6, clear counter-narratives to the majoritarian EP preference for EC constitutionalization were only expressed on the far left, at a time when even the French Gaullists were moderating their long-standing intergovernmentalist constitutional preferences. These counter-narratives came in two variants. The first took the form of a radical defence of notions of 'national sovereignty'. The French PCF linked this defence to its socio-economic policy demands for the implementation of socialism in one country to protect France against the forces of global capitalism – its overriding ideological and policy objective that according to Francis Wurtz (9 July 1985) was threatened by EC market liberalization and the deregulation of the labour market.

Representatives of the Danish People's Movement Against the EU were equally unequivocal in their rejection of any EC reform including more powers for the EP. Thus, Ib Christensen in the debate about the SEA on 16 January 1986 insisted that: 'We are not one of those countries who wish to start constructing a super-state. We wish to preserve our [one] thousand year-old independence'. The notion of a 'super-state' mixed Gaullist visions of irresponsible government by unelected bureaucrats threatening the sovereignty and autonomy of the member states where political legitimacy resided, and should reside exclusively, with affirmative notions of Nordic identity and democracy close to the citizens.

In the same debate (16 January 1986), his colleague Jens-Peter Bonde, then a member of the Danish Communist Party, added a small state concern about large state hegemony to the counter-narrative. He compared the EC to a family where 'people agree on joint solutions. They don't vote and they certainly don't vote on the basis of size, with father having 10 votes, mother five and little Denmark three.' Bonde argued that member-states had to retain the 'veto' that they had allegedly acquired with the 1966 Luxembourg Compromise and which the SEA was going to suppress for single market legislation. A Greek communist, Vassilis Ephremidis (11 December 1985), echoed the concern about hegemonic member-states willing to use majority voting at the expense of others, in his criticism of the SEA as a 'compromise between the economically and politically strong countries, designed to secure their supremacy within the Community'.

The second counter-narrative to EC constitutionalization was articulated from within the GRAEL and focused on the alleged centralizing tendencies of EC reform and the need for decentralization

towards regions. In contrast to the essentialist notions of the nation state propagated by the French PCF and the Danish opponents of EC membership, it actually rested on a rejection of the nation state as the central organizational principle of politics and policymaking. Thus, Brigitte Heinrich (17 April 1985) from the German Greens demanded a 'Europe with more human rights, more democracy, less centralism, with autonomous regions, where political decision-making is closer to the citizens, more transparent and easier to control'. The Dutch left-socialist Bram van der Lek in turn argued (17 April 1985) that 'it is fundamentally wrong to think that bigger is always better'. Instead of centralizing powers through the DTEU or alternative EC reforms, it would be necessary to strengthen or create 'regional autonomy [and push] the decentralization of decision-making'. Their sceptical attitude to the nation-state would later make it easier for many Greens to convert to quasi-federalist notions of overcoming or taming the nation-state.

EP politics during 1985–6 created incentives for newly formed alternative far left parties to define more clearly their programmatic demands for the EC, which had never been one of their ideological priorities. Thus, during 1984–85 the German Greens developed the concept of 'eco regions' as a counter model for European integration. Petra Kelly, co-founder of the German Greens and a former official in the European Commission, spoke about a Europe of such eco regions in the German Bundestag just before the 1985 Milan summit.¹ The GRAEL then charged Santiago Villanova from Barcelona and Alfred Horn from Bonn with defining a political strategy for EC reform that sought to operationalize the notion of a Europe of eco regions that the German Green Party's 1984 EP election manifesto had only mentioned in passing as an 'organisational-institutional model'.²

These two variants of democratic-institutional counter-narratives were connected in different ways to ideas of the most desirable socio-economic order, the second narrative theme. The SEA chiefly aimed to complete the single market already envisaged by the EEC treaty, which was expected to create economies of scale, strengthen the EC's global competitiveness, lead to increased growth, and to create jobs and reduce unemployment (Warlouzet 2018) – as such it fitted well with the majoritarian pro-integration narrative about welfare creation through market integration, with different desirable degrees of EC-level redistribution through regional and structural policies. Once again, the Italian communist and MSI MEPs did not fundamentally challenge the SEA's dominant socio-economic future narrative. Giovanni Cervetti (9 July 1985), the Communist Group chair, demanded greater 'supranational solidarity' and emphasized that the EC needed to 'busy itself with the work of solving great, acute economic, social and political problems'. However, their narrative drew on demands for traditional forms of increased redistribution at EC-level to compensate for the expected differentiated economic impact of market liberalisation. It did not oppose it in any fundamental manner.

On the European Right, Romualdi (11 December 1985) highlighted as necessary priorities after the coming into force of the SEA, 'addressing unemployment (without any socialist whining or demagoguery)' and fostering new technologies. In fact, the MSI at this point strongly supported progress on economic and monetary union, including the introduction of a common currency. It talked about the EC as a suitable mechanism for addressing Italian economic inefficiencies, especially in the big state-owned companies. The MSI did so in much the same way as the moderate Left did when it was in power in the second half of the 1990s (Pasquinucci 2021). While no FN MEPs spoke about socio-economic issues in the debates about EC reform during 1985–86, Le Pen at this time similarly supported EC economic integration as a mechanism to liberalize the – in his view – overregulated and inefficient French economy.

Counter-narratives to the EC's market integration with a limited social component in the SEA mainly relied on traditional criticisms of its capitalist rationale and alleged undermining of workers' rights protected, or to be protected, by member-states. Compared to the narrative topos of lack of social justice, two other allegations were much less strongly articulated in the debates, that the SEA did not strengthen a fairer global order and that it contributed to the destruction of the environment.

For the French PCF, Francis Wurtz (9 July 1985) claimed that the internal market would do away with member states' remaining options for protecting industries and that it would deregulate the labour market. In the same debate about the results of the Milan summit (9 July 1985) the Belgian Green MEP François Rolants du Vivier asked 'where are the social policies provided for in Article 55 of the draft Treaty on European Union?'. In the debate about the Luxembourg summit on 11 December 1985 Wurtz attacked the SEA as an instrument for multinational companies to enforce the closure or relocation of factories, particularly shifting them to Spain and Portugal, the new member states where wages were lower. The provisional agreement on the SEA had nothing to say on 'harmonization from above of social legislation, workers' rights, commitments with dates on creating a European social area'. The SEA was therefore creating 'a deregulated Europe, a Europe of speculators' (11 December 1985). His Greek colleague from the Communist Group, Ephremidis (16 January 1986), also drew on the traditional communist counter-narrative when he called the SEA a form of 'monopolistic integration'.

The Communist Group's deep split was also evident in the assessment of the SEA's global impact. The Italian PCI enthusiastically welcomed it as a mechanism for strengthening Western Europe's global role. Alessandro Natta (16 January 1986), for example, argued that it could 'give Europe the chance to play a part in keeping with its most glorious moments, as we work towards a new international order of cooperation, justice and peace'. In contrast, the PCF MEP Robert Chambairon (17 April 1985) claimed that the Dooge Report, which eventually led to the SEA, left the EC in a position of 'permanent weakness as regards American demands [for liberalization]' – a claim still fully in line with the traditional communist narrative of European integration as a US capitalist plot.

Criticism of the SEA's anticipated negative global impact was frequently linked by far left MEPs with environmental destruction. Thus, van der Lek claimed in the debate about the Milan summit (11 June 1985) that the SEA would not promote 'peace throughout the world and a socially peaceful Europe for everyone who lives in it', but more competition which 'is now destroying Earth'.

The third main narrative theme concerned the impact of EC reform on external and internal security. At the time of the SEA debate, national governments also agreed to enhance their foreign policy cooperation. The Italian communist and MSI MEPs welcomed these developments as did Le Pen. At the time, he saw European defence cooperation in an intergovernmental format as essential 'in the confrontation with the USSR's hegemonic ambitions' (17 April 1985). Fear of the Soviet Union and communism also motivated Romualdi's support for closer foreign and defence cooperation in his speeches (11 June 1986).

The Soviet Union had acted as an 'external federator' for the European integration efforts of the democratic centre-left to centre-right in post-war Western Europe. Moreover, starting in inter-war Europe, many also saw European integration as a mechanism to retain European colonial possessions and transform a united Europe – chiefly through its connection with Africa ('Eurafrica') – into a global power on a par with the United States and the Soviet Union (Hansen and Jonsson 2014). Although the aim of creating 'Eurafrica' was not a primary motive for European integration as it developed from the early 1950s onwards, concerns about how to maintain an independent (Western) European role in international relations were widespread, also among the European Right. Their anti-communism had additionally been a key ideological and narrative building block for their identity, domestic and foreign policies since the late nineteenth century. Against this background, the European Right was able to link their own narrative of European 'unity' with the notion of a European renaissance in international affairs – in the words of Romualdi (11 December 1985), the future EU 'of course must be established on a continental scale, to enable it to take its place as the third Superpower'.

The Schengen process and associated abolition of internal border controls also started in 1985. Although it took place outside the EC legal framework, it could lead to common and commonly policed external borders for the EC, or most of the EC member states. Although not articulated

during the debates about EC reform, Le Pen at this time hoped that commonly policed borders would reduce or prevent altogether immigration into the EC and France, and in this way effectively support the FN's anti-immigration stance. In the debate on 17 April 1985 Romualdi asked in line with this European Right preference that much more be done jointly to organize the extradition of illegal immigrants, effectively demanding more rather than less EC cooperation and integration in this field.

Far left counter-narratives about external and internal security inverted the European Right's reasoning for supporting EC reform. Thus, Dorothee Piermont from the German Greens claimed (17 April 1985) that the Dooge Committee Report and the DTEU were 'only a smokescreen behind which we are really trying to create a third superpower in Europe'. The Dutch left-socialist van der Lek similarly warned (11 June 1985) against a European 'superpower' and plans for 'the formation of a military alliance'. Far left opponents of EC constitutionalization also argued that it would lead to a closed instead of open Europe – precisely what Le Pen hoped it would. Thus, the German Green Party MEP Heinrich asked rhetorically (17 April 1985) 'what will become of refugees from what is called the Third World, or persecuted minorities such as Kurds and Tamils' if the EC created common external borders. Such counter-narratives advocated what they increasingly called a 'multicultural' Europe open towards refugees and migrants as opposed to what they saw as the (far) right's racialized Europe of white Europeans.

Conclusion

This article's analysis of the Groups on the far left and far right fringes of the EP as narrative entrepreneurs and of their narratives and counter-narratives of European 'union' in the debates about EC reform in the EP has resulted in some key findings about counter-narratives in historical perspective. To begin with, very few such counter-narratives had enough temporal depth, were purposefully enough constructed and mustered sufficient ideological cohesion to create powerful narrative paths, which would be difficult for individuals or political parties to abruptly deviate from without risking their identity and (apparent) authenticity, with potential negative electoral consequences.

Really, only two narrative paths qualify for this. The first are essentialist narratives about the nation-state as the sole location of democratic legitimacy under attack from 'Brussels technocracy' – whether in the form of 1960s Gaullist or contemporary Brexit narratives on the right or the storytelling of the Danish People's Movement Against the EU on the far left. The second variant is the post-war communist, anti-capitalist, anti-US and anti-German narrative that essentially replicated Soviet propaganda and that the PCF basically clung to until the end of the Cold War. Even the Italian PCI had needed the external shock of the brutal Soviet suppression of the 1956 Hungarian Uprising and its aftermath to overcome this storyline and under the influence of Spinelli, to develop its Eurocommunist narrative of a reformed federal Europe.

The analysis of far left and far right counter-narratives to European 'union' in the 1980s allows for the hypothesis that would have to be tested in research comparing different points in time: namely, that narrative entrepreneurs could (and still can) revise their counter-narratives under changing scope conditions such as the end of the Cold War or the transformation of the EC into the EU with substantial new powers. Existing narratives could (and still can) then be employed for different and changing functional purposes. Thus, on the far left, the 'Green-Greens', who were not as wedded to old left narratives about the EC as a capitalist system, shifted their narrative during the late 1980s and early 1990s towards increased support for the EC/EU, which acquired competence for the environment in the SEA and used majority voting from the Maastricht Treaty onwards, as the appropriate political-institutional context for what were after all strongly transnational environmental problems (Grimaldi 2020). The 'Green-Greens' first portrayed the EC as a source of accelerating degradation through capitalist expansion. However, as in the prominent case of the German Green Party foreign minister Joschka Fischer and his EU narrative developed in a speech at Humboldt University in Berlin (Fischer 2000), they

could adjust their narrative to make it congruent with their new support for the EU as a global promoter of environmental protection as well as peace and economic development.

At the same time, the European Right was not initially opposed to European integration or the EC as such. As we have seen, the Group supported moves towards institutional deepening, economic liberalization, and closer foreign and security policy cooperation in the mid-1980s. Its stories about the EC had clear functional objectives, however. When they no longer fulfilled these functions, the European Right narrative entrepreneurs could change the meaning of their stories about European 'union'. Thus, when the Cold War ended, the EC/EU no longer seemed necessary for the collective defence against the Soviet Union and communism, which had been an overriding motivation for the far right for supporting any form of European 'union'. When the EC/EU and the Schengen system failed to stop refugees and migrants from entering the EC, it served no useful functional purpose either. On the contrary, the EU appeared to make immigration into the EU easier, something that the political left advocated as part of its vision of a 'multicultural' Europe which the far right detested and feared. When the EU appeared to become captured by 'progressive' political forces and values in the 1990s, it no longer seemed a promising vehicle for the promotion of Eurocentric ethnic nationalism either, despite its strong historical lineage.

Crucially, narrative entrepreneurs actively make choices about how to tell stories about 'Europe' and the EU, and for what purposes. Far right leaders like Le Pen (Reungoat 2015) or the Austrian Freedom Party leader Jörg Haider moved their political parties from a pro-EC position to nationalist opposition to 'Brussels'. As they claimed to follow the same political objectives as before, their storylines about 'Brussels' could still seem to make sense to their supporters at a time when the EC/EU apparently no longer served a useful function.

It appears that with their new counter-narratives, the far right-turned Euro-populists could draw on existing narrative topoi to exploit political space that formerly more 'Eurosceptic' socialist parties like the British Labour Party as well as far left and Gaullist parties temporarily left void after the end of the Cold War. Moreover, in positioning their parties against the EU or further integration, these far right narrative entrepreneurs could paradoxically draw on the narrative about the EC's 'democratic deficit' originally developed by the protagonists of EC constitutionalization during the 1970s and 1980s to bolster their demands for more powers for the EP. Clearly, or so it seemed, the EC/EU was undemocratic – and also constituted a threat to nation-states, their identities, and interests. Crucially, the post-Cold War political and narrative realignment, which would require further research, is not set in stone either. Following new external shocks or their political capturing of EU institutions, the far right could easily reactivate key narrative topoi for the renewed support of European 'unity'. Thus, Chinese economic, political, and military hegemony could revive the anti-communist topos and once more turn it into a legitimising force for European cooperation. Similarly, if the far right succeeded in creating a broad coalition for an extremely restrictive immigration policy, it could once more – like Le Pen in the 1980s – talk about EU 'unity' as the only vehicle for achieving what could be dubbed a social fortress Europe. Thus, delving into the history of narrative-making and usage at the most general level reminds us not to take contemporary storylines and their exploitation for particular functional purposes for granted.

Notes

1. Petra K. Kelly, Für ein entmilitarisiertes und dezentrales Europa der ökologischen Regionen!, Redebeitrag, Bundestag, 27 June 1985, AGG, B.IV.2, 231.
2. Santiago Villanova and Alfred Horn, Für eine Konföderation der Öko-Regionen Europas, Politische Strategie der Grün-Alternativen für Europa. Ein Diskussionsbeitrag im Auftrag der GRAEL im Europäischen Parlament, August 1985, AGG, B.IV.2, 221.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

I would like to thank the Centre for Global Cooperation Research at the University of Duisburg-Essen for hosting me as a Senior Fellow during 2019-20.

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