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## Unthought and unrepresentable? The European territorial paradox

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### Abstract

The crisis of the European Union is partially linked to the fact that it has not become an identity referent for the European citizens. This is a crucial issue because the revival of European integration could precisely be based on the ability of Europeans to take ownership of the European construction. We set out two hypotheses: first that the weakness of the EU is intrinsic to the way it is constructed as a territory from one day to the next; second that the EU cannot be an object of social representation shared by European citizens. We show that the territoriality of the EU is ambiguous. We then define the EU as a particular type of political construction, in which pooling mechanisms render the relationship between territory and sovereignty hard to read. Finally, we show that Europeans are not able to produce a common territorial reference.



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The European project is in crisis. It is a crisis generated by a number of shocks over the last 10 years, including the considerable rise in sovereign debt, economic recession, deepening social and regional inequalities, an influx of asylum seekers, conflicts in the broader region, tensions with Russia and Brexit (Richard, 2012; Kahn 2017a). Simultaneous crises at different but interconnected levels have combined in an entirely new configuration, producing a political crisis for the European project. Since 2010 this has been illustrated by the rise to power, through democratic elections, of populist and extreme right-wing parties advocating nationalist and eurosceptic positions in several member states. The representation underpinning these new nationalisms in Europe reflects the convergence of nationalist struggles and nationalist public policies in a kind of European nationalism. Beyond their differences of economic and budgetary doctrine, these governments all postulate the existence of a European territory of which the European Union (EU) is the political manifestation. The EU's function then becomes to protect Europe, its inhabitants and civilisation from threats linked to globalisation, economic competition, migratory flows, jihadism and so on. Frontex is supported by the nationalist governments of Hungary (since 2010), Austria (2017-2019) and Italy (2018-2019).

Paradoxically, this project and its comparative success are fuelled by the idea that European regional integration has broken down. In light of the notion of “regionness” defined by Björn Hettne and Fredrik Söderbaum as part of a social constructivist approach to regional integration (Hettne, Söderbaum, 1998), we can say events and realities as they are experienced in Europe do not correspond sufficiently – or at all – to the emergence of a region organised to a degree where it can become a functional actor, with its own identity, a capacity for political action and institutions capable of taking decisions that are legitimate in the eyes of a transnational civil society (Hettne, Söderbaum, 1998), does not concur sufficiently – or at all – with events and realities as they are experienced. Yet, the most recent Eurobarometer surveys reveal a desire both for European integration and for it to work (see for example Eurobarometer 90, November 2018, notably chapter 4 “European Union’s political priorities”, pp. 29-32). Moreover, the crisis has placed more emphasis on integration mechanisms and institutions that maintain interdependence and solidarity between member states and regions within the EU.

The current European crisis is in fact a crisis of territorial sovereignty. On the one hand there are two contrasting conceptions of territorial community. One postulates that the territory of the EU is that of a European civilisation that must be protected from foreign influences. Ivan Krastev (2017) analyses how the so called “migration crisis” is causing an “existential crisis” for the EU. Viktor Orban, prime minister of Hungary since 2010, is one of the most influential representatives of this political doctrine, as exemplified by his address at the second “International Conference on Christian Persecution in November 2019: “Demographic forecasts also indicate that in the not too distant future there will be European countries undergoing rapid change in the religious and cultural composition of their populations. Everything that has happened in Syria and Iraq – or what is happening in Nigeria today – is much closer to us than many people think. We believe that the only one thing that can save Europe from this is for it to find its way back to the source of its true values: to Christian identity”. This phenomenon has been analysed by Cas Mudde (2016). The other

conception regards European territoriality as a product of multiculturalism. Moreover, territorial sovereignty involves differing degrees of mutualisation, depending on how nationalist or sovereigntist the vision, and coincides more or less with supranationality. With the exception of the United Kingdom, the debate is no longer focused on a mutually exclusive conception of territorial sovereignty (nation or EU) – sovereignty being defined as supreme political authority over a territory – but on the degree and modes of connection between national territorial sovereignty and European territorial sovereignty. So the territory of the member state is manifestly perceived as both national and European territory. This perception corresponds to geographical and juridical reality. But the reticence, fears and debates related to it are worthy of question and description. For some Europeans (ordinary people and political leaders alike) European territory is the cause, or one cause, of the crisis (Eurobarometer, 2018, chapter 1, pp. 5-12). For others it is the remedy, either on its own or in part (“more Europe”). In this context the crisis of the EU stems in part from the fact that European citizens themselves have not sufficiently bought into the integration project. In practice the EU region does not exist in terms of a Europe-wide organisation and society (Hettne, Söderbaum, 2006). European citizens do not recognise each other as members of a regional society that supposedly shares representations. This problem is crucial because if the European project is to be relaunched it will need to be endorsed by a greater number of Europeans.

According to the constructivist approach to regional integration (Hettne, Söderbaum, 1998), one pillar of this endorsement is the construction of a European territory, where territory is understood as a social production, a mode of ownership and an object of shared representation (Di Méo, 1998), more broadly as a social construction with juridical, political, economic, social and cultural and affective dimensions (November, 2002; Elden, 2010). From this perspective territory is produced by a society as a symbolic space that underpins or reaffirms a sense of common identity among its occupants. Maurice Halbwachs has shown that a group cannot become self-aware without the support of certain visible forms of space (Halbwachs, 1950). As a particular mode of spatial organisation, territory is one of these visible forms. It reduces distances within the society that has produced it and reinforces the sense of distance from neighbours located outside it, whose otherness is emphasised by its borders. This basic idea was later developed by many social scientists, including Michael Keating, who distinguishes three elements in the formation of a regional identity: a cognitive element (people need to be aware of the area and its limitations), an affective element (a feeling of belonging, of shared identity within the space) and an instrumental element (which motivates collective action) (Keating, 1998; Guermond, 2006). From this perspective we suggest that the EU can be adopted as a common referent by European citizens only if it becomes an object of shared collective representation.

In the present article we explore a paradoxical hypothesis. The EU’s weakness is intrinsic to the way it is constructed as territory from one day to the next. As it grows as a territorial construction, it becomes less open to adoption as a common referent, because it is a territory that cannot be an object of collective representation. In the first part we show that the word “territory” poses many problems when applied to the EU, since the EU has an ambiguous relationship to the territorial principle. In the second part we define the EU as a particular type of empire in which the relationship between territory and sovereignty is not explicit, since it involves complex mechanisms of

voluntary mutualisation. In the third part we show that Europeans struggle to produce a shared territorial referent, since the EU is precisely a complex territorial arrangement and a spontaneous interweaving of regimes of territoriality that are hard to encompass in a single shared representation.

## **2. IS THE EUROPEAN UNION A TERRITORY?**

Territory can refer to an element of spatial management, a portion of geographical space to be developed or managed, or an area subject to a particular authority or sovereignty (Sack, 1983). Replying to Stuart Elden who defines territory as “a political technology (that) comprises techniques for measuring land and controlling terrain” (Elden, 2010), Marco Antonisch proposes a broader definition of territory as “the sociospatial context where the ‘living together’ is produced, organized and negotiated through the continuous interplay between ‘top-down’ discourses and ‘bottom-up’ mundane practices and lived experiences” (Antonisch, 2010). These definitions pose problems in the European context, since the EU’s relationship to the principles of territory and sovereignty is ambiguous, making it hard to represent the community as a geographical object.

### **2.1. The territorial principle**

With countries things are simple. Territory and space coincide. Geographers can refer to space in explaining what national territory is, as they can refer to national territory (or not) in explaining the functioning of the space of a country they study. In the context of a macroregion like the EU, things are still fairly simple, but for the opposite reasons. A macroregion is almost always a space first of all, although generally its degree of institutionalisation remains low or superficial, because there is less standardisation than within a state (Beckouche, 2017). Several bodies contribute to the regional integration of Europe (Council of Europe, EFTA, OSCE, NATO and others). As vectors of regional integration they are weak, since they have little bearing on the territorial sovereignty of member countries, whose nature and sovereignty they do not affect.

These general characteristics do not apply to the EU. There is a European space, just as there is a Southeast Asian or North-American space. But there is also the EU. The EU is like a federal state that is not really a federal state. It is a territorial entity that has existence in international law within the international community, and which is sovereign in many ways, like a territorial state, but is itself formed of sovereign territorial states; it is what Jean-Marc Ferry calls a “meta-state” (Ferry, 2012). So European territoriality is problematic. It is tempting to say that, for several reasons, the EU is not a territory. There is no European political sovereignty in the classical sense. Although the EU has supranational institutions, it does not have a government that is the expression of a European political society. So there can be no European political territory as a defined space in which legitimate power can be exercised. In the words of Jacques Ziller, territory “does not confer jurisdiction on the Community or the Union. It is solely determined by the need to establish its field of operation within the space of functional jurisdictions attributed by the treaties establishing each community of the Union” (Ziller, 1998). From a classical legal perspective, Ziller continues, “the EU lacks

at least two of the three major components of a state: it has no territory and no population of its own and no unilateral control over these two” (Ziller, 2007).

## 2.2. The European Union has territoriality

The European Union is not a country as the term is commonly understood. However, it is a project and a political construct sustained by communities of inhabitants. In this sense the EU is a fundamentally territorial entity. According to Teresa Pullano, “as a concrete, political dimension, territory is consubstantial with citizenship and consequently with political community: space is not a neutral context for social and cultural forms or for the application of legal norms, it is ‘built in these forms’. Space is the condition of citizenship as a power relation and hierarchisation that sees the possibility for actors to struggle for equal participation in the political community. In this sense there is no citizenship without territory” (Pullano, 2014). So the European project is territorial in the first instance; in other words it is a project based on the production of a space of politics and a space created by public policies and political strategies. For this reason, adopting an unconventional geographical perspective, Kahn and Lévy characterise Europe as a country with a heuristic value (Kahn and Lévy, 2019).

The EU does implement policies for territorial development. These are subject to regulations and have aims (integration, cohesion and territorial cooperation) that are jointly drawn up by the national executives of member states and the European Commission, in a context of shared jurisdiction. Their effect is to overlay the vision of the nation states with one that is more European in scope – for example, the organisation of European transport networks is not decided by national criteria. Some policies have no explicit territorial intent, but their implementation has territorial consequences (common agricultural policy, competition policy, energy policy). What this comes down to is that Europeans are together creating territory by gradually producing a material reality that is greater than the sum of the territories of the member states.

Recent research confirms that the EU’s relationship to the territorial principle is problematic. Virginie Mamadouh has shown that EU territoriality has notable differences from that of a state (Mamadouh, 2001). Luiza Bialasiewicz and Stuart Elden (2005) show that territory has an ambiguous role in European integration. The word “territory” appears here and there in European texts, for example in relation to territorial cohesion, and crucially it is used in relation to derived rights. But it does not appear in the Lisbon treaty, although it features in the constitutions of many countries. European texts tend to use words like “area” or “space”, which have fewer connotations. Some legal researchers prefer to speak of the EU’s “territoriality” to emphasise that its relationship to the territorial principle differs from that of the member states, since it is not associated with any potential for the legitimate and direct use of violence (Lebon, 2015; Marti, 2015). This reminds us that for most legal researchers, territory is essentially an attribute of a state. However, there is a tension between not promoting the idea of territory in primary law, in order to emphasise what Pullano calls “soft territoriality”, and the implementation of policies that relate to a hard territoriality involving territorial practices in the classical sense (for example, monitoring borders) (Pullano, 2009). Moreover, if we agree that the EU constitutes an

autonomous legal system, we might judge that it also has a territorial nature, since European law and the decisions taken by European institutions apply to a defined area.

### **2.3 The EU's indeterminate territory**

The EU is neither a country nor a state. It is not regarded as a territorial state. Either it is not recognised as having territory in the same way as a country or federal state, or the borders and frontiers of its territory remain unstable, as do its characteristics. However, some authors lead us to wonder whether this lack of definition is not precisely a characteristic of EU territoriality (Mamadouh, 2001). Yann Richard (2009) has suggested describing the EU's borders as blurred and transgressive as a way of understanding the EU border as functionally unstable due to its nature as a "meta-border" and to the EU's enlargement and neighbourhood policies (Foucher, 2007). Jacques Lévy uses the notion of "Horizont" to refer to the EU's territorial dynamic (Lévy, 2011). Along the same lines, Gianfranco Battisti sees European unification as a "regional clustering of states projecting their integration process so as to gradually absorb the neighbouring ones" that is not necessarily confined within the boundaries of Europe, implying that the European Union is not a well-defined space object (Battisti, 2017). A similar fuzziness can be seen in the EU's spatial dimension. The EU is above all a set of policies and it is the area in which these policies are implemented that defines European territory. However, they often apply in portions of spaces that do not overlap and do not correspond to the sum of the territories of the member states. Within the space of the EU this is what is called differentiation. Outside it, we can observe that some policies, standards and regulations are exported and applied in third countries, which implies the integration of those territories into the European regional political and standardisation mechanism. This makes the borders of EU territory difficult to encompass in a simple representation (Richard, 2009).

## **3. THE UNCLEAR RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TERRITORY AND OVEREIGNTY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION**

### **3.1. The governance and transcalar approaches to the EU**

Research on the EU foregrounds the complexity of European governance, notably through the observation of what is called multilevel governance. This term refers to a system of constant negotiation between authorities at different territorial levels, involving governmental and non-governmental actors in more or less formalised political networks (Marks, 1993; Marks, Hooghe and Blank, 1996). Other work on the EU focuses on the notion of scale, which can be defined as a space that is socially constructed, and thus contingent and open to question, but which is regarded as appropriate to the implementation of a strategy at a particular time (Moore, 2008). Drawing on this research, Mamadouh and Herman van der Wusten see a need to update the geographical concept of scales (which they define as reticular structures) to describe the EU. From this perspective the EU is not an additional scale on top of others in an ordered hierarchical system, but a new scalar configuration of governance, in which each scale has multiple relationships with the others (Mamadouh, van der Wusten, 2009). This idea is also developed by Julian Clarke and Alun Jones, who show

how relations between territory, government and power are rearranged in what they call the production of the spaces (and scales) of European governance, in which numerous actors interact (Clark and Jones, 2008). In both these approaches (multilevel governance and transcalar analysis), the EU is understood as a complex, shifting system that, once again, cannot be encompassed in a simple representation, particularly by non-specialists. Andreas Faludi has taken these ideas even further, pointing out how difficult it is to spatially represent the EU and describing (member) states as “islands forming an archipelago in a sea of interrelations” (Faludi, 2018).

Building on this research we can conclude that the EU does not have different scales within it, but is itself simultaneously multiscalar. The EU’s territory is at once material and virtual, its existence is conditioned by public policies. It is a construction on several levels, including the very local. The term “consociational”, widely used in Belgium and Holland, is a useful adjective to describe this reality when its meaning is adapted. In the context of the EU, social communities with territories on very different scales join forces occasionally and without necessarily meeting (territorial contiguity is contingent) when they accept and apply standards that they have adopted and which were developed in a supranational process. This process creates territory and, while we can call it supranational, it is “present” at every level at the same time.

### **3.2. A complex relationship between territory and sovereignty**

So the EU offers a form of statehood, in other words a conception and practice of territorial sovereignty, which is not covered by the classical idea of the territorial state. This point was theorised by John Agnew, who deconstructs what he regards as fixed and weak conceptions of space and geography used by political scientists in the study of international relations (Agnew, 1994). He proposes a conceptual and methodological framework that is very useful for answering two questions: does the EU have a territory, and how can it be described? The “territorial trap” that he identifies is to fail to recognise that sovereignty can be exerted in other ways besides those of national territory and that the territorial state is often a myth and a representation spread by political actors and political scientists. In many countries the state is not sovereign over the territory that bears its name.

The territory of the EU can be seen in material terms through the public policies implemented in a complex system of authorities at several levels, including the very local, since most European administration is carried out by national and local authorities. For example, the common agricultural policy is a strong vector of EU territoriality. Before structural funds and regional policy, this policy enabled the European Communities to weave a territory extending across almost all the national territories. The advent of the euro turned the national central banks – which retain their national territorial jurisdictions – into organs and relays of the European Central Bank (ECB). This shows that the territory of Europe reflects both reticularity and statehood. European monetary public policy creates territory and sovereignty on a European scale, giving the EU the statehood of a territorial state. At the same time, European territoriality exists through the networking of the national central banks. The board of the ECB comprises the chairs of the national central banks, who thus exert power at both the European and national levels. This astonishing capacity for networking on the

part of such historic national institutions as central banks must be seen in a geohistorical context. In the European political space, the legacy of various networks (religious institutions, universities, cities, commercial leagues etc.) is at least as important as that of nation states (Lévy, 2008). Moreover, the ECB's jurisdiction extends *de facto* beyond the borders of the eurozone into states that use the euro but are not in the eurozone or even in the EU, giving it an imperial dimension (Agnew, 2005). Similarly, judges in national courts are European judges when they use European law to make their rulings (Scheek, Barani, 2008).

This supranational process creates territory. But in a political construction of this type, the relationship between sovereignty and territory is neither fixed nor monoscalar. It has several possible configurations, rendering it difficult to read. The complexity of European political geography relates to the fact that the EU mutualises the territorial sovereignty of many political entities at different levels. It has no political centre that concentrates power and dominates the whole in an asymmetrical, hierarchical relationship. Territorial mutualisation is voluntary and forms part of a post-nationalist project in which continuous territorial enlargement could be described as “auto-empire”. Each nation runs its territory jointly with the other nations, while also participating in the production of the territories of the other nation states that are members, through the implementation of regulations that have been co-produced and are seen as legitimate – a model that also applies to infra-state entities.

This mutualised form of territorial functioning means that any immediate all-encompassing perception on the part of Europeans of a clear link between sovereignty and territory at EU level is unpredictable.

### 3.3. Kantian geopolitics

We might conclude that EU territoriality reflects a Kantian geopolitics (Kahn, 2017a). The theoretical preconditions for a human territory structured by settled peace between democratic states, posited in 1798 by Immanuel Kant in *Perpetual Peace*, can be invoked in describing the construction of the territory of the EU. Membership requires states to accept the mutualisation of elements of their sovereignty, to freely agree to alienate an element of their freedom in order to benefit from the advantages of membership, and to agree to be co-responsible for the collective project. Neither a treaty nor world government, perpetual peace is thus a project for a society of free nations, each respecting the autonomy of all in an “alliance for peace”. Unlike a peace treaty (*pactum pacis*), the alliance for peace (*foedus pacificum*) is said to put an end to all wars forever (Kant, [1795], 1903). But, unlike a federal state, this alliance is not a union between states that merge into one. As Kant wrote, “This alliance does not aim at the gain of any power whatsoever of the state, but merely at the preservation and security of the freedom of the state for itself and of other allied states at the same time. The latter do not, however, require, for this reason, to submit themselves like individuals in the state of nature to public laws and coercion” (Kant, [1795], 1903). The “Second definitive article of perpetual peace” is thus entitled “The law of nations shall be founded on a federation of free states” (Kant, [1795], 1903).

Here lies the essential difference from an empire. Renunciation of an element of sovereignty proceeds from voluntary mutualisation, which makes it possible to attain a higher collective responsibility. This principle applies to every EU member state.



Expansion is also part of the EU's rationale, since every new member is a state won for democracy, the rule of law and interdependence in autonomy, and thus a state won for the expansion of this area of peace and security that is the EU (Hassner, 2008). The sovereignty of member states is limited by European supranationality and the power conferred on the European Commission and a European parliament elected by direct universal suffrage. Consequently, when this power is exerted, the territory of each EU member state becomes the territory in which the sovereignty of the EU is exercised (Ferry, 2000; Ferry, 2004). The territory of the EU is thus a territory which, in a given portion of space, produces several sovereignties at the same time (Lemaire, 2012). Raised to a high level of abstraction, European territorial sovereignty thus connects territories and sovereignties. It mutualises them in a jurisdiction that is common but not singular. It is not superimposed on national jurisdictions, but merges with them and involves them in its own implementation. This makes it all the harder to encompass in a simple representation.

#### **4. ON THE DIFFICULTY OF CONSTRUCTING A COMMON TERRITORIAL REFERENT: THE EU AS A WEB OF REGIMES OF TERRITORIALITY**

##### **4.1 Beyond the sole prism of the nation state**

Reading the European project solely through the prism of the nation state would have the merit of simplicity, but it would be a partial and indeed erroneous reading since the European system is more complex. Approaching the EU through political geography and geohistory invites us to demystify the nation state within the territoriality of the EU (Kahn, 2014). The dominance of the nation state as a canonical form has been brief in European history and in practice there are many types of nation state. This is why, in describing the contribution of nation states to the territory of the EU, it is useful to use the neologism "nation-statehood" (possible synonym stato-nationhood). This notion refers to the territoriality proper to nation states, which relates to the territory of nation states and by which their territories are characterised, qualified and constituted (Kahn, 2017b).

Geohistory shows that European societies in fact combine different regimes of territoriality. Here we are using territoriality in its the broad sense as "the imperative for human beings to come to terms with their earthly condition and the material and symbolic accommodations that result" (Debarbieux, 2008), and as the attempt to affect, influence or control actions and interactions (of people, things, and relationships) by asserting and seeking to enforce control over a geographical area (Sack, 1983). In the present case this notion is applied to the field of politics. The term "regime of territoriality" refers here to the way that human societies construct territorial arrangements in relation to particular means of implementing political power linked to the exercise of sovereignty. We can identify four fundamental regimes of territoriality which we call "stato-nationhood", "imperiality", "local statehood" and "reticularity". Each can take different forms.

## 4.2 Intertwined territorial regimes and cultures

When these regimes of territoriality continue over the longer term, it becomes possible to speak of the territorial culture of a given society. We can suggest that the societies found in EU member states construct territorial cultures that may comprise a single regime of territoriality or several in combination.

Imperiality is the territoriality characteristic of empires. It designates everything that relates to the territory of empires and by which their territories are characterised, qualified and constituted. In the past, imperiality shaped many territories of the EU. The list of empires in European geohistory includes a great number and variety of territorial entities, including the Hunnic, Roman, Byzantine, Carolingian, Latin, Roman-Germanic (before and after the treaties of Westphalia), Lithuanian, Russian, Swedish, Ottoman and Habsburg empires, and others such as the colonial, Napoleonic and Nazi empires. Stato-nationhood and imperiality are the two major forms of territoriality experienced by Europeans. They can be described as the antagonistic extremes of an axis of territoriality. But do they exhaust the major forms of territoriality known and experienced by Europeans in the course of their geohistory?

In practice the territorial dynamics of both nation states and empires are at odds with sub-state (i.e. sub-monarchical, sub-national, sub-imperial) territorial entities. We propose to regroup these sub-state territorial entities as variants of what we shall call the local state. They are local states because the scale of their territory is local compared to the state that contains them. Like the state, be it nation state or empire, a local state exercises prerogatives and implements public policies across a given territory in which it exercises its powers and jurisdiction. The fundamental difference between the state and the local state is that the exercise of sovereign powers is a matter for the state. The exercise of sovereign power defines the territoriality of nation states and empires alike. In both centralised and federal states, the territory of a federated state or decentralised territory – region, county or *département*, municipality, group of villages – is fully part of the territory of the nation state or empire whenever the state exerts its sovereign powers. In present-day Europe the local state designates those sub-state or infranational territorial entities whose exercise of sovereignty is restricted (for example, the German *Länder*, the nations of the United Kingdom, the Spanish Autonomies and Provinces or the federated regions of Belgium).

The locality state is the territory of local states. It covers everything that relates to the territory of local states and characterises, qualifies and constitutes their territory. We should not exaggerate the bequest of local states to the territoriality of the EU. In most member states, territorial authorities exert limited, stable power over the territory. In a few European nation states local states have a high level of prerogatives over their territory. These are Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain and, more recently, the United Kingdom. However, regardless of the extent of their prerogatives, the local authorities in all EU countries meet and work together in Brussels; they exchange good practices and each takes ideas from the others (Pasquier, 2015). In this way a slow process of acculturation has begun, which tends to relativise the “national” gradient of local state cultures in each country. Without any great upheaval taking place, we can observe a slow, continuous, long-term trend towards the expansion of the prerogatives of regional authorities over their territories in all the countries of the Union, in other words a convergence towards greater decentralisation and indeed greater autonomy. More rarely, but more noticeably, this is a cultural and political

trend seeking to considerably increase the sovereignty of regional authorities over their territory, to the point where they become more than simply local states, as in Flanders, Scotland and Catalonia.

Networks are another geographical reality that renders EU territoriality more complex. To some degree networks are the opposite of territory. As territory relates to political society, so networks relate to civil society. We should note also that while political authorities may seek to control networks, networks seek to evade the control of public authorities. Nation states interrupt and cut across networks, establishing their territorial sovereignty in an areolar fashion. Empires meanwhile capture networks and use them to manufacture their territory. It is crucial to bring networks into the description of EU territoriality, since Europeanness is first of all – in the primary, chronological sense – a matter of networks. Historically, the production of Europeanness had little to do with political society and statehood. Europeanness, in other words a commonality that became characteristic of the inhabitants of a space they called “Europe” in order to differentiate and identify themselves, was above all a matter of values, a *habitus* and a way of thinking. For a long time it also reflected a Christian religion believed by its adherents to be a necessary foundation of objective law, customs and rules governing personal and collective life. Hence Europeanness produced space by connecting places where this religion and those values were developed and formalised. Europeanness only became a matter of political society, statehood and ultimately of politics with the advent of what became the European Union.

#### **4.3 The EU: a dynamic assemblage of four regimes of territoriality**

As a territory of neither empire, nor nation state, still less a local state, we can suggest that the EU is a territory of networked national territories (Ferry, 2012). The EU is a supranational territorial entity with over 500 million inhabitants; it has a legal personality; it employs 55,000 public agents who work at the headquarters of the European institutions and in the handful of European agencies with headquarters across EU territory. Aside from the civil servants who represent the EU in the member states, none of them act directly on, administer or connect the aforementioned territory of the EU (Smith, 2010). To use a French image, the EU has no devolved administration, let alone any territorial civil service. EU territory is the product of the action of national and regional actors in jointly producing public policy and EU law. So EU sovereignty exists only through its territory (the EU is not a country, nor a people) and this territory is produced, manufactured and secreted every day by the networking of national actors, the central, devolved and local civil servants of the individual member states, with impetus from a small number of EU civil servants. Does this mean that this area of sovereignty that is the EU has invented a network-based territoriality? It remains the case that the EU territory is moulded by reticularity, a term referring to the process by which networks produce territory.

Since, in tandem with the European project, Europeans have also put an end to conflict and competition between state territories and between different manifestations of nationalism, EU territoriality is a web of these inherited regimes, which remain fully alive. Their co-existence within the EU, in combinations that vary from one country to

the next, gives a flexibility to the European project. But at the same time, it makes it difficult – to the point of short-term improbability – to construct a territorial culture that can serve as a shared referent for Europeans and which could be linked to a simple spatial representation.

The EU territory is a dynamic assemblage of four regimes of territoriality and the manufacture of European territory benefits from this heritage and these territorial cultures. The notion of assemblage has several merits (Anderson, MacFarlane, 2011). It signifies that variety and heterogeneity do not prevent a political entity that is neither sovereign nor a state from having coherence and territoriality. It connotes a political project and reflects the intentionality of actors. To paraphrase Allen and Cochrane, it relates to the idea of governance, of flexible, fluid and negotiable relations between many actors and between diverse political entities, of political arrangements that take shape in networks of horizontal and vertical relations that overstep established political confines (Allen, Cochrane, 2007). The notion of assemblage assumes the presence of objects that are disparate but connected, while suggesting the difficulty of naming and characterising the result, since an assemblage is by nature complex and unlike anything already known – not unlike an unnatural alliance or a transgression of the identified territorial order (Sassen, 2007; Aymes, Surun, Benoist, Burbank, Cooper, 2012).

## 5. CONCLUSION

European integration is facing a paradox and a negative feedback loop: (i) the further European integration progresses, (ii) the more difficult it is to encompass the European Union in a simple representation, (iii) the more difficult it is to take ownership of the European Union, (iv) the longer the EU remains a fragile construction, and so it goes round again. The European territory is complex. It is a consociational, post-nationalist and Kantian auto-empire, which constructs itself through the mutualisation of national territories and the territorialisation of European networks. But the European territorial mechanism constructed by Europeans is complex. All in all, we can ask whether territory is not the great unthought of the European project. In speaking of unthought territory, we emphasise the fact that the construction of a territorial reality really is under way and that it is more than the sum of the territories of member countries, but that the means by which the EU is constructed render this territorial reality unrepresentable, or representable only with great difficulty, and so ungraspable.

All in all, it is an “unintended territory”, which the inhabitants of the Europeans are collectively building unawares. The official documents conspire to maintain this situation, since the word “territory” is generally avoided in primary law. We might also suggest that it is a “quasi-territory”. In practice the concept of territory traditionally combines three fundamental principles of spatial relations: it is a space that is owned, delimited and serves as a reference for identity. The territory of the EU does not fully fit into any of these categories. It is constructed collectively but is not linked to a European form of sovereignty or a sense that all are part of a European society, rendering a sense of ownership and reference for identity problematic. The idea of delimitation is also problematic, because it is very hard to say where the boundaries of the EU lie. These things together represent a major issue for supporters of the EU, if they want to relaunch the European project.

The European Union is undoubtedly a post-modern territorial experiment, beyond traditional state territorialism. As such, it seems to echo the most recent research on territory and territoriality. By way of example, we can recall the work of Frédéric Giraut, who reflects on what makes up a territory (Giraut, 2013). In Giraut's view we are in an age of complex territorialities that "bring places and areas together to form spatial systems of governmentality" beyond containment fixity and continuity. This fuzzy, complex and not always hierarchical territorial post-modernity is problematic for the establishment of a political community. Elaborating on this observation, it seems that the European Union may not be about to break free from its vicious circle of fragility, which is one of its permanent, structural characteristics.

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