

## Chapter 15

# Nationalistic Independent Movements Within the European Union and Its Challenge to Create a Territorial Identity

**Demi Wilhelmina Maria van Huisseling**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0496-0394>

*Universidad de Extremadura, Spain*

### **ABSTRACT**

*Throughout history, humanity has been known to move in groups as a way of surviving, to expand their identity and culture. In Europe this has led to international and civil wars in the past but changed with the creation of the European Union. This chapter analyzes the creation and demarcation of nations during the past, the territorial identity that was formed and the need of the EU to create a European Identity to overcome the threat of independent movements. Secessionist nationalistic movements have gained importance since the economic crisis which started in 2007 and have been rising in different regions and countries of the EU. The main question that needs to be solved in this chapter: How does the EU cope with the rise of new nationalistic movements? It can only be overcome with the creation of a European territorial identity.*

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## **INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL SHAPING OF THE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES**

Humankind has always had the tendency of living in groups in which they could search for protection, live and develop. They would establish communities at a territory in excellent conditions where they could create their civilization. The link with this territory would define them and here they establish a social and political life (for example Vikings, Egyptian or the Mesopotamian civilizations). They lived in a society divided by a system of hierarchy where they had different social classes, but they were also recognisable by their culture, architecture, temples, etc.

### **Evolution of the European States**

The expansion of the European civilizations became clearer with the creation of the first maps during the fifteenth and sixteenth century. The different civilizations who settled and identified themselves with one territory expanded their territory to gain prestige. This has led to the creation of a firm society that became more organized, with a political structure (hierarchy) and which, at the same time, attracted more people.

According to the German writer and cartographer Johann Zahn, who wrote in 1696 about nations and their inhabitants, the most significant nations in Europe were Germany, Italy, Spain, France and England because of their clearly defined borders, but also because of the way of living of their inhabitants, their language and physical aspects (Leerssen, 2006, p. 63).

Although he wrote about nations, the definition of 'national character' rose during the Enlightenment (18<sup>th</sup> century) with the principles of democracy. The North American demographic Revolution (1776) and the French Revolution (1789) set the origin of 'nationalism'.

*The word 'nation' comes to refer to the corporate identity of all political subjects of a given country. The realization that these people form, not a servile estate or a subaltern layer in society, but the general body politic, with a will and a mandate of its own, will call into play the concept of nation [...] the birth of democracy vests power, [...] in the united will of the people; and that people, following 1789, will proclaim its inclusiveness and emancipation by calling itself a nation (Leerssen, 2006, p. 89).*

Although nationalism was meant to be represented by democratic ideas, it was brought to extremes and interpreted by many leaders during the following centuries as a principle of totalitarianism. After the French Revolution, according to Leerssen,

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