

Thomas Risse, *A Community of Europeans? Transnational Identities and Public Spheres*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010, 272 pages, ISBN: 978 0801476488

Book Review by Scott Nicholas Romaniuk*

A Community of Europeans? Transnational Identities and Public Spheres represents a multi-faceted and multi-dimensional exploration of the Europe as an institutional and social conception. It systematically links understanding of the Europeanization of identities and public spheres with citizenship, nationalism, community and communication, EU (European Union) enlargement, institution-building, and European democracy and politicization. As a hallmark of insightful and dynamic scholarship, Risse's work draws inspiration from a variety of societal levels, including some of the most critical players in European political life today, and highly-praised and well-known political philosophers, and policymakers.

In arguing that a European public sphere exists, Risse notes the contentious limits of that sphere, noting that the possibility exists for the European public sphere to expand further or retract in a manner that could have negative consequences for European communities. Risse advances six main claims through the course of presenting and evaluating the emerging knowledge about European identity and its public spheres.

First, he rejects the conventional and popular understanding that Europe is generally devoid of a sense of community. "It is true," argues Risse, "that we do not observe the emergence of a uniform

and shared European identity above and beyond the various national identities. Rather, the available data show the Europeanization of collective, local, national, gender, and other identities (Risse, 2010: 5). Second, he challenges the idea that the EU lacks a universality in communicative spaces given the fact the Europe lacks a common language. He asserts that there is an irrefutable emergence of transnational European communities of communication, "through the interconnectedness of Europeanized public spheres" (Risse, 2010: 5). Third, the conflict that centres on European identity is fuelled by two marked concepts of what "Europe" is and means. Fourth, there is a struggle over describing the Europeanization of identities and public spheres and the explanation of such processes and phenomena. Fifth, these issues associated with the Europeanization of identities are of great importance to the political life of the EU. Sixth, in considering the impact that these elements have on European democracy and democratization, Risse claims that assertions regarding the lack of a European demos are largely overstated.

This book is divided into three distinctive parts. The first two analyze the state of the as it relates to the Europeanization of identities and public spheres, and attempts to clarify the subject matter. In these parts, the author

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considers the concept of social identity, and approaches identity formation in sociology as well as in social psychology. He also determines the feasibility of the categorization of collective identities according to their substantive content. Part three considers the extent of which the Europeanization of identities and public spheres actually impacts and matters for the political operations of the Union. In part three, the author explores the impact of the Europeanization of identities and public spheres on European institution-building. "What does the Europeanization of identities and public spheres mean, however, for the 'big picture' of European politics, that is, European institution-building, EU enlargement, and European democracy?" (Risse, 2010: 13).

In chapter two, Risse notes that, "Europeans on average know one another and trust one another, indicating a sense of community among strangers. But a North-South divide exists in the EU with regard to both identification levels and the degree of mutual trust" (Risse, 2010: 44). The study that generated this claim was based on 1976 and 1997 Eurobarometer data and measured both familiarity and trust. In making such a claim, Risse jeopardizes the legitimacy of his study. The general basis for such a claim calls into question some of the road-based indicators for further argumentative precision in his study. In another instance, Risse explains that Polish post-Communist identity in the new European remains unsettled and deeply contested. However, this statement in particular is largely ambiguous and misleading with offering details concerning the specific elements of Polish identity struggle with their historical past.

Although Risse focuses heavily on Britain, France, Germany, and Poland, he

pays homage to the historical roots of the profound identity changes that have taken place in these countries, and assesses the Second World War as an important point of departure for the identity and nationalism discourse. In spite of this, however, increased attention should be given to the role that Eastern European nations have played and what role they will continue to play in the conceptualization of European identity and community. After all, it is the inclusion and blending of communities traditionally seen as "other" that has impacted the project of European integration and identity building to one of the most considerable degrees. In this respect, delineation should be made between the claim of addressing a community of Europeans, and such a community in a specific part of Europe.

Even amid these shortcomings, Thomas Risse's work should be praised for its unique expression of conceptualization and potential pathways for European community- and identity-building. His accomplishment rests in the successful transcendence of a sociological, comparative politics, and international relations piece that will be of great value to those studying these topics, those practicing politics, and those living the changes and values greatly affected by the ongoing political, social, and cultural transformation. It is a spiritedly debate about the future of Europe.

About the author of the book:

Thomas Risse is Professor of International Relations, Otto Suhr Institute for Political Science, Freie Universität Berlin. He is co-editor of *The End of the West? Crisis and Change in the Atlantic Order*, and author of books including *Cooperation among Democracies: The European Influence on U.S. Foreign Policy*.