**The Pan-European Union Interpretation of Symbols and Myths\***

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Paper prepared for

2015 Biennial Conference of the European Union Studies Association,

March 5-7, Boston, Massachusetts

**\*** This paper is part of the research project “Symbols and Myths in European Integration” funded by the Danish Council for Independent Research.

**Abstract:** This paper ask the question: What roles do the interpretation and use of symbols and myths by pan-European non-state actors and organisations play in the processes of European integration? The point of departure is that the roles of symbols and myths are crucial for our understanding of both how the European Union (EU) becomes constituted as a political reality and how the integration process itself occurs. European integration research has traditionally been dominated by the study of how rational political-economic choices of national and supranational political elites feed into EU institution building. Yet, this paper aims to advance European integration research by investigating how both symbolic and mythical constructions in European societies feed into European integration. Almost certainly, collective European symbols and myths are fundamental to our understanding of issues such as European social solidarity, citizens feeling of belonging to the EU, political advocacy for and resistance to European integration, and concrete political actions. For the purpose of this paper, I explore myths and symbols associated with the ‘EUROPE 2020: A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’ (Commission 2010 - hereafter Europe 2020), adopted in early 2010. The significance and potential of the Europe 2020 for the EU’s political economy is clear. What makes Europe 2020 especially interesting for this study is that it draws upon and feed into a number of symbols and myths about European integration including ‘green Europe’, ‘social Europe’ and ‘Economic Europe’. In the exploration of how pan-European non-state actors and organisations (hereafter pan-EU NGOs) outside of EU institutions feed into and receive symbols and myths about European integration, I have a special focus on members of the social policy coalition known as the Platform of the European Social NGOs (Social Platform), the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and Businesseurope (renamed in early 2007, previous ‘Union of Industrial and Employer’s Confederations of Europe (UNICE)). The paper argues that (1) pan-EU NGOs are indeed receptive to political myths, also in the short term, (2) pan-EU NGOs contributes to the reproduction of myths, especially already institutionalised myths and those myth particularly relevant for their sectoral activities and (3) in this process pan-EU NGOs translate and strategically use political myths to justify their policy positions.

**I. Introduction**

This paper examines the interpretation and use of symbols and myths by pan-EU NGOs in the processes of European integration. The point of departure is that the roles of symbols and myths are crucial for our understanding of both how the EU becomes constituted as a political reality and how the integration process itself occurs. European integration research has traditionally been dominated by the study of how rational political-economic choices of national and supranational political elites feed into EU institution building (e.g. Moravcsik 1998; Pollack 2003; Tsebelis and Kreppel 1998). Yet, this paper aims to advance European integration research by investigating how both symbolic and mythical constructions in European societies feed into European integration. Almost certainly, collective European symbols and myths are fundamental to our understanding of issues such as European social solidarity, citizens feeling of belonging to the EU, political advocacy for and resistance to European integration, and concrete political actions.

For the purpose of this paper, I explore myths and symbols associated with the ‘EUROPE 2020: A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (Commission 2010)’, adopted in early 2010. The significance and potential of the Europe 2020 strategy for the EU’s political economy is clear. What makes Europe 2020 especially interesting for this study is that it draws upon and feed into a number of symbols and myths about European integration. More specifically the strategy draws on the symbols and myth of what can be termed ‘economic Europe’ (Kaelberer 2004; Jones 2010), ‘green Europe’ (Baker 2007; Lenschow and Sprungk 2010) and ‘social Europe’ (Macrae 2010; Rovisco 2010) (see Lynggaard et al. 2014: 3). In this way the Europe 2020 draws both on past EU symbols and myths, but arguably also creates expectations about the future of European integration. In that sense it represents a view on ‘past futures’, described by Stråth (2005) (using Koselleck) as ‘[t]he processes in which collective memories are constructed are about the horizons of future expectations as much as about past experiences (p. 260).’

While the Europe 2020 strategy in itself creates expectations about the future trajectory of European integration, both in general and quite specifically through strategy targets, the implications of Europe 2020 very much depend on how it is received by societal actors. Europe 2020 was formulated as a respond to the financial and economic crisis, and particularly the initiative can be viewed as accidence to critiques of what by some was seen as one-sided austerity EU policies at the time. Launching Europe 2020 the European Commission President Barroso recognized that: *“The condition for success is a real ownership by European leaders and institutions. Our new agenda requires a coordinated European response, including with social partners and civil society. If we act together, then we can fight back and come out of the crisis stronger. We have the new tools and the new ambition. Now we need to make it happen (Barroso in Commission 2010: 4).”* My focus here is on to what extend this ownership in fact has materialized among pan-EU NGOs, especially the roles of symbols and myths in the reception of the strategy.

The remains of the paper is organised as follows: section II establishes a conceptual framework for ‘the politics of symbols and myths in European integration’, section III outline ‘research design and techniques’, followed by an empirical analysis in section IV. Conclusions are made in the final section V.

**II. The Politics of Symbols and Myths in European integration**

Symbols and myths are first and foremost associated with the EU identity politics and political legitimacy. We have seen how exposure to EU symbols such as maps of Europe, the flag, passport and so on, have immediate and strong effects on citizens feeling of belonging to Europe (Bruter 2003; 2009). The relationship between EU symbols and political identity is typically seen as reciprocal; while EU symbols are tools in the construction of European identity, some level of collective identity and institutional trust is required for symbols to take effect (Kaelberer 2004: 177). Myths are commonly seen as essential for the political legitimacy. In the broadest sense myths are shared ideas supplying citizens with a sense of ‘origin, continuity, historical memories, collective remembrance, common heritage and tradition, as well as a common destiny (Obradovic 1996: 196).’ Such foundational myths are the carriers of social solidarity and crucial for popular support to political institutions and output. Views on the existence of foundational myths in Europe range from those arguing not only their absence, but also near impossibility amongst others due to the indistinctiveness of Europe as a geographical and cultural unity (Obradovic 1996); to those arguing that the successful construction of European integration as a rational, non-political and inevitable process is one such myth, and a powerful one, at the heart of Europe (Hansen and Williams 1999). This type discussion and literature is as relevant as ever. However, what it lacks, and for that matter allows for, is a view to the role of symbols and myths in more mundane EU decision making or, as I will return to below, what may be termed functional symbols and myths.

The perspective here on the politics of European integration is a broad institutional one. This perspective is especially chosen for a number of reasons. First, the institutionalist view on European integration has very much become and established itself as mainstream at least since the early 1990s (Saurugger 2014). In that sense, the institutional perspective allow us to link up the more marginal symbols and myths research agenda with some of the most well-developed and sophisticated conceptualisations of EU politics. Second, while now firmly located in mainstream political science, the institutional perspective has its origin in and draws on a range of disciplines including politics, economics, sociology and history. In its inclusiveness, institutionalism thus enables and aspires to cross-disciplinarity and a holistic view on European integration. Third, my interest is both on the ‘high politics’, or grand bargaining, of European integration and on ‘day-to-day’ institutional politics. Institutional theory serves well for those purposes by supplying conceptualisations of both short term grand bargaining and the medium- to long term EU politics. In sum, I wish to carry the study of political myths and symbols into the field of institutional theory.

My perspective further highlights symbols and myths as elements in political discourse. From this perspective symbols and myths are viewed as providing order to political life. Symbols and myths establish rules for who we are and what is acceptable and, especially, who are we not and what is not acceptable in political life. In that sense, symbols and myths affect the inclusion/exclusion of actors and ideas in political life. While symbols and myths are elements in political discourse, they are not equivalent to any political discourse. Rather, for a start, we may understand symbols and myths as especially emotionally appealing elements of political discourse (Sears 1993: 120; Lieberman and Gray 2007: 378).

The study of emotions is typically associated with political psychology. From this perspective political emotions can be viewed as guided by two types of emotional systems; the disposition system and the surveillance system (Marcus 2003). Whereas appeals to the former activate already internalized behaviour without much thought, the latter rather appeals to reflection and possibly strategic behaviour by warning us of ‘unusual and/or threatening circumstances (ibid: 203)’. Marcus (2003) further argues that emotions: ‘*is intimately involved not only in habits, prejudices, and other instances of reliance of learned behavior but in the recruitment of reason and the full display of cognitive activities* (Marcus 2003: 204)’. Together this means that emotions is neither something that should - or indeed can - be eliminated from political decision making, nor should political emotions be conceived as opposite to political reason or rationality. Rather the two are interrelated and political rationality depends on political emotion. Furthermore the emotional appeal of symbols and myths not only allow for routine political activity, but also for swift evaluation and reactions by political agents to political challenges (Marcus 2000: 222).

Against this background, I suggest that, at the heart of the study of the role of symbols and myths in politics are two mechanisms highlighting respectively (1) symbols and myths as code and (2) symbols and myths as conduct.

*Myths and symbols as code*

Symbols and myths as code highlight their discursive structural features, which can be described in terms of subject matter and structural firmness, or level of institutionalisation. In terms of subject matter ‘[s]ymbols refer to a body of social values, knowledge and practices which offer guidance for interpreting, processing and coping with specific issues or situations (Blühdorn 2007: 255)’. Symbolic manifestations include icons (e.g. maps), rituals (e.g. joint acts of remembrance) and taboos (e.g. phases referring to the practice European integration for instance in national political debate) (Manners 2011). Symbols typically have a physical form, which for phrases may be a particular typography, and ‘is about something’. While symbols offer guidance for understanding specific issues and situations, it is also clear that the nature of symbols allow for, if not multiple, then a range of interpretations and political activities. Similarly myths have a subject matter. In this sense, a ‘*political* myth is the work on a common narrative that grants significance to the political conditions and experiences of a social group (Bottici and Challand 2013: 92)’. Further, myths in politics ‘arises out of a narrative because it (a) coagulates and reproduces significance, (b) is shared by a given group, and (c) can address the specifically political conditions in which a given group lives (Bottici and Challand 2013: 92)’.

We may also expect that the structural firmness, or level of institutionalisation, of symbols and myths matters for their impact on politics. Compare, for instance, the institutionalisation of symbols and myths associated with economic Europe with those of social Europe. The myth of economic Europe include the notions that economic integration was *the* historical starting point for European integration, that European integration is driven by economic interests (whether institutional or states), economic ideas about the relationship between state and market (which may be manipulated by political elites), the irreversibility of economic integration, economic interdependence as the safeguard for peace in Europe and that there are winners and loser of economic Europe (Jones 2010: 96-102). The Euro – the coins and notes – is the most obvious symbol associated with economic Europe, but there are numerous others symbolic manifestations including phrases such as ‘multiannual financial framework’ and the recent introduction of macro-economic coordination through ‘The European Semester’. Compare to social Europe, where central to this myth is the idea of a ‘European Social Model’, which is typically constituted by a mixture of liberal and social democratic values where economic growth and competitiveness goes hand in hand with socially just labour market policies and institutions. Social Europe is illustrated in phrases such as ‘social dialogue’, ‘flexicurity’, and ‘gender equality’ (Rovisco 2010: 252; Macrae 2010). Symbolic manifestations include the Commissions biannual publication ‘Social Europe’ (since 2011 ‘Social Europe guide’. Clearly social Europe and economic Europe are both constitutive parts of the EU as a political reality, but also almost certainly the latter has more reach and depth in EU policy making. How the level of institutionalisation of symbols and myths matters is treated as an open and empirical questions.

If we see institutions are authorised and sanctioned discourse, then processes of institutionalisation of symbols and myths progress through authorisations and the establishment of some sort of sanctions (see Lynggaard 2006). Authorisation and sanctions can range from being instituted by EU law to being more informal political mechanisms setting out boundaries for relevant and legitimate political issues and political actors from those that are not in EU politics. Symbols and myths may also to be institutionalised among larger or smaller groups of actors. Whereas foundational myths and symbols about e.g. ‘nation’ and ‘state’ concerns the largest groups, we may expect that myths such as economic, social, and green Europe concerns smaller more specialised groups. Myths of economic, social, and green Europe may be termed functional myths and may each be viewed as ‘a “brand attribute” of Europe, a particular feature that distinguishes Europe from other political entities and that adds to a common identity (Lenshow and Sprungk 2010: 136)’. Functional myths are from my perspective neither more nor less real than foundational myths, but they tend to draw on specified historical events and people. Functional myths are then located between the often more grand and elusive nation-like foundational myths and specific policy ideas. It has been argued that the weakness European - compared to national - foundational myths highlights the importance of European functional myths (Della Sala 2010). While it may be so, is suffice here to acknowledge some type of relationship between European foundational and functional myths and for the time being I am more concerned with the latter.

Finally, about the relationships between myths and symbols; myths often draw on associated symbols. Think, for instance, green Europe. ‘Sustainability’ and ‘ecological modernisation’ are terms at the heart of the green Europe myth, but also the idea that the EU exercise leadership in promoting climate policies globally (Baker 2007). Symbolic manifestations of the green Europe myth most obvious include the colour green, but typically also images of European landscapes and ‘green technologies’. In a similar way the social Europe myth may be associated with images of people, possibly of women and men, visibly different ethnicities, whom may be united around a particular common task. At the same time, we may expect that, whereas symbols may very well give associations to particular myths, the range of possible interpretations and usages of symbols exceeds that of myths. Although symbols and myths are sometimes closely associated, we may also suspect they have distinct roles in EU politics; if for no other reason due to symbols often being non-verbal.

*Myths and symbols as conduct*

Symbols and myths as conduct highlight agency, which can be described in terms their usage in EU politics. Della Sala (2010: 6) suggests that political myths ‘are political instruments that may or may not be successful in their appeal’. Although the historical point of creation of political myths may well be blurred or abstract, by no means follow that political myths cannot be used strategically by political actors. Symbols as physical representations may more often have a concrete and historical origin, but may also be subject to strategic use. But how can we know if when decision makers invoke symbols and myths strategically as opposed to merely reiterate already internalised symbols and myths without much reflection and purpose? In other words, how can we differentiate between symbols and myths respectively as ‘code’ and as ‘conduct’?

Assuming a mutually constitutive relation between structure and agency essentially makes this an analytical decision, yet not a random one. First, the time dimension is of particular importance. While decision makers are likely to become less reflexive and strategic in course of time of the development and possible institutionalisation of European symbols and myths, a more sudden articulation of ‘new’, or previously downplayed, symbols and myths suggests a more reflective and strategic choice. Second, decision making elites are arguably more likely to be reflexive and strategic users of symbols and myths. Decision making elites are likely to be – perhaps often acutely – aware of the presence of alternative and competing symbols and myths both domestically and internationally. One example of this awareness is highlighted by the French and Dutch rejection of the ‘Constitution for Europe’ at their 2005 referenda. The Constitutions for Europe promoted a series EU symbols – including the EU flag, anthem, day and motto - which, according to Manners (2011: 244-245; 252 ff.), was ‘too federal’ and bared too much resemblance of the establishment of a European statehood to pass a popular vote. The EU symbols were subsequently removed from what became the Lisbon Treaty. In other words, decision makers are faced with the task of articulating European symbols and myths *as opposed to* alternative symbols and myths, suggesting at the very least some level of strategic reflection. Third, symbols and myths associated with specified and possibly presented as necessitating certain courses of action suggest that such are invoked strategically. Fourth, the extent to which decision makers invoke different symbols and myths for consumption in different types of fora - e.g. more or less private/public or domestic/international ones – indicates strategic reflections.

**III. Research Design and Techniques**

In my study of the reception among pan-EU NGOs of symbols and myths associated with Europe 2020 I will first identify the symbols and myths in use. To be sure, the use of symbols and myths is not conceived as a one-way linear sender-recipient process, but rather as an interactive process involving EU institutional actors, most notably the Commission and Commission services, and various pan-EU NGOs. The Europe 2020 strategy is used a point of return to identify symbols and myths in use, but I move beyond this document, both in time and types of data. The analysis not only covers the process of elaboration, adoption and implementation Europe 2020, but roughly the period 2000-2014. ‘Archives of documents’ have been put together in each case area so to allow for both within and across cases temporal comparisons. The data material consists of documents published by the EEB, the Social Platform, ETUC and Businesseurope. Tabel 1 provides an overview of the documents conferred.

**Table 1: Types and total number of conferred documents**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Sources** | **Types of documents** | **No. of documents per** **Source** |
| **EEB** | Biannual memorandums 2005-2014, each approx. 40-70 pp.  | N= 20 |
| **Social Platform** | Annual reports 2002-2012, each approx. 20-40 pp. (except briefer 2008-2010). Work programs 2002-2012, each approx. 15-25 pp.  | N=23 |
| **ETUC** | Annual resolutions 2000–2013, each approx. 100-200 pp.  | N=13 |
| **Businesseurope** | Biannual economic outlooks 1999-2014, each approx. 10-30 pp. | N=32 |

Some variation exists in the scope of documents (in terms of number of pages/word counts) both within and across the sources. Types of sources may thus not be straight forward comparable, particularly in quantitative terms. Yet, the scope of each source is typically quite similar over time with a few exceptions, where a few additional documents have been included to compensate for e.g. a few very brief annual reports. Using Nvivo I make use of a series quantitative indicators accompanied with illustrative quotations in the following. While quantitative comparisons across sources should be done with caution, patterns may still be identified and compared over time.

It is notoriously difficult to measure political emotional appeals. Some of the techniques available from political psychology are actors emotional self-reporting, experimental research, and interpretation of facial and other physical expressions. For my purpose, however, I am not so much concerned with the deeper sentiment and structure of political emotions, but rather my concern is the emotional appeal as a characteristic of political myths and symbols. I rely on admittedly less sophisticated, but more readily available and still useful techniques. I thus focus on how European myths and symbols are being reconstructed by means of emotional political discourse, rather than cognition and information processing. Attention is given to the argumentations associated green, social and economic Europe emphasising the usage of emotional language. It is worth noting that the language of emotions among EU political elites must be expected to be fairly subtle – e.g. opposed to the language associated with severe political aggression and violence (see Matsumoto *et al.* 2013). ‘Sustainable development’ and ‘social model’ as linked with respectively green and social Europe may in itself be viewed as wordings with emotional appeals. However, also when pan-EU NGO’s ‘urges’ EU institutions to take political action or point to ‘real’ development, often with a negative outlook and creating a need for action, can be seen as appealing to political emotions.

**IV. Analysis**

The nature of myths makes detecting their historical origin inconceivable. A myths is rather something that is continuously reconstructed, or if not the myth cease to exist. Highlighting the continuous reconstruction of myths is especially important when the focus is on short- or medium-term policy making. Acknowledging this, I follow Bottici and Challand (2013) that – analytically – the ‘reconstruction of myths can be seen as consisting of three elements: production, reception and reproduction (2013: 90)’.

*Production of Europe 2020*

Europe 2020 sets out three strategic priorities for the EU namely; what is termed ‘smart growth’ emphasizing ‘knowledge and innovation’ as key for developing the economy, ‘sustainable growth’ involving ‘a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy’ and ‘inclusive growth’ aiming at ‘a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion’. The strategy further set out five ‘headline targets’ for the overall strategy, and each of the priorities is accompanied with two-three ‘flagship initiatives’ and specified targets, all to be realized by 2020 (targets are typically measured in absolute figures and/or in % compared to a default position).

Europe 2020 was explicitly adopted as a responds to the financial and economic crisis. At the same time it may be viewed as a contribution to the reconstruction of the myths of green, social and economic Europe. My concern here is not if the production of Europe 2020 represents a sterile continuation of more or less institutionalised European symbols and myths or possibly a subtle discursive change involving a ‘rehabilitation, or even reinforcement, of neoliberalism’ as suggested bv De Ville and Orbie (2014: 150). My concern is rather to what extent and how myths associated with Europe 2020 are received and reproduced among pan-EU NGOs. Are the myths of green, social and economic Europe received and reproduced in continuations of their representation in Europe 2020? Are green, social and economic European myths equally received and reproduced by pan-EU NGOs? These are the questions I turn to now.

*Reception of Europe 2020 among pan-EU NGOs*

Figure 1 is a simple word count of references made to ‘Europe 2020’ by the EEB, the Social Platform, ETUC and Businesseurope. Searches were conducted on the terms ’Europe’ and ’2020’ within a five words distance. This is used as an indicator of if, and to what extent, Europe 2020 is adopted as a concern among pan-EU NGOs.

**Figure 1: pan-EU NGOs references to ‘Europe 2020’ 2005-2012/14**

Sources: EEB Biannual memorandums 2005-2014; Social Platform annual reports 2005-2012 & Social Platform work programs 2005-2012; ETUC annual resolutions 2005–2012; Businesseurope biannual economic outlooks 2005-2014.

Businesseurope stands out by a close to absence of references to Europe 2020. This may mean that Businesseurope is much less concerned with the Europe 2020 than the EEB, the Social Platform, and ETUC. However, as we shall see, Businesseurope is indeed receptive to some of the key issues in Europe 2020. Starting at a low level the EEB, the Social Platform, and ETUC all show a steep increase in references made to Europe 2020 during 2010, the year of the adoption of the strategy. In the year following the adoption of Europe 2020 we see a continued increase in Europe 2020 references made the EEB, a small increase by ETUC and a decrease by the Social Platform. The EEB, the Social Platform and the ETUC all show a decrease in 2012, leaving the number of references at an even or lower level than by the end of 2010. Data available only for the EEB show a renewed and steep increase in Europe 2020 references in 2013 and 2014. While these observations should be treated with some caution, a few preliminary interpretations can be made.

First, and possibly not so surprising, pan-EU NGOs does in fact adopt Europe 2020 as a concern in their policy papers. Second, based on the data presented here, pan-EU NGOs appear to react immediately to the adoption of the Europe 2020. Pan-EU NGOs do not actively refer to Europe 2020 during its elaboration but, as we shall see, they do appear to be proactive on the substance of Europe 2020 prior to 2010.Third, the EEB’s concern with Europe 2020 seems to be actualised by the agreement (early 2013) and adoption (end 2013) of the multiannual financial framework 2014-2020. Whether the adoption of multiannual financial priorities and ceilings generally boost concerns with Europe 2020 among pan-EU NGOs, should be looked into as data for 2013 and 2014 becomes more systematically available from the Social Platform, ETUC and Businesseurope. But let us have a closer look at the reception of the substance of Europe 2020.

Figure 2, 3, 4 and 5 are simple word counts of references to the terms ‘smart’, ‘un-’/‘sustainable’ and ‘inclusive’/’exclusive’ by the EEB, the Social Platform, ETUC and Businesseurope respectively. ’ In order to capture all forms and their negations searches were conducted on the terms ‘smart\*’, ‘inclusi\*’ and ‘exclusi\*’, ‘sustainab\*’ and ‘unsustainab\*’. This is used as quantitative indicators of the reception of the three key objectives of Europe 2020, smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The indicators should all be treated with some caution. Also, ‘un-’/‘sustainable’ and ‘inclusive’/’exclusive’ are not straightforward indicators for respectively green and social Europe myths – e.g. ‘sustainable’ may well be used to characterise societal and economic developments or the status of fiscal policies – and ‘smart’ should certainly not be used as an indicator of the myth of economic Europe. However, treated with causion we may make a few preliminary observations and interpretations.

**Figure 2: EEB references to ‘smart’, ‘un-’/‘sustainable’ and ‘inclusive’/’exclusive’ 2005-2014**

Source: EEB Biannual memorandums 2005-2014.

**Figure 3: Social Platform references to ‘smart’, ‘un-’/‘sustainable’ and ‘inclusive’/’exclusive’ 2005-2012**

Source: Social Platform annual reports 2005-2012 & Social Platform work programs 2005-2012.

**Figure 4: ETUC references to ‘smart’, ‘un-’/‘sustainable’ and ‘inclusive’/’exclusive’ 2005-2012**

Source: ETUC annual resolutions 2005–2012.

**Figure 5: Businesseurope references to ‘smart’, ‘un-’/‘sustainable’ and ‘inclusive’/’exclusive’ 2005-2014**

Source: Businesseurope biannual economic outlooks 2005-2014.

First, across the board there is a decrease in the total number of references from 2005 to 2007, except from Businesseurope, where 2006 stands out with a high total number of references. Second, across the board there is a fairly steep increase on the total number of references from 2009 to 2010, except from the EEB where the steep increase is delayed and appears from 2010 to 2011. This suggests that the pan-EU NGOs are not only relating to the Europe 2020 in general terms, Europe 2020 is also boosting discourse on substance. Third, there appear to be variations as to the type of references made by different pan-EU NGOs. Most apparent is the Social Platforms high number of references to ‘inclusive’/’exclusive’, whereas the EEB also, unsurprisingly, may be seen as having a particular emphasis on ‘un-‘/sustainability. This suggests not only a sectoral emphasis on myths by pan-EU NGOs, but also that Europe 2020 has boosted the reconstruction of the myth of green and social Europe. We need better indicators to assess whether this also the case for economic Europe. Fourth, ‘un-’/‘sustainable’ receives the largest number of references with a large margin to inclusive’/ ’exclsive’, except from the Social Platform, where this is reversed. References to ‘smart’ is very limited, peaking around 2010/11 among all pan-EU NGOs. Searches on the terms ‘knowledge’ and ‘innovation’, which are viewed as key to ‘smart growth’ in Europe 2020, confirm that this is the least referred issue over time and the objective that pan-EU NGOs are the least receptive to. This suggest that pan-EU NGOs are the most receptive to already institutionalised myths. Moreover, whereas pan-EU NGOs are not unresponsive, they are less receptive to issues outside of the existing terminology, issues which also wears off more quickly.

*Reproduction of Europe 2020*

We seen how pan-EU NGO’s appear receptive to myths associated with the Europe 2020 strategy, but how do they contribute to their reproduction? Are pan-EU NGO’s merely reitating already institutionalised myths as represented by the Commission? Or to what extend does pan-EU NGO’s have an independent role in articulating EU myths? In order to have a first look at this, I turn to a more qualitative reading of how pan-EU NGO’s reception of Europe 2020.

A closer look at the EEB’s reception of Europe 2020 show a reluctance to treating sustainability and growth on par. For instance, in 2012 at the expiry of EU’s Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS), which was first adopted in 2001 and extended in 2006, the EEB notes that: *“So far there has been little sign of intention to extend or renew the SDS, with this reluctance being attributed to the existence of the Europe 2020 Strategy. However, the focus of Europe 2020 is competitivity, growth and jobs. The fact that the growth is supposed to be smart, sustainable and inclusive does not make Europe 2020 a sustainable development strategy (EEB Biannual memorandum 2012a: 9).”* And: “*While Europe 2020 has potential, EEB believes it will not lead the way to sustainable development in Europe. Therefore we need to work with a real EU Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) which sets out the main direction under which Europe 2020 can play a role (EEB Biannual memorandum 2010b: 8).”*

At the same time, the EEB conceived of sustainable development (rather than ‘growth’ which, when at all used, typically has negative connotations) as serving both European competitiveness and jobcreation. The EEB argues that: *“If Europe does not take steps to invest in its own green technology base, to secure a greener economy, it risks losing out to others. By investing in efforts to meet a more ambitious target, the EU will also invest in its own sustainable future, creating new, local and long term jobs, driving innovation and technological change (EEB Biannual memorandum 2010b: 9).”* This suggests that, while Europe 2020 has boosed the myth of green Europe and the EEB does associate sustainability with competitiveness and jobcreation, for the EEB the latter follow from a sustainable development path, not the other way around or as eaqually important objectives.

A closer look at the Social Platforms reception of Europe 2020 suggests that they conceive of inclusive growth as a respond to exsisting and failed EU macro-economic policies. Not without an amount of sarkasm the Social Platform claims that: *“The new motto for the EU has become “budget consolidation and austerity measures” in response to the demands of the ﬁnancial markets. Alerted by our members to the situation on the ground we instead proposed a Social Pact to achieve an inclusive recovery (Social Platform annual report 2011: 1).”* And: *“The EU is back once again to the growth and jobs agenda that was not successful in the past. The reason - growth at any cost is not what people want, they want an inclusive growth based on solidarity and social justice (Social Platform annual report 2011: 1).”* While the Social Platform makes use of the phrase ‘inclusive recovery’ and distance themselves from a ‘growth and jobs agenda’, they are not reluctant to associate societal and labour market inclusiveness with growth. As an example, the Social Platform argues specifically that care policies and services: *“are not a cost as they are generally perceived but are a social investment for the sustainability of European societies and an under exploited source of employment. Our starting point - not only is care a human right but it also beneﬁts our societies (Social Platform annual report 2011: 2).”* Together this suggests that Europe 2020 has boosted the myth of social Europe but also that, while the Social Platform give more emphasis to social justice, they are possibly more in line with the social Europe myth, than the EEB is with the green Europe myth, both as represented by Europe 2020.

The ETUC highlights the links between, and need for, investments in public services on the one hand and, on the other hand, the defence of the ‘European social model’ and promotion of sustainability (e.g. ETUC annual resolutions 2010: 16). At the same time, ETUC’s reception is possibly the most in line with Europe 2020. Specific in relation to the Common Agricultural Policy, the ETUC state that: *“The CAP must follow the logic of the EU 2020 Strategy and contribute to the ﬁnancing of its implementation, and not on the contrary. The beneﬁciary enterprises have to respect, in particular, social and labour standards. Consequently, in future, the connection between the CAP and the sustainable and inclusive development objectives (creation of quality jobs, social cohesion, environmental protection) must be consolidated and strengthened (ETUC annual resolutions 2010: 34).”*

The quantitative indicators suggest the Businesseurope is the most concern with ‘smart growth’. A closer look show that Businesseurope links both ‘smart’ and ‘sustainable’ growth with structural reform and austerity measures. Illustrative of this Businesseurope argues that: *“A reform agenda for a smart consolidation of public finances should focus on expenditure cuts while preserving productive public investments in education, innovation and infrastructure, and undertaking growth-enhancing tax reforms. The fear of a tax-driven budgetary consolidation underlines the necessity to combine fiscal sustainability and growth, and this can only be achieved through far-reaching structural reforms (Businesseurope biannual economic outlook 2011a: 13).”* Opposed to the EEB, Socialplatform, and ETUC, Businesseurope is thus associating sustainability with public finances, public debts, fiscal policies and stability (in fact more than 40% of all mentions by Businesseurope of ‘un-‘/‘sustainability 2005-2014 appears within a distance of 5 or less words from such terms).

**V. Preliminary Conclusions**

This is clearly work-in-progress and explorative. However, a few preliminary analytical conclusions appear from the investigation of what roles do the interpretation and use of symbols and myths by pan-European non-state actors and organisations play in the processes of European integration? First, Pan-EU NGOs does in fact adopt Europe 2020 as a concern in their policy papers, not only in general terms, Europe 2020 is also boost discourse on substance. Second, Pan-EU NGOs appear to react immediately to the adoption of the Europe 2020, and in the reproduction of (mythical) substance all pan-EU NGO’s appear to be proactive. Third, negotiations on, and adoption of, the multiannual financial priorities and ceilings *may* generally boost concerns with Europe 2020. Or it may be caused by mid-term review of Europe 2020. Fourth, there appear to be not only a sectoral emphasis on myths by pan-EU NGOs, but also that Europe 2020 has boosted the reconstruction of the myth of green and social Europe. We need better indicators to assess whether this also the case for economic Europe. Fifth, Pan-EU NGOs seem to be the most receptive to already institutionalised myths. Especially sustainability as a feature of the myth of green Europe, come across as a discourse that can take on a great number of meanings and as such Pan-EU NGOs almost effortless – it seems – activates this myth for any ‘pet’ issues they may care for at any given point in time.

There are clearly a series of both theoretical and empirical issues which needs further attention. This include a systematic and empirical study of symbols associated with Europe 2020. I intend to commence this by making used of images as found e.g. on the Commissions Europe 2020 and pan-EU NGOs webpages. Further need is qualitative analysis of pan-EU NGO’s reproduction of myths, conceptual and research design considerations on how to differentiate between the reception and reproduction of symbols and myths and, finally, additional thoughts are needed to conceptually distinguish political myths from any other discourse.

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Words: 7042