



Name and surname	Satu Haapaniemi
Nationality	Finnish
Country of residence	Finland
Language of the article	Finnish

#### IN A EUROPEAN STATE OF MIND

When in 2006 I decided to travel to Italy to take part in a European Union historical and environmental project, I knew I was involved in something that transcended my own national boundaries. At the time, however, I was not at all sure what it really meant. I was 16 years old, and up to that point in my life the European Union had mainly been about learning to use a new currency and taking free flights to get away from the pitch black of Finland in October. As it turned out, I had a memorable 17<sup>th</sup> birthday on that trip. I remember vividly sitting at the head of a long table covered with a white tablecloth, alongside people from Italy, Spain, England, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, who were all singing birthday congratulations to me in their own languages. Through that moment of singing, I encountered the idea of 'supranationality': perhaps difference and similarity are not mutually exclusive after all. I encountered the idea of a European identity which could go hand-in-hand with being Finnish.

Nearly ten years have passed since that moment, and I am now sitting in the main library of the university, writing an essay on European Union enlargement. I browse expertly through political stories with titles such as "The European Union's foreign policy has a congenital defect" and "The Eurozone countries have become more deeply entrenched in debt". Black clouds are hanging over the Union. In recent months, Europe has been tested by many difficulties. It seems as though Europe is drowning in the black waters of the Ukraine crisis, the Charlie Hebdo attacks, the economic recession and youth unemployment. "What common European identity?" say the opinion polls, and my head is filled with gloomy thoughts about Europe's future. Was Jean Monnet right after all to claim that there should first of all be integration in the area of culture, as opposed to economic integration, if we really want to create a single Europe? Was there really a common European identity, and should we even try to create one?

At least in terms of history, it is difficult to find a basis for a common European spirit. Christianity and the Greek heritage are hardly sufficient to capture the range of diverse cultures that exist on the Union's territory, and there is not even any consensus on Europe's geographical area! Europe has been in flux throughout its recorded history: borders have changed, systems of thought have arisen and been suppressed. When I think of European identity now, I think of battles of cultural hegemony in the name of religion and political ideology. I think of inclusion and exclusion, Europeanness and non-Europeanness, juxtapositions which the European Union can no longer afford. Now, when someone mentions common European citizenship, I feel the pain of history inside me. Nevertheless, this pain is a reminder of why the creation of the Union was so necessary. The idea of peace is once again relevant.

I write in my essay that the European Union is an organisation for peace, and I reject the idea of a common culture. The common European identity is a utopian idea, but this does not mean that peace and cooperation are not principles that all EU Member States can commit themselves to.



Although the lack of a common ideological basis is often seen as the weak link of the EU, it is important to remember that the EU can still act as a framework for diverse cultural identities without requiring them to be consistent. Thus, European identity does not have to mean cultural similarity; rather, it should mean organising our diversity so that we can resolve conflicts by diplomatic means, both now and in the future.

Of course, pluralism sets a number of challenges for policy-making. The American philosopher and political scientist John Rawls (1921-2002) summarised the problem of a pluralistic society by asking how it is possible to maintain peaceful coexistence between free and equal people who are at the same time kept apart by different religious, philosophies and moral doctrines. Policy cannot be based merely on common issues if there is no consensus on the common good. Rather, in a pluralistic community, democracy must be used as a way to bring out differing and contrasting viewpoints. By strengthening democracy and diplomacy, we can create ways to prevent confrontations from coming to a head and turning into conflicts. With this kind of pluralistic democracy, we can give a voice to those that have been silenced for decades by the prevailing balance of power. According to the Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe, giving a voice to diversity means treating contrary opinions not as enemies, but as essential parts of the democratic process and of dissent. As no individual social actor can represent the whole of the EU's diversity, we should organise differing viewpoints in accordance with democratic values so that we can be heard in all our diversity and thus receive equal treatment.

I now return to my thoughts about Italy, about the moment when I blew out that candle at the head of that long table, with those twinkling eyes looking at me and the applause as I made a wish. I have no idea what I was wishing for from the pink candle sticking out of my cake. I just remember those faces looking at me from under mats of fluffy, smooth, light and coal-black hair. Similarity and difference can sit at the same table and commit to things that affect everyone. Every one of us was at that table thanks to the European Union, and every one of us was therefore involved in this common project, the reason why we made the trip there. Common projects, however, are more than the sum of their parts.

This is also the case with the European Union, which is not just a historical and cultural community; neither is it merely economic and political in nature. The EU has inevitably created something new, which scientists, writers and ordinary citizens will describe to future generations in their own stories. Thus, the European Union is a story that lives in every moment and changes shape constantly. This story has thousands of versions, and its content varies depending on the storyteller and the point in history. What all the stories have in common is that they reflect an ability to imagine, and the ability to imagine makes it possible to create. The future of Europe, then, will simply be how we imagine it, and we must therefore tune in to a European state of mind and recreate Europe again and again.