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Heritage in flux: Europeanization as identity politics

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In the context of the European Union's (EU's) Eastern enlargement, European identity politics has become very topical. During the enlargement process the candidate countries were conceived to graduate to 'Europe proper' after proving their will and capability to internalize European values and norms. However, further developments have shown that in practice the process is never a linear one, since the new member states also mold the EU. Current ongoing debates about the meanings of 'Europe' and 'European' in the different EU countries can be seen as one example of that.

In parallel with the enlargement process, European integration developed from the economic and political sphere to the cultural one, a development framed as cultural Europeanization. Culture was made an official policy sector of the EU in the Treaty of Maastricht. Since then various initiatives have been launched that legitimize and justify cultural integration of the EU as part of European identity politics. Forming and enshrining a European cultural heritage has been one cornerstone of this process.

The most recent example of fostering a cultural heritage as part of EU identity politics is the European Heritage Label (EHL) initiative launched as an official action by the European Commission in 2011. The labeled sites are pre-selected at the national level and the final selection is made by an expert panel appointed at the EU level. To date, the label has been designated to 29 sites. Since twelve of the designated sites are situated in countries that have joined the EU during the last Eastern enlargements—Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia (2), Hungary (2), Lithuania, Poland (4), and Slovenia—the EHL also brings together different forms of Europeanization.

The heritage sites spring from different epochs of time; from the Neanderthal period, through the medieval time and World Wars, to the fall of the Iron Curtain. From the recent period preceding the EU's Eastern enlargements, the Gdansk Shipyard in Poland, where the Solidarity (*Solidarność*) movement was established, is designated. Similarly, the memorial park on the Austria-Hungary border, where a peace

demonstration was held in 1989, is praised for its significance to a borderless and unified Europe.

Apart from the temporal difference, the sites also represent different institutions. Museums are widely represented among the sites. For example, the Great Guild Hall, situated in Tallinn, Estonia, represents Hanseatic architecture and currently hosts the Estonian History Museum. Also the Franja Partisan Hospital from World War II has been turned into a museum. The Olomouc Premyslid Castle and Archdiocesan Museum in the Czech Republic focus on the Moravian presence in European history.

On the other hand, the historic ensemble of the University of Tartu in Estonia functions as a university campus. Similarly, the Ferenc Liszt Academy in Budapest, Hungary is an international university of musical arts and also a concert center. The Lithuanian site, Kaunas of 1919–1940, praises the prosperous development of the city into a modern cultural center during the time period when it was the temporary capital of the country.

Unlike the UNESCO World Heritage List, the main objectives of the EHL are to bring to life a European narrative and promote the European dimension of the sites. However, all the sites also stand for a remarkable national heritage. The same holds true in the level of actors. In practice, the European cultural heritage is formed in an interplay between the EU and national levels: since the daily practice of the sites is managed by national actors, they also have a significant role in mapping the meanings of Europe. This can be done by framing what the European dimension of the sites means and how the European narrative is told.

Furthermore, the process is a good example of how Europeanization and promotion of the national dimension become entangled in identity politics by different actors. For example, in the site videos available on the European Commission website, apart from the European aspects of the sites, national ones are emphasized. As part of the process, the meanings of Europe as well as the relationship between national and European are continuously in flux. Therefore, in identity politics, like Europeanization, nothing can be taken for granted: instead of identity as a status quo entity, multilayered and often controversial processes at the European and national levels deserve the main focus.