

# National Interests and the European Union

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Published in February 2012 by

The Bruges Group, 214 Linen Hall, 162-168 Regent Street, London W1B 5TB

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## The Author

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# Government and Power – the Creation of National Interests

*Power and wealth is the key to survival and prosperity, and therefore they will always be largely dependent on the internal ability to deal with external circumstances, and therein lies the national interest.*

National interests are by definition always unique to any one state, but may well, and indeed regularly do, temporarily line up with those of other states, and this is how intergovernmental cooperation and alliances are created. It is, however, important to clarify that there is never a complete separation between the domestic and the international when dealing with national interests. Internal domestic behaviour will always have an effect on that state's international behaviour – a reality which has snowballed with increasing globalisation and one which provides the basis for the nature of national interests and competition in the international system. However, in the bigger picture, it is also important to remember that all states do not always need to compete against each other. For example, the UK has no reason to be in competition with Tanzania. If absolutely all ties were cut between the two, neither would be damaged economically, politically or physically, i.e. it would have no consequences to either state's survival or needs. Of course it would be nice to be friendly with all states, but the fact is that if not, sometimes it simply does not matter. Even a bit closer to home, take the UK and Finland. Now, whether a friendly or sour relationship develops between the two, it simply does not make any real difference, whereby 30 years ago this was not the case. The same however, cannot so certainly be said about UK-US relations and UK-French relations for example. Why? Because the UK has much more interests in and with the US and France than with Tanzania and Finland. Therefore, in understanding national interests, it must be understood that they are the basis upon which relationships between states are built, or not, and which drive the desire for not just survival, but power and influence, and therefore progression in the international system.

Government is *the* vehicle by which a state officially deals with the outside world and international relations and it is, after all, government which decides, facilitates, guides and tries to realise what are defined as national interests because the primary role of government is protection of its people and everything that lies within its borders, and therefore essentially survival of that state. However, there must be

a conceptual separation between survival and progression<sup>1</sup>. Whilst it is not the role of government to create wealth and prosperity, as the ability to create wealth and the ability to regulate it are entirely different things, it must work with the private sector, which does create wealth and prosperity, and provide it with a legal background in order to try and ensure its development and progression. Therefore in terms of state protection and survival, government plays the primary role, but in terms of wealth and prosperity, it does not create it but helps to assure and aid it.

This, then, helps to distinguish between the two types of national interest which Morgenthau set out: vital and secondary<sup>2</sup>. Vital interests are centred on security as an independent nation, and the protection of its institutions, people and values, and are therefore those interests which have direct consequences for the practical survival of the state. In terms of government, then, this bases them in the military, defence, security and (largely) economic policy of the state. It is important to note the word 'policy' here, as it is government which has primary oversight of these areas, what their objectives are and how to realise them. This is precisely how the primary role of government is the protection of its people and everything else which lies inside its borders from external (and also internal) aggression. There is little point in having the best health care system in the world if it cannot be protected and secured. Therefore, vital national interests are much less open to political manipulation because they are much more objective by nature, and as Morgenthau stated (below); more a product of necessity. Whilst they are inherently related to the domestic military-industrial complex, they are always domestically in relation to what the state has geographically to survive, in terms of raw materials, produce and productivity through its economy, business and trade, and therefore perhaps more importantly, what it does not have. Furthermore, as national interests (and more importantly their ability to be realised) are in direct relation to the international status of that state (which is also primarily produced through military capacity and capability in being able to project power and influence), and it is the mix between the status, strength and capability of any given state which allows it to seek its national interests internationally through its foreign policy.

This leads on to Morgenthau's other category of national interests: Secondary interests. These are normally not concerned with threats to sovereignty, and are therefore essentially everything which pertains to the wealth, prosperity and progression of the state. As Morgenthau noted, "*The concept of national interests,*

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1 This is because a strong military alone does not guarantee survival, but not progression, which is one of the core reasons why most dictatorships have disastrous economies.

2 Morgenthau created and developed this idea of national interests and his work created the basis for modern realism in analysing state behaviour and international relations.

*then, contains two elements, one that is logically required and in that sense necessary [vital], and one that is variable and determined by circumstances [secondary]*<sup>18</sup>. Again, it is important to separate the ideas of survival and progression, because whilst secondary national interests are not necessarily concerned with the practical survival of the state but of its development, they have an openness to be confused and blurred by politics and politicians into a perception of actually being vital national interests. In other words, they are open to political manipulation precisely because they are determined by circumstance rather than necessity. Add domestic politics and the desire (interest) for election and re-election into the mix and the difference between the two become easily, intentionally, and perhaps naturally, blurred.

Nonetheless, national interests are about goals and objectives in the international system; strategy is the means by which to realise them through foreign policy. So, as democracy is a system of governance whereby the state and the people are synonymous, the interests of the state are foundationally linked to the interests of its people. Therefore in a democracy, national interests cannot justly be removed from the interests of the people without becoming government or special interests – another important distinction which is all too often blurred. Because national interests are all about benefits, in a democracy they are therefore always linked to the benefit of the people and society within the state. Furthermore, it is precisely because of the democratic process that the people have an absolutely fundamental role to play as an electorate in guiding national interest and acting as a primary sounding board during their creation, development and strategy for achievement. No other political system or process has the ability to produce national interests in this way and distinguishes, at its foundations, national interests from all other forms of interests because the source of their creation and the nature of the power to create them in the first place is based upon the people. This is one of the *many* reasons why an active and participative electorate is not just desirable but mandatory.

Therefore, the further away from the core functions of government those interests which are defined or marketed as national go, the more political (and politically partisan) they become. That is the key to understanding specific decisions, and what specifically is to be defined as real democratic national interests. This is why the linking of secondary national interests to the democratic process is invaluable to the legitimacy of these interests, the government's decisions surrounding them, and therefore the government itself and its decision-making regarding the vital national interests. Put bluntly, this is why the surrendering of national sovereignty to the European Union without directly involving the people in the process (of that

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3 Morgenthau p 972




surrender or the creation of the European Union itself) is anti-democratic in the most profound sense.

Particularly in Europe, however, national interests are very politically expansive and partisan because government itself has become very expansive in size and scope. The narrower the size and scope of government, the less chance national interests have to be politicised and politically manipulated because governmental responsibilities themselves remain narrow. Therefore, the more the size and scope of government goes outside its core responsibilities (and therefore vital national interests), the more opportunities it has to design and create national interests which are not vital to the survival of the state (i.e. secondary), but to the survival of the government in power – that is essentially where the mix of partisan politics, marketing and electioneering create perceived national interests out of a political agenda rather than the other way around. Indeed, how politicised national interests have become is indicative how expansive the government itself is. Therefore, take the democratic process out of the mix, and the interests, national or otherwise, have no inherent reason, foundational ideology or pressure to be for the primary and inherent benefit of the people over which the government presides. This is essentially the nature of the common European interest, and this argument will be detailed below.

Therefore, there is always a fine line between decision-making and popular will to be on the right side of in order to be labelled democratic, and as always, it is a question of closeness. The further away and therefore more difficult decision-making is able to be influenced by its people, the further away from a democratic label the government is. National interests in free and democratic societies, therefore, are produced out of a large element of interaction between the people and the government of a state, and are representative of what the people need in order for the state to survive. Whilst this never fits perfectly in practice, it is by and large the guiding ideology by which national interests are created in a free and democratic society. Once again, this is because the people and the state are synonymous.

So, in going slightly further into the nature of government (and therefore bearing in mind the nature of European political union), all forms of government are connected by one single trait: control. That is their point. If the core nature of government was not control, then it would simply cease to exist and create an anarchical society out of an already free one. Yet, what compounds political control is the centralisation of power, which without checks and balances leads to expansion of the size and scope of that power out of line with the desires of its peoples. This is the situation from which the interaction between pragmatic politics and partisan political ideology





creates a cyclical process for the politicisation of secondary national interests, and subsequently a blurring of the genuine difference between the secondary and the vital. This is why it is so important for the democratic process to be allowed to take its course, because when governments create and advance what they determine to be national interests they are able to be held accountable and responsible by a public mandate and their ability to follow through on them is likewise dependent on that process, and the extent to which that is indeed possible is a key indicator of how democratic that state is, and subsequently how free its people are to guide its direction. The general ideological problem, therefore, is that the more responsibility society hands over to government, or allows it to take, the more that society becomes removed from the decision-making process and the creation of national interests. This is true for both national and supra-national governance, and is precisely why the means by which to dilute the natural democratically-negative products of an entity which is based upon control, and yet which is also absolutely foundational to keeping that society free, is by keeping government as close to the people as possible.

Therefore, all things considered, national interests are essentially the objectives set by government primarily for its survival and protection and secondarily for the assurance of the wealth, prosperity and well-being of the state (and in free societies should practically include the exercise and enhancement of freedom and liberty), and at the very least what it needs to continue to function under the status quo. What underlies national interests in democracies is that they are a product of self-determination, and how that self-determination fits against the outside world. Therefore in free and democratic states they are underpinned by the needs of that free and democratic society which resides within them and furthermore, the means by which that society can remain free and democratic. This is why it is all but impossible to entirely separate the concept of national interests from the concept of the citizen in a democratic state. However, European Union member states are wrestling ideologically and pragmatically with a politics of pan-European mono-ism in which they have already more or less given up the idea of self-determination by practically and pragmatically outsourcing their sovereignty and power to the European Union, and in addition doing so through avoiding the democratic process. This in itself has negated the true nature of “the national interest” because that cannot exist independently of self-determination – one feeds off the other and vice versa. Pooling of sovereignty by definition, therefore, means pooling of national interests, and when this is created whilst circumventing the democratic process, the people are no longer the source of the national interest - bureaucrats and the

political elite are, and a political system and a system of governance is created which reflects this.

Therefore, a collective sense of national interests, manifested through a pooling of sovereignty, can only really be brought about by actively manufacturing external circumstances which appeal to different states in the same manner and for the same underlying reasoning; normally in terms of exertion of power and influence for the benefit of the home state. This characterises the 'Common European Interest' in homogenising areas of common interaction such as trade, finance and border control for example, and is precisely why the aim of the Justice and Home Affairs Council is to 'create a single area of freedom, security and justice within the EU's borders', which, importantly, is backed up by the ECJ and the Commission. However, adding an independent supranational legal and judicial system behind that changes incentive to coercion when driven by an equally independent system of bureaucracy and governance. Without manufacturing a supranational state and allowing it the power (which is sourced and taken from the nation-state itself in the first place and which has avoided the domestic democratic processes) to become independent and self-reliant, *"Two countries, even allies, seldom have identical national interests. The best one can hope for is that their interests will be complimentary"*<sup>4</sup>.

Nonetheless, national interests are always rooted in power and influence in terms of expansion, or retention of the status quo with a view to expansion. This is precisely why the 'common European interest' is based upon pooled sovereignty rather than inter-governmental cooperation: because intergovernmental cooperation as an end in itself pragmatically contradicts the production of political union, and therefore the European Union's ability to (inevitably) project single unit power. Projection of single unit power is the end-game of any state in its formation; national or supranational. Whether this means to project power within the EU and amongst the member states in the European post-modernist bubble, or whether it means to project power outside the collective border(s) depends on how the member states' national interests are aligned, and indeed what their governments believe their interests are. This is simply power politics at play, and it starts to show how when a sense of inevitability takes over the concept of political union it becomes easy to market (to the states and to the peoples) deeper integration and the surrender of national sovereignty as the only pragmatic means to deeper involvement and influence in its progression. Once again, tapping into the nature of power politics and balance-of-power politics. The problem with this kind of thinking is that in terms of national democracy, domestic politics becomes a game of postponement of increasing

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4 Morgenthau p964

external coercion rather than free choice of national direction, and fundamentally so when the people of the state are explicitly removed from that process. In terms of national interests, then, it destroys the foundations and playing field upon which the democratic process and national direction interact to create the basic national interests of free societies, and the interests, even vital ones, themselves become an external dictation rather than an internal creation leading to domestic politics saturated by postponement of submission and external coercion packaged as self-determination and progression.

Clausewitz said that all state behaviour is motivated by its need to survive and prosper, and nothing changes with a supra-state. However, this traditionally means that via the interaction and competition between states, governments decide their own direction and action principled on self-determination. However within the European Union this has been twisted into a fight for influence far and above self-determination so that the idea of self-determination itself has been twisted into predestination. And this idea of predestination is what now characterises and colours the core foundation of the interaction between the state and the European Union. Self-determination cannot exist without a self, which is precisely why Jacques Delors recently stated that *“Europe needs a soul”*. In terms of national interests and the supra-national, or common European, interest, then, the same rules apply in terms of what they pragmatically are, but because they are labelled differently and have no preceding democratic process in their creation, they produce an entirely different form of interest and represent an entirely different form of governance, neither of which have any inherent reason, pressure or ideology to bring the people into the process.

## **European Union Power and the Common European Interest**

In coming back to the nature of EU power, then, the capacity to create the common European interest, as declared by the European Commission, is embodied in the Commission and the Council, and is set rolling by the continuous initiation and ratification of EU treaties. Both the Commission and the Council have a mandate to act first and foremost in the *‘common European interest’*<sup>5</sup>, which is created and produced entirely independent of member-state national interests (and indeed runs ideologically and philosophically contrary to the very idea of their existence),

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5 As outlines at [www.europa.eu](http://www.europa.eu).


and has no democratic political link to the interests of member-state citizens. The Commission president initiates legislation and therefore sets the European political agenda, and therefore by default sets the common European interest, with whom there is no election by the peoples of Europe as the sole nominee is decided behind the closed doors of the Commission, and then that sole nominee (rather than candidate) is either accepted or rejected by parliament. Because there is no choice nor election of any EU leadership position (as understood by democratic process), and not just of the Commission President, there is no need for any election contest or campaigning, and therefore at the foundation no need for any link (political or otherwise) between legislative production, the body and agencies which create and produce it or the individual that initiates it, and the peoples of Europe. Subsequently, the common European interest, upon which European legislation and policy is based on, is entirely independent and separated from the peoples of Europe. Plurality is a key indicator of democracy, and the European parliament can only accept or reject one single nominee and his vision for the European Union which will be embodied in its legislation<sup>6</sup>.

So, if the product of power is legislation, then legislation is the official stamp of the interest. Because legislation is, in terms of interests, the means by which to make them official and find a strategy to achieve them, whoever or whatever creates legislation essentially creates the interest, national or otherwise, and if there is no preceding plurality and democratic political marketplace<sup>7</sup> from which they arise, the interests created are unable to be that of the people and are solely of the institution. Once again, this is why a democratic process is integral to creating political and governmental interests which are reflective of its people, i.e. national interests of a democratic state. If there is no direct link to the people in the legislative production process then there is no inherent reason why any legislation produced should be reflective or representative of them. As stated, for the EU, legislative production is the work of the European Commission, which receives recommendations from internal EU agencies and committees which all have the pre-defined primary aim of looking at how to harmonise member-state policies in their given areas. These recommendations form the basis for legislation because these are what the Commission use as research to create it. Therefore, the nature of EU interests immediately replace those of the citizen for predefined institutional bureaucratic interests. Therefore what is produced is legislation by an institution with no popular

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6 Indeed, whilst typing a Google search for the words “European Commission President election”, there are no recommended results.

7 The ‘democratic political marketplace’ is essentially the interaction of all the elements inside the democratic process in a democratic state, a full description of which can be found in my previous paper for the Bruges Group: European Union Power – the Ideology of Ant-Democratic Governance.



mandate, link, election process or connection to the peoples of Europe on the recommendation of pre-defined bureaucratic objectives set by the same institution, and initiated by a Commission president for which there is also no democratic process or election.

In terms of interests, then, it is a cyclically expansive process of the institution acting on its own incentives and objectives to create legislation that reflects its own desires. The peoples of Europe, then, are three times removed from legislative production process as the EU agencies that produce recommendations are set up by the EU itself, and national governments nominate their own European commissioners without public consultation who are then officially selected by the Commission President (remembering he is also not democratically elected) and are legally obliged to put the common European interest before that of their own nations in the legislation that they create. This closed and singularly centralised nature of EU production and process is aptly described by Simon Hix, and therefore the nature of the common European interest can be described likewise; *“You tend to get policy outcomes from Brussels that are relatively close to the European average, but that’s not enough. Supplying policies that are close to the European average is not democratic politics – it is enlightened despotism”*<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, the common European interest is not chosen by, consensually accepted by, or produced out of any interaction with the peoples of Europe, leaving European political union being neither voluntary nor free.

The common European interest, then, is essentially the treaties and the values and principles they represent and enforce. The Commission is set up to act on, and actively pursue this common European interest through legislative acts because it is the ‘guardian of the treaties’. For member-states this means bringing down the ‘barriers’ of national sovereignty and creating a centralised political union based upon a pan-European mono-culture. However, it is due to the avoidance of any semblance of a democratic process in the creation of the EU and the idea of political union, and more importantly its progression and direction, which actively created a common European interest of a likewise anti-democratic nature, therefore making the ‘Great European Project’ a realistic pariah as much as it is the saviour it is marketed to be. What tips the balance to the adjective of a pariah is that the ever-closer union of peoples cannot morally, ethically or truly be created without the consent of these people. And so as with any other form of despotism or dictatorship, democracy is given up in preference for stability. Therefore, interests being decided for you, by definition are not your own; they may benefit you, but they are not a

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8 [www.fora.tv/2010/05/26/Simon\\_Hix\\_on\\_the\\_Future\\_of\\_the\\_European\\_Union](http://www.fora.tv/2010/05/26/Simon_Hix_on_the_Future_of_the_European_Union)

product based upon the foundations of freedom and liberty and so have no inherent or objective reason or principle to support or project these values, despite the marketing to the contrary.

## Supranational National Interests?

*“When the national state will have been replaced by another mode of political organization, foreign policy must then protect the interest in survival of that new organization”*<sup>9</sup>. This is what characterises the nature of political union and the common European interest, and is precisely why in dissolving and surpassing the concept of the nation-state, the European union’s interests remain exactly the same as national interests in nature and character, but are simply acted out under a different label.

The European Union is a political and legal abstraction placed on a political and legal territory, and so EU enlargement breeds the need for centralisation of power because diffusion of it is unworkable and the creation of political union is not based upon diversity but upon homogeneity and common pan-Europeanism. So, in negating any sense of surprise by making political union seem inevitable from every direction, we can see why its progress is so gradual. By promoting the inevitability of political union with every step of EU progression in that direction, the process itself is made easier by externally aligning member states’ interests with it rhetorically and pragmatically. In other words, it ideologically merges the practical national interests of member states to the supranational common European interest. Subsequently, as states need compensation for this loss of sovereignty, this compensation is marketed as the ability to influence proceedings within the EU structure itself. The added bonus of “inevitable” political union is that you rig the game before coming to the table, because if that is what is expected to happen anyway, it comes with an incentive to become involved rapidly and deeply precisely in order to maximise that influence, creating a cyclical process of deeper political union. This highlights the irony of the SNP position of creating an independent Scotland by taking it out of our current union and amalgamating it into a political creation with an end-goal of the political union of its member states. The SNP have bought into and accepted the Brussels ideology of how to dilute national sovereignty and are using it as a prerequisite for an independent Scotland. When a political party starts talking about

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9 Morgenthau p972

*'fighting for your national interests in Europe'*<sup>10</sup>, it is not nationalist, nor patriotic, because you have already chosen to give the power from your state to allow this to be the situation in the first place, and therefore accepted the ideological argument that your new nation is, indeed, not the master of its own destiny. The idea that a state can hand over legislative power to an external and independent body and still be able to control itself independently is pragmatically unworkable and heavily ironic for a political party seeking an independent national status.

Therefore, governance which exists outside and independent to member-states has no inherent reason to continue those states as a form of political organisation, and indeed seeks to dissolve their sovereignty by amalgamating them into the new structure through binding legislation. This pooling of sovereignty by definition negates the concept of national interests and replaces them with a collective supranational interest, and the more member states are legally bound to the supranational interest, the less power they have to exert their vital and secondary national interests. This is all linked together through the creation of the supranational (vital) interest being the actual dissolving of member-state national interests. Therefore, politically marketing influence (which all states seek anyway) within the supranational structure as a vital member-state national interest becomes a definitional oxymoron. Therefore the massive irony, in thinking about vital national interests, is that states are giving up their sovereignty with the perception that their survival depends on it. In this case, power itself is marketed as influence, when in actual fact influence is a product of power; not a synonym of it.

The logic of this concept is that by acting individually, a state has much less control over the progression of the European Union, and political union, and therefore, *"Governments defend their own countries' national interests in the Council of the European Union"*<sup>11</sup>. Therefore the deeper involved a state gets, i.e. the more sovereignty it decides to give up, the wider its influence within the European structure and policy process it becomes. A fitting analogy is the preference for Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) over vetoes. With QMV you get to "team up" with other countries and wield influence in that way. However, by definition, this means that state national interests become diluted two-fold by definition; firstly because they become collectivised which can, at best, be described as a protracted and highly temporary alliance, and secondly because the sovereignty upon which they are based and created becomes diluted and a product of external acceptance rather

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10 See the SNP's last two manifestos and *Your Scotland Your Voice* manifesto for the future of an independent Scotland.

11 [www.europa.eu/about-eu/institutions-bodies/index-en.htm](http://www.europa.eu/about-eu/institutions-bodies/index-en.htm)



than internal creation. National interests are not something that must be vetted, cleared or accepted by anyone other than that state's own government and people. Any state government that does think they do, as the SNP's EU policy highlights, has already surrendered the idea of national sovereignty in its most basic ideological and practical form. In this case the national interest, as viewed from Brussels, is not created from within the state, but is purely produced from outside circumstances<sup>12</sup>. Whilst this may sound like secondary national interests, it is indeed a reduction of the capacity to survive as an independent nation-state, hence the irony outlined above. When a state cannot decide its own interests, it is in no position to decide its own future and direction, and if it cannot decide this, it ceases to be free.

This, then, follows directly into Morgenthau's premise that "no nation will forego its freedom of action if it has no reason to expect proportionate benefits in compensation for that loss"<sup>13</sup>. Indeed, this characterises every single membership deal and their contents, strategies and objectives, and particularly so with the new and coming Eastern European member-states. Therefore in highlighting the coercive circumstances surrounding the projection of the common European interest through pooling of sovereignty as outlined above, the traditional state desire for influence is steered into influence within the EU structure and the cyclical process for the dissolving of national sovereignty is set in motion. Therefore when Morgenthau states "*Thus all nations do what they cannot help but do: protect their physical, political and cultural identity against encroachments by other nations*"<sup>14</sup>, the difference between "encroachment"<sup>15</sup> by the EU (as opposed to traditional encroachment by other states) is that the EU, through the anti-democratic nature that it has both taken and been given the ability to exist in the first place (through transferral of state power to supranational power), puts member states in the same direction towards dissolving their national sovereignty and borders.

This is precisely why fighting or defending one's national interests, and the seeking of influence rather than traditional power, is beginning to occur under a supra-state umbrella system, and is being marketed by the EU itself as the only real (and by definition, temporary) means by which to exert influence in Europe. Furthermore, when the sense of inevitability of political union is incorporated into this game, we can see exactly why closer union and ability to influence proceedings become

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12 Again at this point it is important to remember the political blurring of vital and secondary interests.

13 Morgenthau p973

14 Morgenthau p 972

15 Traditionally, encroachment means an attack on state sovereignty through force, but in terms of encroachment by the European Union is not through force but by pooling of sovereignty itself.

intertwined together creating a marketing tool by which to align member-state national interests with ever-closer union, and by the same measure, a visible projection of the consequences of not following the predetermined Eurocratic path.


## Coming back to the Nature of Government

Any institution of power looks to centralise that power within itself, and this is precisely why government must be kept as close to the people as possible through the diffusion of power throughout local government. This is what creates bottom-up governance and that is what fits directly in line with the foundational concept of what democracy is and why it exists as a system of governance. Indeed, it is the struggle between centralisation and diffusion of state power which characterises the strength or weakness of a democratic government and a free society; democratic strength being a principled tendency towards diffusion of power. This is precisely why various forms of checks and balances are built into the power structure of any free and democratic state. Conversely, creating a centralised power structure outside the reach of the people is conceptually, ideologically and pragmatically anti-democratic, and creates interests in kind.

Therefore, in going back to the nature of government, centralisation of power in a legislature that is independent to the nation-state and works above its level, hence supra-national, creates new interests which are also independent of the nation-state. An independent legislature by definition creates and acts upon independent interests created there. There is no government or system of government in the world which does not primarily seek its own interests, and therefore when a democratic mandate for a supra-national existence does not occur prior to its creation there is no reason why its progression should follow a democratic process, nor that it should it have any inherent interest in preserving the *status quo* of the nation state being the highest form of power. Therefore, any supranational form of governance will seek to dissolve the nation-state as a concept, and particularly as a unit of power for immersion within that supra-state (with the EU via political union)<sup>16</sup>. Whilst this European manifestation may be new, its rationale is age-old power politics with the supra-state product being subject to all the same internal characteristics and external forces that any other state is, but under the guise of pooling of sovereignty and therefore pooling and manipulation of independent national interests. Furthermore, it is through the creation of political union by which all other EU interests and objectives

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<sup>16</sup> This is not something specific to the European Union, as it can be seen within the underlying nature of international law, and the objectives set by the United Nations.



can be realised precisely because that is what dissolves the nation-state as the highest form of power within EU borders. The common European interest, then, is based upon expansion, progression and centralisation of power, and so is nothing conceptually new when looking at state or governmental behaviour.

Nonetheless, the EU remains an international actor, and if it is an international actor, it cannot have surpassed the concept and idea of what national interests indeed are, as it is obliged to compete for its own survival (vital interests) and aims to secure its own wealth and progression (secondary interests) in the international game and outside its borders. The difference is that it is in the midst of an internal quasi-international power struggle for its own survival, and therefore the EU simultaneously has to compete for its vital and secondary interests inside and outside its borders. Furthermore, there is a direct relationship between consolidation inside and ability to project the subsequent capability outside – the stronger it gets inside through the dissolving of member-state national sovereignty, the stronger a single unit international player it becomes, and therefore being able to project its vital and secondary *supra*-national interests within the international system. So, whilst the idea of national interests can be somewhat said as having been surpassed internally, it is more a conglomeration of member-state practical national interests manipulated and transformed by Brussels into a common European interest, and is therefore simply a change of label rather than of concept and idea. The fundamental political and historical difference for Europe as a geographical area rather than a political concept, is that this new form of supranational interests have been created without any preceding structural or ideological democratic process, thus leaving no indication that any democratic process will be created before or after political union has been achieved.

Therefore, in circumventing the democratic process, national interests as we have come to know them in modern Europe will have no objective reason, nature or ideology to be based upon the peoples of Europe because they have not freely chosen, consented, accepted or have the ability to influence the legislative process and its products. More dangerously, then, the common European interest has no natural reason not to be purely a collection of special, political and governmental interests. Without democratic checks and balances and a tendency towards transparency and bottom-up governance, the common European interest remains that the political bureaucracy in Brussels. It is not just where power is held, but how it is wielded which is so important to any free society, because regulation of that power and its consequences must have a democratic root embedded into it in order for that society to remain free and not become authoritarian. Enlightened despotism, as Simon Hix calls it, is despotism nonetheless and works ideologically and

practically contrary to freedom, liberty and democracy. Regardless how honourable the intentions are, if the people cannot influence and guide governmental power, interest and direction, they cease to be free by definition.

Traditionally in modern Europe, the very concept of national interests assumes general agreement of core principles, objectives and gains which can be sourced inside the state for the benefit of those inside, and in any free society this means for the benefit of the citizens via the governmental structure. This is where the EU starts to come undone, because in any free society, national interests naturally develop and evolve through the classical interaction between the government and the people (outlined above as the democratic political marketplace), and so whilst products of the principles, objectives and gains can be (somewhat) forced on the people, what lies at its core cannot. In democratic states, national interests that are not a product of the people become governmental interests, which are entirely different, and infinitely more political<sup>17</sup>.

It is therefore no surprise that the common European interest is always couched in terms of what is best for Europe as a whole, but when the peoples of Europe are not involved in what this means, it leaves supranational government to decide what is best for its people, and this is the historically sure path to decreased freedom and liberty, and increased governmental scope and expansion. Here again there are parallels to be drawn because any form of governance that can be labelled democratic, or promotes a free society, must have an inbuilt tendency to keep itself close to the people, and ideally have a tendency to decentralise its decision-making structure. The EU on the other hand is all about increased centralisation and pooling of sovereignty. Indeed, centralisation of power is an objective in itself and more importantly a vital supranational interest, and that is the key to understanding the anti-democratic nature of the EU itself. It is difficult to promote democracy and impossible to promote self-determination whilst simultaneously centralising power not just at the state level, but by also adding a further layer of supranational power via the state governments without requiring, and not least desiring, a democratic mandate from the peoples of each state to do this in the first place.

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17 Therefore, if any country leaves the Euro or perhaps the EU itself during the current crisis, it shows that the imposed values of what is a common pan-European mono-ism is, is indeed a product of materialistic and economic production rather than any ideological or cultural notion of what this means and which national interests traditionally protect. Therefore it shows the age-old realist argument that pragmatics are no match for idealism in the real world, that power politics still hold true in the European context, and that pan-European mono-ism is indeed not a natural product which does indeed need to be forced in order to exist, and if it needs to be forced to exist then it requires a source that is neither democratic nor voluntary to force it.

## Conclusion

Inside the European Union, the supranational and national interest oppose each other at the most basic conceptual level. It is through this zero-sum game that vital national interests are becoming secondary interests because national power itself as a concept is being substituted for influence. From the EU down, then, this changes the entire concept of national interests because influence is a product of power and not a substitute for it. Therefore when the core power of a state is substituted for one of its products, specifically through the pooling of sovereignty, traditional power politics is manipulated into a post-modernist enterprise which is, fittingly and logically, regulated under the auspice of a unit of power higher than that of the nation-state itself, hence from the EU down. This is the character of generic harmonisation, and is exactly what underlies European political union.

Therefore, the bigger picture shows that power politics is being recreated on an internal yet international level, and for the first time without the need for an independent military capability behind it the creation of a new supra-state unit of power. It does not need a preceding military capability precisely because by dissolving and assimilating the sovereignty of its member-states, it dissolves and assimilates the need for the basis upon which member-state vital national interests are created and taken care of. So, diluting the ability of a democratic state to continue its democratically-based legislative production process dilutes its ability to create both vital and secondary national interests in kind, and that results in a foundational change in the nature of its own power and therefore in its relationship with its people.

The idea of a supranational interest, then, in itself poses no inherent reason for problem and particularly so if it occurs without the use of force; however, it is in how this interest is created in the European Union which causes profound undemocratic change to a previously democratic system by a new source of power changing the nature of state power and its relationship with its citizens by by-passing of any semblance of democratic process in that new source of power's production, or in the institutions which precede it. What compounds this situation is that an anti-democratic production process of the independent supranational vital interest can only be actually realised by dissolving previously democratically produced vital and secondary national interests. This zero-sum game of interests pitches an autocratic political system, and system of governance, against democratic systems of national government, and furthermore that game itself is being played out politically and pragmatically out of the reach of the peoples of these democratic



member states. Therefore, this produces a fundamental decrease in the freedom and liberty of the EU member-state because it is impossible to have a free and democratic society under a system of governance and institutions of government which are not built upon these values. Subsequently, the interests which are created from this structure, and indeed which produce it in the first place, have no inherent political or natural need to associate the structure to the people, and as is seen in the nature of European Union governance and the progression of political union, creates government for the people but not by them. If the people cannot create and guide the direction of the government which they are under and the interests upon which it acts, then ideologically they cease to be free, and pragmatically it is simply a question of time, and that is precisely why those who live in free societies cherish and defend democracy and the freedoms and liberties which it provides.

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The Bruges Group is an independent all-party think tank. Set up in February 1989, its aim was to promote the idea of a less centralised European structure than that emerging in Brussels. Its inspiration was Margaret Thatcher's Bruges speech in September 1988, in which she remarked that "We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain, only to see them re-imposed at a European level...". The Bruges Group has had a major effect on public opinion and forged links with Members of Parliament as well as with similarly minded groups in other countries. The Bruges Group spearheads the intellectual battle against the notion of "ever-closer Union" in Europe. Through its ground-breaking publications and wide-ranging discussions it will continue its fight against further integration and, above all, against British involvement in a single European state.

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