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Constructivism and Role-Taking

An Analysis of the Single European Act

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Abstract

By conceiving identity as endogenously defined and construing other central political concepts according to this assumption, constructivism has proven apt to understand and explain phenomena that earlier were hard to grasp. Constructivist ideas have here been used in order to analyze the events surrounding the Single European Act as a contrast to the more conventional rationalist approach used by Liberal Intergovernmentalism. As a result of this analysis, proposals for developments of the constructivist framework are put forward, the most important one being a specification of the conditions under which shaping or reshaping of identity occurs.

The empirical material is entirely made up of secondary sources such as books and articles. Since the focus of this paper is on the theoretical conflict between rationalist and constructivist analyses of European integration, the empirical aspect has an illustrative purpose rather than presenting further material. The theoretical part of the paper is, however, relevantly connected to the existing literature on constructivism.

The main findings are that constructivism can provide a plausible description of the SEA and hence is a serious contender to established theories of European integration, and, moreover, that constructivism seems able to explain changes in identity and actorness that rationalist explanations lack.

Key words: Constructivism, Liberal Intergovernmentalism, Single European Act, Identity, European integration

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1 Introduction

Starting with Alexander Wendt's 'The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory,' constructivism began to become a serious contender to the formerly prevailing rationalist theories of international relations theory.¹ Rejecting the fundamental rationalist assumption of exogenously given identities,² constructivism as a contrast had the potential to give explanations to events that formerly were considered highly problematic.³ As a result of this move, however, many other concepts were affected as well; along with a reconception of identity follow similar reconceptions of preference and agency. The rationalist way of addressing the agent-structure problem by emphasizing the primacy of agency thereby had met a more serious contender than the postmodernist approach of more or less reducing the problem to exclusively structuralist explanations and in that way only providing extremely abstract and counterintuitive descriptions of political events. Hence, constructivism has been described as occupying the ontological middle ground between rationalism and postmodernism.⁴ Arguments to the effect that this middle position is in fact contradictory have been presented, but no satisfactory consensus has so far been reached. *Prima facie*, it seems constructivism is a viable alternative to the two more extreme positions in the field.

Related to constructivism's consideration of ideational aspects and therefore its focus on discourse, there exists the problem of what the theory potentially can explain. In order for a theory to explain anything at all, it must be able to provide certain substantial claims. Andrew Moravcsik has criticized constructivism for not being able to do exactly that; he claims that it is a 'characteristic unwillingness of constructivists to place their claims at any real risk of empirical disconfirmation.'⁵ Some plausible operationalizations have been presented, but it must be conceded that the constructivist interpretations of political or societal phenomena are better suited at *understanding* rather than *explaining*. Connected to this, constructivism seems less able to provide predictions about future events than do rationalist accounts; whereas rationalism clearly states identities and preferences from the outset, constructivism claims that these are developed during and through the events. This paper will partly be focusing on how this matter should be addressed.

¹ Wendt 1987.

² On rationalism's assumption of exogenously defined identities, see e.g. Wendt 1995.

³ The demise of the Soviet empire is one obvious example: see Koslowski & Kratochwil 1994.

⁴ Adler 1989.

⁵ Moravcsik 2001, p. 177.

Another aspect of the constructivist framework that will be focused on is an understanding of how identities are formed. Constructivism is by its premisses not restricted to any certain understanding of which identities are interesting in political science, but is instead free to employ any account that is compatible with its basic ontological assumptions, namely that of a socially constructed reality as opposed to one given by nature. Due to constructivism's claim that identities are determined endogenously, a constructivist account of analyzing political events is much less generalizable than rationalist accounts. In this paper, however, I will make an attempt at finding some recurring themes of constructivist explanations of European integration, with particular focus on how identities are shaped and reshaped in this context. In order to do this, I will use the events surrounding the Single European Act as an illustration of my development of the constructivist framework.

1.1 Aim and Disposition

The main purpose of this paper is to develop certain aspects of the constructivist framework that hitherto have been insufficiently examined. At the same time, however, this paper will provide an examination of the Single European Act conducted with analytical tools belonging to the philosophical idealist and constructivist traditions as a contrast to the more established rationalist understanding. The aim is therefore two-fold; it does at one blow develop and apply theory. In this process, the important guidelines are: (1) How can constructivism explain the outcome of the SEA? (2) In which ways is the constructivist understanding of the events preferable to a rationalist understanding? (3) How ought the constructivist 'toolbox' be developed, based on the events surrounding the SEA, in order to provide better explanations? This two-fold aim implies that the paper challenges the prevalent rationalist understanding of European integration in general and the SEA in particular, and at the same time examines how constructivism ought to be supplemented concerning the study of European integration. In response to Moravcsik, this paper will provide operationalizations of the constructivist approach aimed both for the SEA and the study of European integration.

The disposition of the paper is as follows. In chapter 2 the major points of the prevailing rationalist description of the SEA, here represented by Andrew Moravcsik's Liberal Intergovernmentalism, are presented. The paper will thus take its departure from the rationalist understanding of European integration and question its central assumptions and implications. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical underpinnings of constructivism, and lays the foundation for possible developments of the framework more generally. Chapter 4 applies constructivism to the events of the SEA, and further develops the theory. Chapter 5 concludes.

1.2 Methodology

As stated above, the aim of this paper is two-fold. The mainly theoretical part, with the aim of developing the constructivist framework, therefore does not draw on any empirical material in the ordinary sense. Instead, the literature used to that part (mainly chapter 4) is needed to connect the ideas presented in this paper to those already advanced in the constructivist tradition. Since the development of the theory is partly made by polemizing against the rationalist tradition, the ideas in Moravcsik's works will also serve as an important source.

The other part of the paper is an application of the theory, intended to shed light on the events of the SEA. Here a number of different sources have been used, mostly as a way of establishing the 'facts' about the SEA and its actors. Due to the interpretive nature of constructivist analyses, however, the literature is also used as a way of delineating the important norms and values of the period.

1.3 Earlier Work on European Integration

The study of European integration has a vast historical record. It can, as a simplification, be divided into a number of bigger steps. Federalist, realist and intergovernmentalist approaches had their heydays in the middle of the 20th century. Later the neofunctionalist approach, famously represented by Ernst Haas, became influential.⁶ In recent years, however, Liberal Intergovernmentalism has become one of the most influential approaches in the field. Building on a rationalist ontology, it is by many seen as a perspective with a large explanatory potential. By denying the rationalist ontology, constructivism is a new alternative in the study of European integration. Formerly developed as a perspective in international relations studies, constructivist ideas have been applied to the field of European integration by e.g. Thomas Risse, Frank Schimmelfennig, Harald Müller, Arne Niemann, Ulf Sedelmeier and Jeffrey T. Checkel.⁷ The constructivist framework has more generally been developed primarily by Alexander Wendt, Friedrich Kratochwil and Nicholas Onuf.⁸ The events of the SEA have, however, not yet been analyzed from a constructivist perspective.

⁶ See e.g. Haas 1976.

⁷ Among the most important works are Risse 2000, 2004; Schimmelfennig 2001, 2003a, 2003b; Checkel 2001, 2006; Niemann 2004.

⁸ See e.g. Wendt 1989, 1992, 1995; Koslowski and Kratochwil 1994; Kratochwil 1989, 2000; Onuf 1989.

2 Liberal Intergovernmentalism

2.1 The Liberal Intergovernmentalist View of the Single European Act

It is uncertain whether rationalists and constructivists can agree on a common description of what the Single European Act (SEA) implied; usually, their views of political events differ fundamentally as to what really happened. However, if rationalism and constructivism in any tangible way are conflicting and not only complementing perspectives—which is the reasonable interpretation—there must be certain descriptions of events they have in common, but with different explanations to the causes and effects of these events.

Almost any perspective claims that the SEA was an important event in the development of the EC, not least since it implied the end of the ‘Eurosclerosis.’ Concerning the details of the interpretations of the underlying causes and effects of the events, however, the two perspectives are likely to differ significantly. The Liberal Intergovernmentalist perspective, widely conceived to explain much concerning European integration,⁹ will here be regarded the point of departure. In order to motivate a constructivist view of the events, the general features of the LI description of the events surrounding the SEA will first be presented. Thereafter certain aspects of the LI analysis, that arguably are controversial or counterintuitive, will be highlighted.

The LI framework of explaining European integration is divided into three steps. First comes the establishment of national preferences, second comes interstate bargaining, and third come the different institutional changes that follow from the bargaining in step two. The core argument Moravcsik gives is, in this way, that the major steps of European integration should be seen as the result of negotiations as attempts to solve conflicts between the states and then establishing appropriate institutions according to this. National preferences are by Moravcsik assumed to be stable during negotiations, but not necessarily ‘across negotiations, issues, or countries,’ and they are also considered exogenous to a specific international environment.¹⁰ In explaining national preferences, Moravcsik argues that it is a matter of weighing the relative importance of geopolitical

⁹ Schimmelfennig 2004, p. 75.

¹⁰ Moravcsik 1998, p. 24.

interests and economic interests.¹¹ He therefore challenges the idea that the SEA was importantly dependent on the impact of supranational powers as a sufficient condition for reform. However, Moravcsik concedes that supranational entrepreneurs played ‘a unique role’ in the negotiations leading to the SEA, but he nonetheless claims that they were only ‘secondary and limited to the efficiency of agreements.’¹²

According to Moravcsik, the three states that were most influential in the development of the SEA were Britain, France and Germany. Hence, his approach is analyzing the preference formation of each of these states.

Britain, first, is viewed as guided primarily by economic interests, even though geopolitical and ideological considerations did play a role. Importantly, there was a strong support from businessmen for liberalization. In this way, Britain’s preferences are interpreted by Moravcsik as the extension of its domestic regulatory (neoliberal) reform. Thatcher thus sought maximum liberalization without any centralization of power in Brussels.¹³

West Germany was, according to Moravcsik, less opposed to the European project. The main actors were here the West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, and later Chancellor Helmut Kohl. West Germany is described to seek European integration and more efficient EC institutions, but these interests were nevertheless secondary to economic interests. The pro-European attitude of Germany was importantly emphasized by the fact that the Draft Treaty, proposed by the European Parliament (EP), was almost unanimously supported by the Bundestag. Concerning trade liberalization and regulatory harmonization, the West German government was cautiously supportive as long as it did not threaten the existing high German standards for social and environmental protection. Finally, according to Moravcsik, did Germany’s commitment to ideological issues not contradict its economic interests at any point, but was still at the same time described as ambivalent about the question of economic regulation.¹⁴ Indicative of West Germany’s position is also that a ‘strong elite consensus favoured integration.’¹⁵

France, finally, was, again according to Moravcsik’s view, characterized by a combination of caution of the SEA and enthusiasm about European reforms. The failed ‘Socialist experiment’ in France during the late 1970s and early 1980s is described as an important cause of the French President François Mitterand’s surprising enthusiasm about liberal reforms, which is also viewed as a major reason behind the French preferences more generally. Mitterand is, however, simultaneously described to emphasize the social justice aspect of European integration, and not only economic values. French business had nonetheless strong incentives to liberalize, and the EC was thought to be fruitful in that respect.

¹¹ Moravcsik 1998, p. 23.

¹² Moravcsik 1998, p. 8; 1999, p. 270.

¹³ Moravcsik 1998, pp. 323-6.

¹⁴ Moravcsik 1998, pp. 326-32.

¹⁵ Moravcsik 1998, p. 345.

Considering the French economic situation at the time, France was by many seen as forced to choose to ‘modernize’ or ‘decline.’¹⁶

Once the national preferences have been determined, Moravcsik’s analysis claims that the actual outcome is decided in the bargaining between the states. Once more Britain, West Germany and France are viewed as the most important actors, except in a few issues. According to Moravcsik, the outcome was very much the result of a convergence of national interests, and supranational and transnational entrepreneurs did not play any decisive roles in this process.¹⁷ The idea of a ‘two-speed Europe,’ suggesting that those who did not want further integration according to the demands of especially France and West Germany should be left out of much of the integration process, did also play an important role in the events. ‘Two-speed Europe’ was in fact used by France and West Germany to push Britain into further concessions regarding integration in general.¹⁸

The call for a new Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) was *initiated* by Kohl and Mitterand, but in fact *made* by Italy. This call for an IGC was for the first time made by majority vote, and this fact made Thatcher furious. In this period, Delors was at first nominated, and then selected as President of the Commission. By Moravcsik, an important move that can actually be attributed to Delors and the Commission’s influence is the linkage of an extended use of qualified majority vote (QMV) with the liberalization of the internal market.¹⁹

The IGC was not entirely the result of the bigger states’ demands, though. The need for a convergence policy was stressed by the smaller states, and not as an effect by the Commissions influence. Other outcomes of the IGC are also described along the same lines. Thatcher, Kohl and Mitterand are described as well-informed participants of the conference, whereas the outcome in most relevant respects was the second-best alternative to the monetary integration, democratization, industrial policy and foreign cooperation, which were the first-hand choice of many EC officials. Only the efficiency and the speed of the negotiations can, again according to Moravcsik’s view, be attributed to supranational influence, and the SEA as a whole reflected the existent national priorities.²⁰

The SEA, on this view, implied mainly three institutional reforms. First, it implied the extended use of qualified majority voting in the Council of Ministers. Second, the idea of a new approach based on ‘mutual recognition’ concerning liberalization of political regulation of economic issues was introduced. Third, the European Parliament was given greater powers under the cooperation procedure.²¹

¹⁶ Moravcsik 1998, pp. 332-40.

¹⁷ Moravcsik 1998, p. 347.

¹⁸ See Moravcsik 1998, pp. 349ff. for how the negotiations were influenced by this idea.

¹⁹ Moravcsik 1998, pp. 360-3.

²⁰ Moravcsik 1998, pp. 367-73.

²¹ Moravcsik 1998, p. 315.

2.2 Some Problems with the Liberal Intergovernmentalist Description of the SEA

Moravcsik's interpretation of the events surrounding the SEA is extremely well-structured. In line with the rationalist foundation that LI builds on, there are a number of important actors, exogenously given and clearly defined—in this context the member states, mainly represented by the governments—that are well-informed and strategically acting, and whose intentional actions make up the bulk of the outcome. Let us, in order to more closely examine the argument Moravcsik makes, investigate how his analysis of the SEA relates to four categories that often are advanced as important to consider. These categories are: actorness, preferences, logic of action and norms.

Actorness is a concept that quite obviously is important to consider. On Moravcsik's view, actors are defined exogenously to the political process. As such, the important actors are 'assumed from the beginning' rather than 'found during the process.' Moravcsik's approach does not preclude other actors than states altogether, but is definitely centered around the supposition that states are the main actors. *Since Moravcsik's description is almost devoid of explanations in terms of agenda-setting and completely insensitive to discursive explanatory factors, there are reasons to question LI's view of actorness.*²²

Preferences are also crucial to relate to. Moravcsik embraces the view that the preferences of the actors can change, but claims explicitly that they are stable during the negotiations. *Since 'stable preferences' is an assumption Moravcsik makes rather than treating the issue as something subject to empirical examination, the importance and character of the actors' preferences will be examined.*

The *logic of action* that LI embraces is best explained as strategic and intentional. Adhering to the rationalist tradition, LI's view of the SEA is that actions mainly are oriented towards the realization of specific goals, in their turn given by existent preferences. *Based on the fact that actors often seem to act for other reasons than merely satisfying their preferences, LI's rationalist understanding of the logic of social action in relation to the SEA will be challenged.*

Norms, finally, are by many considered important to regard when analyzing political and social phenomena. Since norms best are viewed as institutionalized behaviour or practices, all reasonable theories of political science or political philosophy must take into consideration how norms and institutions constrain or

²² One of the most famous problematizations of decision-making, and power more generally, is Steven Lukes's (see Lukes 1974). Another famous account is that of Foucault, who emphasizes the ubiquity of power (see e.g. Foucault 1988).

facilitate action.²³ In this respect, not only postmodern or constructivist views are obliged to do this; rationalist theories, too, consider the influence of norms on outcomes, albeit to a lesser degree. An interesting difference between constructivist and postmodern theories on the one hand, and rationalist on the other, is that the latter usually regards *formal* institutions as important, whereas the former recognize the importance of *informal* ones as well. LI does in this respect live up to its rationalist heritage. At no point does consideration of norms or informal institutions play a decisive role in Moravcsik's analysis of the SEA. His view of the events, as shown above, is based entirely on the supposition that the different states were unhindered by informal factors; the negotiations were thus the result of the relevant actors' negotiatory resources rather than anything else. *Considering the issue of the influence of norms, widely conceived, there are reasons to question Moravcsik's neglecting their relevance.*

²³ Margareth Archer makes this point in Archer 1990, p. 73, and claims that psychologism and holism are exempted from this reasonable consideration of the relation between agency and structure.

3 The Constructivist Approach

Rationalism has a very direct approach concerning the relation between agency and structure. According to the rationalist view, structure is secondary to agency, and can in theory be reduced to the behaviour of agents. Political events—no matter if concerning international relations, European integration or the study of organizations in general—are according to the rationalist understanding best described by investigating which the most important actors are and which power relations and preferences are relevant in the situation at issue.

The rationalist emphasis on agency at the expense of structure is problematic. Structuralist theories, such as postmodernism, can in this context be seen as a reaction to rationalism's possibly exceeding stress on the importance of agency compared to that of structure in its reverse understanding of that relation. The problematization of agency that characterizes different postmodern theories instead affirms the impact certain ideational components reasonably have, and in this way too much emphasizes the importance of structure at the expense of agency. Michel Foucault's claim that actors and their actions are realizable first in the examination of structure is telling, but highly questionable.²⁴

Rationalism and postmodernism in this way illustrates the extreme positions when considering the agency-structure problem. Many theorists have, along these lines, related the different theories to each other by placing them somewhere along a continuum reaching from describing everything completely in terms of agency to describing everything completely in terms of structure.²⁵ However, both extreme positions are, according to most theorists, very hard to defend. A pure rationalism would posit the total freedom of the actors, since structure would not present any restrictions on their actions. Naturally, and necessarily, actors are to at least some degree influenced by the actions of others, and how they anticipate other actors will act in the future. The rationalist position must hence be supplemented with a reasonable explanation to how ideational factors are relevant. A pure rationalism is thus implausible.

Extreme structuralism suffers from similar deficits in explanatory power. A theory that allows agency to be explained completely in terms of structure seems to lack many of the concepts ordinarily employed when describing political events. A structuralist explanation would in this way preclude any description of actorhood; there would be no actions truly conducted by people or other actors. Everything would have to be explained as 'actorless events.' On such an extreme

²⁴ Giddens's critique of this view is enlightening. See Giddens 1987, ch. 4.

²⁵ The idea of imagining the different theories as ontologically commensurable is debated. Thomas Risse, e.g., claims that there are no large differences between a sophisticated rational choice and a moderate constructivism. See Risse 2000, p. 3.

view, the concept of change would also be contaminated in a way as to transform it to something utterly intangible. Very likely, an extreme structuralism would imply a sort of determinism that opposes our deepest intuitions. Yet, it does not seem structural or ideational factors can be completely left out.

Most reasonable explanations, however, describe political events in terms of both agency and structure.²⁶ Anthony Giddens has along these lines emphasized the importance of treating these two concepts as different sides of the same coin in his theory of structuration.²⁷ Following this idea, constructivism can be seen to occupy an ontological middle position between two extremes.²⁸ Stressing that ‘there are properties of structures and of agents that cannot be collapsed into each other,’²⁹ constructivism differs fundamentally from the more established rationalist frameworks.

Following the Giddensian approach, the constructivist interpretation of political events affirms the existence and influence of ideational factors, and emphasizes the dialectical and non-reductionist view of the relationship between ideas and matter. A reasonable operationalization is therefore that existing norms and institutions, regardless of whether they are formal or informal, must be taken into consideration. Set aside the putative rationalist claim that *no* norms should be regarded, a rather uncontroversial claim is that norms expressed and embraced by all or almost all of the main actors should be included in the description of the events.

The study of norms and thereby the study of discourse is by many thought to be utterly difficult and almost inevitably more or less arbitrary. Considering, however, that even rationalist explanations necessarily imply the inclusion of ideational factors to at least some degree, this is a problem that is ineliminable. There is, however, an important divide between generally acknowledged ideational factors and unconscious ones. This difference is by Ole Waever understood as more or less sedimented structures.³⁰ Sedimented structures, which thereby serve as established structural constraints, are unproblematic. However, less sedimented, too, reasonably have the potential of constraining action. Naturally, these factors reasonably can be placed along a continuum, but in this paper only the very rough distinction between generally acknowledged (sedimented) structures and unconscious (less sedimented) structures will be considered.

²⁶ Herbert Simon can be seen as an important proponent of a ‘watered-down version’ of rationalism, called bounded rationality. See e.g. Simon 1947.

²⁷ Giddens 1984. See also Giddens 1982; Waever 2004.

²⁸ Adler 1989.

²⁹ Risse 2004, p. 161.

³⁰ Ole Waever 1998, p. 106-12.

3.1 Three 'Logics' of Action

Rationalist theories rely on the assumption that actors' behaviour is more or less rational. The general idea is that political actors have clearly defined preferences and act in a strategic way in order to maximize the fulfillment of these. According to this view, the goal of action is simply to 'maximize or optimize one's own interests and preferences.'³¹

The rationalist instrumental idea of political action, henceforth called the 'logic of consequentialism,' has been questioned. In many aspects, actors simply do not seem to act rationally, but instead based on routine and tradition and without further contemplation on the consequences of their actions. This idea of explaining political action is often labelled the 'logic of appropriateness,' since the actors are thought to be rule-guided rather than goal-oriented.³² According to this perspective, political actors are mainly trying to do the 'right thing,' which means that they are continuously trying to identify the existing norms governing a certain situation. Since norms, rules and values are important concepts to consider when analyzing action in terms of the logic of appropriateness, the constitutive rather than merely the regulative aspects of these notions are emphasized.³³

The distinction between the logic of consequentialism and appropriateness is sufficiently straightforward; the logic of consequentialism focuses on the conscious and strategic actions that seemingly characterize certain political behaviour, whereas the logic of appropriateness instead describes how political behaviour can be alternatively described as mainly unconscious and routinized. There is, however, another difference between the positions that ought to be considered. The logic of consequentialism builds on an individualistic ontology, whereas the logic of appropriateness is founded on a holistic one. Following Thomas Risse's categorization, the logics of consequentialism and appropriateness need to be complemented with a third alternative. This third alternative, here called the 'logic of arguing,' combines the conscious and strategic behaviour of the logic of consequentialism with the holistic ontology that the logic of appropriateness builds on. The logic of arguing therefore differs from the logic of appropriateness in its focus on situations where there are no rules to follow and no clear norms that can govern behaviour. The actors hence are in a communicative process with the collective goal of constructing new norms.

Jürgen Habermas's theories about communicative action consider many different aspects in the communicative process the logic of arguing refers to. Drawing on speech act theory, all communication in the relevant sense implies certain validity claims. (Communication in the relevant sense must here be

³¹ Risse 2000, p. 3.

³² March and Olsen 1989; 1998.

³³ On constitutive and regulative aspects of the agent-structure problem, see Dessler 1989 and Wendt 1987.

defined as communication implying more than only ‘rhetorical action.’³⁴) Following Habermas, there are three such claims. The first claim is its descriptive content; does it correspond well with the ‘objective’ world? The second has to do with its normative content; can the assertion be justified? The last validity claim is the question of whether it is stated in a sincere manner.³⁵ These validity claims can and are continuously challenged during the process of deliberation. As Risse points out: ‘The goal of the discursive interaction is to achieve argumentative consensus with the other, not to push through one’s own view of the world or moral values. Since the validity claims of identities and interests are at stake in theoretical and practical discourses, an argumentative consensus has constitutive effects on actors.’³⁶ Actors engaged in communicative action are therefore also prepared to be persuaded themselves. The core idea of communicative action is in this way to argue and reach a reasoned consensus. Unlike both the logic of consequentialism and the logic of appropriateness, the logic of arguing describes a process where nothing but the better argument is allowed to affect the outcome of the deliberative process.

The issue of how to distinguish the different logics of action from one another has been stressed by e.g. Jeffrey Checkel.³⁷ Concerning the question of how to recognize social action based on the logic of arguing, I will mainly follow Risses operationalization. First, argumentative consistency is crucial. If the arguments presented change depending on who it is directed to, it is hardly a sign of argumentative rationality. Second, the arguments cannot refer to authority or rank, but only to whether the argument in itself is persuasive or not. Third, do the participants continuously justify their positions, or are they merely engaged in pure bargaining? The provision of justifying reasons for the provided arguments indicate argumentative rationality. Fourth, if the participants tend to use arguments by which they have been themselves convinced, it is also an indication of this.³⁸ Situations characterized by contested norms and strong institutions are also claimed to motivate communicative action.³⁹

3.2 The Concepts of Identity, Actorness and Role-Taking

Following Alexander Wendt’s idea of investigating the similarities between persons and states, the capability of having intentions seems a necessary condition

³⁴ Schimmelfennig 2003b: ch. 8.

³⁵ See Eriksen 2000, ch. 3. See also Habermas 1981

³⁶ Risse 2000, p. 10.

³⁷ Checkel 1999; 2001.

³⁸ Risse 2000, pp. 18f.

³⁹ Müller 2004, p. 401.

for personhood.⁴⁰ Reasonably, this aspect would be possible to generalize in order to apply it to any type of actor. What is of interest here is to delineate which features are interesting to take into account when discussing identity and actorness in political issues more generally.

Importantly, are any 'actors' other than individual persons capable of having intentions? There are different ways of understanding intentionality. It could be understood in a reductionist fashion, according to which all intentions must be understood as merely the sum of its constituent parts. On such a view, states are incapable of having intentions; instead only its inhabitants are the sources of what is sometimes mistaken for a state's intention. The reductionist account is generally considered doubtful, however, for many reasons. There are simply many occasions where different individuals act together in order to achieve a certain goal. On a strict reductionist account, any joint efforts that would imply common goals are difficult, if not impossible, to describe. It simply seems a fact that groups of people can do things individuals alone cannot, and this makes complete reduction to individual intentions impossible.

If the reductionist approach is rejected, we are left with some sort of approach according to which the whole is more than the sum of its parts. According to such a view, the significance of the group at the expense of the individuals is highlighted. All such non-reductionist views of intentionality therefore posit the realities of non-individual actors' intentions.⁴¹ In other words, any non-reductionist view of intentionality arguably affirms the significance of identity and actorness that differs from the conventional materialist idea of what can constitute an actor. Hence, ideational factors seem to have significance, at least *prima facie*. Bearing in mind that the materialist-idealist debate has a long history, there seems there are no reasons *a priori* to reject the inclusion of ideas in political theory.

In order to provide an explanation to how changes in the pattern of identity occur, we need to supplement the above description. The conception of identity in terms of intentions is undoubtedly necessary, but not in itself sufficient, to understand what actorness is. I will here propose two other concepts that are important to consider when discussing identity, and thereby actorness, in European integration. These are *role* and *function*.

Starting with the concept *role*, it must be admitted that it often has a fuzzy and ambiguous meaning. *Role* has been used in a number of contexts, primarily in theatrical metaphors. In this context it should be seen as a societal position an actor can occupy which is generally supposed to imply certain practices. *Role* is in this way dependent on expectations from other actors. In the same way the characters of a theater play are expected to behave in a certain way, so are the different actors in political event expected to live up to their role. This mainly sociological conception of identity and actorness was famously developed by George Herbert Mead, who emphasized that the development of the self was

⁴⁰ See Wendt 2004.

⁴¹ Wendt 2004, p. 304.

importantly dependent on the interaction with others. Mead's illustrates this by referring to the idea that in order to become good at sports in general, one has to be able to take the perspective of the other.⁴² The development of identity therefore seems the result of different actors with the tendency to take certain perspectives. By taking the perspective of others, a person perceives what others expect of oneself. The idea of occupying a certain role is also entertained and further developed by Erving Goffman, who emphasizes how the interaction of people is continuously permeated by their conception of each other's social roles.⁴³

Then, are these descriptions of how individual persons develop their selves applicable to non-person actors? According to a description of a *role* in terms of practices or expectations, there seems to be nothing essential that separates persons from non-persons. It seems the important matter is that other actors *normally* expect a person or non-person to occupy a certain role; in other words, the *norm* that an actor behaves in the way conventionally associated with a certain role is what is crucial. This process also seems self-reinforcing; once the norm is to recognize a certain organization, state, group of individuals etc. as an actor, it will also in a sense become an actor.

Function is also worth considering. This concept can perhaps most successfully be considered a variant of *role*, but accentuating the question of the purpose of the role. Another way of putting it might be that *role* takes up the descriptive aspect of actorness ('what is the content of a certain role?') whereas *function* instead stresses its normative content ('what justifies a certain role's existence?'). Emile Durkheim is perhaps most well-known among those focusing on the function of the members of society, and how this is part of the definition of identity.⁴⁴ In this context, analogous to the above passage, I will focus on function as a part of social identity more generally. In other words, it will not be applied only to individuals, but to all possible actors. Therefore, the function of an actor refers to in which ways the actor's identity can be justified in terms of its purpose in and for society.

In sum, the concepts of identity and actorness are important in a number of ways. First, the intention of an actor is important insofar as it determines the potential the putative actor has of staying an actor. Its intention also has the potential of shaping other actors' conceptions of it as an actor. Second, the role of an actor refers to how the actor is conceived by others, and thereby whether the norm is to consider it an actor and in which contexts. Third, the actor's function is important, since even if the actor is normally considered a proper actor, it might under closer scrutiny not have the qualifications that reasonably should be needed. The process during which an actor is developed can in this way be seen as 'role-taking' in the sense that there is a set of established and generally accepted roles that can be taken by different 'potential actors.'

⁴² Mead 1934, pp. 152ff.

⁴³ See Goffman 1959.

⁴⁴ See Durkheim 1933.

The three categories above presented are in a relevant way connected to the three validity claims presented by Habermas. Intention is easily related to the sincerity of the actor and its actions, and can continuously be questioned on that basis. Role is in the similar way linked to the validity claim of correspondance with reality, and function to the Habermasian normative claim. In this way, Habermas's communicative action, originally applied to individual actors, is here applied to the concept of actorness.

4 A Constructivist Understanding of the Single European Act

The structure of this chapter, providing an interpretation of the SEA in constructivist terms, is as follows. First a general characterization of the events in constructivist terms will be presented. Thereafter follows a short analysis of which the important norms prevalent during the period were. An analysis of which the important actors were, and how these were affected by the events of the SEA, finally concludes.

4.1 Characterizing the Events of the SEA

In 1974, the Paris summit had implied the formalization of the European Council, which was thought to provide the EC with the impetus that was needed for further development. The clearly intergovernmental direction the EC was pushed in because of this reform is obvious, due to the European Council's configuration of only the heads of state and government of the member states, and it soon became a very important agenda-setting body.⁴⁵ The EC's new intergovernmental character was summarized by Margaret Thatcher's words: 'there is no such thing as a separate Community interest; the Community interest is compounded of the national interests of the Ten member states.'⁴⁶

Arguably, there was a widespread conception that the EC was not functioning satisfactorily and that something had to be done about it; the birth of the European Council is an indication of this. It is also clear that the supranational institutions of the EC—the Commission, the European Parliament and the ECJ—were discontent about the situation. These supranational forces within the EC made continuous attempts to change it. The direct elections to the EP beginning in 1979 can be seen as having improved the legitimacy of the whole EC, and thereby the EP also gained influence in the organization as a whole. At the same time a host of initiatives were taken at many different levels in order to develop the EC. Jacques Delors's declaration in 1986 that 'all the family quarrels have been sorted out,' and, 'the family is now going to grow and we can think of the future,'⁴⁷ also point to the fact that there had been some severe problems and that change was long

⁴⁵ Bomberg and Stubb 2003, pp. 32f.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Urwin 1995, p. 175.

⁴⁷ Urwin 1995, p. 211.

overdue. It was widely recognized that the EC had to develop economically. In order for this to happen, though, the EC reasonably had to develop politically and institutionally as well. The need for change resulted in a number of actions of different kinds. The Davignon Report and the establishment of the European Political Cooperation have been seen as a result of that need. The then Prime Minister of Belgium, Leo Tindemans, produced one of the first initiatives concerning this political and institutional development of the EC. Tindemans's report, issued in 1976, proposed e.g. that a common foreign policy and defense system, economic and monetary union, European social and regional policies, and joint industrial policies should be part of the EC agenda. Moreover, he proposed that the EC was in need of a stronger executive body and elected legislature. Tindemans's report was, however, in most respects discarded. Another important step towards SEA was the committee appointed by Giscard d'Estaing that consisted of 'Three Wise Men.' This committee came to the conclusion that the main problem was the cumbersome nature of the policy-making. The Three Wise Men, too, came to the conclusion that the Commission should be endowed with more authority, and that majority voting should be more widely used in the Council of Ministers. This committee was also unsuccessful in making any changes.⁴⁸ Further, the so-called Genscher-Colombo plan, making much the same proposals as the others before that, had little practical impact on the development of the EC. Thereafter followed also the plan issued by Altiero Spinelli, resulting in a Draft Treaty on European Union in 1984 with the aim of increasing the power of both the EP and the Commission. That, too, came to have no concrete results.

Finally, after the urgings of among others François Mitterand, the Dooge Committee was formed, and in 1984 and 1985, it worked out a proposal for the next integrative step for the EC.⁴⁹ Both Mitterand and Helmut Kohl had stated that they very much were in favour of a European Union. Backed by these leaders, very much of what the Dooge Committee proposed survived. In the formal proposal put forward at the European Council, the International Governmental Conference (IGC) that would follow should consider improving the Council of Minister's decision-making procedures, strengthening the Commission's executive power, increasing the powers of the EP and extending common policies to new fields of activity.

4.1.1 The Logics of Action

Moravcsik's analysis of the SEA is, as stressed above, predominantly describing action in terms of the logic of consequentialism; according to him, the major actors had their set of preferences from the beginning of the negotiations and these were kept during the whole process. A natural response to this is to question

⁴⁸ Urwin 1995, pp. 218ff.

⁴⁹ The SEA has been described as the compromise that resulted from the discarded Dooge report (see e.g. Andersson and Lindahl 1994, p. 35).

this assumption, since a view of stable preferences during negotiations only affirms the regulatory aspects of the negotiations and precludes any constitutive ones. In other words, LI is *analytically* incapable of embracing the possibility that the negotiations themselves actually had an influence on the preferences or, in the wider perspective, on identity.

Admittedly, LI does not totally rule out the possibility of changes in identity over time. Given Moravcsik's claim that LI is especially suited to describe the 'bigger steps of European integration,'⁵⁰ the theory can still harbour the possibility of changing identities inbetween the 'bigger steps.' It seems, however, that this feature is an important flaw; it seems a fact that the integrative process of Europe has implied important changes in our view of Europe. Moravcsik's claim to the effect that there exists no 'European identity' since the people of the EC/EU at no point has considered the European identity more important than their national identity is in this case simply unjustified, since it suggests that identities are mutually exclusive. Contrary to this, I believe that identity is best understood as potentially overlapping, which in turn means that a person is capable of having multiple identities. A relevant example is that one can be both e.g. Swedish *and* European. Even though LI in this way is compatible with the idea of shaping and reshaping of identities over time, it does not explicitly touch the issue. This is, in my mind, an important flaw of the LI framework.

4.1.2 Events Directly Related to the Negotiations

As pertains to the negotiations of the SEA, the different actors were described as well-informed and strategically acting.⁵¹ In other words, Moravcsik understands the situation according to the logic of consequentialism. Here an important feature of the discussions prior to the SEA is relevant: it was generally considered to imply highly technical issues. This meant that many parts of the SEA simply were beyond the scope of the governments of the member states to decide. The major implications of this are two: who the real actors were is unclear, and the nature of the negotiations plausibly were affected. Both of these implications are not easily reconcilable with the rationalist conception.

First there is the question of which were the relevant actors in the situation. Since much of the material was discussed and brought forward by experts, the influence of the participants in the actual negotiation became less important. Here the technical expertise of groups such as the Commission and other supranational and transnational actors gained influence. This conclusion is supported by Sandholtz's claim that the Commission's influence is greatest in those areas where it possesses the greatest policy expertise, and where Member States face imperfect information or uncertainty, or are searching for new policy alternatives.⁵² The fact

⁵⁰ See Moravcsik 1998, 'Introduction.'

⁵¹ Moravcsik 1998, p. 369.

⁵² See Sandholtz 1993.

that the EC experienced an economic recession and were urged to try new methods in order to solve the situation—which of course meant uncertainty about the outcome—also supports the fact that the Commission had a greater influence than before. Sandholtz further claims that ‘under such circumstances international organisations (like the Commission) can seize the initiative to supply new models and strategies and to promote bargains.’⁵³

Second, negotiations under conditions of uncertainty suggest that the participants of the negotiation were acting more according to the logic of arguing than consequentialism. It also fulfills the condition that the situation is characterized by contested norms and strong institutions.

4.1.3 Widening the Scope: Before the Negotiations

Quite clearly are the actual negotiations important, but they are hardly the *only* things that are important; the events before the negotiations are arguably crucial to consider.⁵⁴ Again, from a constructivist perspective not only the formal institutions and norms are relevantly considered, but also the informal ones. Starting with the formal powers of the Commission, its agenda-setting power was, in Mark Pollack’s words, ‘minimal or non-existent prior to the adoption of the SEA.’⁵⁵ The influence of different supranational actors was nevertheless substantial. Many describe Jacques Delors and Lord Cockfield to have had a lot of influence before the negotiations. Pollack’s description that the two ‘enjoyed a clear success in setting the agenda for the 1992 SEM programme, and for SEA generally’ illustrates this point well.⁵⁶

Moravcsik, however, challenges the above conclusion. He instead claims that the Commission essentially did not manage to get any of its main priorities approved, and that many of the things the Commission actually proposed already were prioritized by Britain, France or West Germany.⁵⁷ Whether or not his assertion is correct is, reasonably, a matter of interpretation rather than fact. According to David Wincott, Moravcsik’s claim is not the whole story, though: ‘the basic, innovative policy techniques required for the internal market programme had been fashioned in the daily work of the supranational institutions (essentially the Commission and the Court of Justice) long before the Member states considered these issues.’⁵⁸

⁵³ Sandholtz 1993, p. 252.

⁵⁴ This point, too, can be supported by the discussion about the ‘three faces of power’ as suggested by Lukes (see Lukes 1974). According to his argument, it is quite unclear how to define who has power. Reasonably, not *only* the actual decision is important.

⁵⁵ Pollack 1997, p. 119.

⁵⁶ Pollack 1997, p. 126.

⁵⁷ Moravcsik 1998, p. 373.

⁵⁸ Wincott 1995, p. 606.

Regarding the period at issue, the Commission is repeatedly claimed to have influenced the outcome a great deal.⁵⁹ The President of the Commission, Jacques Delors, is in this context seen to be a truly important force. His influence on the European Council is claimed to have resulted in the inclusion of references to the EMU—regarded one of the Commission’s prioritized issues—in an important summit in the fall of 1985.⁶⁰

Reasonably, a conception of the events of the SEA cannot only focus on the negotiation process itself, but also take into account the different events that led to it. In this way, the events can easily be described as guided by the logic of arguing in the meetings between the different actors regarding many of their attempts to propose new policy guidelines. Much of the preparatory work carried out by e.g. the Commission can also be characterized as following a logic of appropriateness, where actors (sometimes individuals working in the Commission) without the authority to take important decisions themselves, merely did what was expected of them.

The process is for the most part not characterized by reference to ‘authority or rank,’ as Risse puts it. Even though it in this context is problematic to apply the ideas of communicative action, there were many summits as well as informal meetings between the different actors, and therefore an interpretation in these terms can be applicable nevertheless. Further, the actors continuously justify their positions in the process, which also supports the conclusion that the logic of arguing is relevantly applied.

4.2 Norms

The next feature of the LI analysis of the SEA that will be analyzed is its treatment of norms. Moravcsik’s view does not in any substantial way include norms in the description and analysis of political events. Nevertheless, norms are relevant for both rationalist and constructivist analyses of politics in at least two ways. First, established norms may indicate how actors probably will act, which of course is a help for other actors on both a rationalist and constructivist view. Second, concerning behaviour that is not entirely instrumental, different norms typically influence behaviour; actors act according to what they usually do, or according to what they are supposed to do. In this way norms can reasonably be claimed to affect social action regardless of theory.

⁵⁹ Pia Christina Wood and George Ross are among those who emphasize the importance of Jacques Delors and the Commission regarding the initiatives in the SEA. See Wood 1997 and Ross 1995.

⁶⁰ Cameron 1995, p. 42.

4.2.1 The Norm of ‘New Measures’

The events preceding the SEA can convincingly be described as lacking order. Starting with the Luxembourg compromise in 1966, which meant a further interstate emphasis regarding EC decision-making, the EC experienced a deep pessimism concerning its future.⁶¹ It is unquestionable that this period forced politicians and decision-makers to take action in order to address the situation. In this way, as Alan Cafruny observes, did the SEA appear a ‘politically acceptable path to further integration.’⁶² The view of the SEA as the result of a whole range of failed economic programs, such as ‘the snake’ during the 1970s, is also suggested by David Cameron.⁶³ This conception of the problem was not limited to certain groups, but a wider phenomenon. At state-level, Moravcsik himself has noted that there was a widespread need for renewal of the economies. The French awareness of the failure of the ‘Socialist experiment’ greatly supported the influence of liberal and neoliberal ideas.⁶⁴ The turn in French economic policy can be described as radical.

In sum, I claim that one quite easily observable norm in the mid-1980s was that action had to be taken in order to stop the current economic—and political—recession in Europe. Due to the many years of economic recession, and to the almost complete failure of political and economic cooperation and development during the 1970s and early 1980s, I argue that the norm was that something had to be done about the situation. Keeping in mind that a number of reports, suggestions and proposals by a whole host of different national, supranational and transnational actors in the EC had been rejected, the prevailing norm was moreover that the situation was critical enough to take completely new measures in order to solve it.

4.2.2 The Norm of ‘New Roles in the EC’

Another important norm that was present during the time preceding the SEA, and which actually is connected to that of a critical situation in need of new measures, is how the former actors of the EC seemed inadequate to control the process of European integration. The Luxembourg compromise can, once more, be regarded an indication of this. The same goes for Giscard d’Estaing’s initiative to create the European Council as a means to coordinate European policies. The European Council, however, is by constitution a clearly intergovernmental organization with the aim to enhance the cooperation between the states involved, and thereby more of a direct and informal interaction *between* the states rather than an emergent

⁶¹ See e.g. Ross 1995, p. 5.

⁶² Cafruny 1997, p. 119.

⁶³ Cameron 1995, p. 42.

⁶⁴ See e.g. Lombard 1995, p. 371. On the neoliberal course the new Europe was taking, see e.g. Wood 1997, p. 137 or Ross 1995, p. 43.

political entity. There were other EC bodies that had developed in another fashion, though. The Commission, first, was developing during the mid-1980s to something as yet unprecedented in the history of the EC. Under the leadership of former French Finance Minister Jacques Delors, the Commission found a number of ways to extend its powers within its formal limits. At the same time, there was a growing awareness of the need of development of the EC. In other words, the EC needed a new actor with the role of being the motor and main initiator of new policies for the Community. Furthermore, the role of being the motor and main initiator had to be claimed by an actor with the potential of being sufficiently influential and not having to regard any national ties. More and more, the Commission assumed that role. Aside from the informally strengthened position it had achieved, the treaty itself meant further increases of its formal powers.

4.3 Reconceptualizing Identity

As stressed earlier in this paper, a plausible theory of European integration should be able to handle the idea of the shaping and reshaping of identity. I have criticized the rationalist tradition, here represented by LI, for not being able to do exactly that, and have at the same time proposed an alternative way of analyzing European integration that is supposed to handle this problem satisfactorily.

Starting with the identities of the formerly established actors, Britain, France and West Germany are naturally uncontested as the main actors even on a constructivist understanding of the events. Even though constructivism does not presuppose their identities, the norm of conceiving these three states—and of course all the other member states, but to a lesser degree—as the main actors in European integration is probably one of the most sedimented of all political norms. This quite unproblematic interpretation leads to results that touch upon and in many ways coincide with those presented by rationalist theories. Analyzed in terms of our developed constructivist toolbox, the member states' roles are in all relevant respects unquestioned; there are no discernable norms that openly and convincingly challenge the dominance of the member states in that regard. The function of the member states is also best interpreted as uncontroversial. Justifications of the member states' function in the EC can be made in a number of ways. Most important, reasonably, is the way the member states already have a developed political and administrative system—ultimately connected with the peoples—that in relevant ways act under the authority of the different governments. In this way, the function of the member states in the EC can be linked to their domestic functions. As regards their intention, finally, member states represented by their governments are easily conceived of as having intentions. Consequently, the member states display all requisite signs of being political actors.

The Commission is a different story. It is clear that it has an intention, conspicuously illustrated by the actions of especially Jacques Delors, but also of other commissioners. The fact that since its inception the Commission has been

described as a ‘leader’ and ‘informal agenda-setter’⁶⁵ indicates that the Commission actually produces new ideas and tries to impose these on the EC as a whole. The Commission’s role is more problematic, though. In the 1970s and the early 1980s the Commission was, as claimed above, often regarded as lacking political clout. During that period the European Council had partly taken over the role as agenda-setter, which ought to be interpreted as making the role of the Commission, in turn, less clear. Moreover, there are definitely problems in viewing the Commission as a unitary actor.⁶⁶ All of these factors naturally obscure the exact role of the Commission at the time prior to the negotiations of the SEA.

Another way of describing the unclear role of the Commission is in Habermasian terms: the validity claim regarding the ‘objective’ state-of-affairs of the Commission was challenged. In that situation, the role of the Commission had to be justified—albeit mostly implicitly. I here argue that this justification is best understood by reference to the function of the Commission. In this respect, the Commission’s resources in terms of e.g. knowledge and expertise, impartiality and neutrality, and the ‘motor role’⁶⁷ are important. General perceptions of the Commission between 1985 and 1992 were that ‘there was a widely held desire to confront policy problems and policy failures,’⁶⁸ which further supports the idea that the Commission successfully determined its role in the EC by relating it to its function.

The EP had had a rather anonymous role in the EC, with little powers to wield. Before the SEA, the Council of Ministers had ‘relatively little difficulty in ignoring them.’⁶⁹ The first elections to the EP, held in 1979, should perhaps be seen as enforcing the EP’s powers in the EC, even though these were primarily consultive.⁷⁰ The view of the EP’s role was in many ways much more unclear than that of the Commission. The EP’s function is by comparison much easier to characterize; with the EP as an EC body directly elected by the people, the EC would mitigate the problem with the democratic deficit. The role of the EP could therefore be supported by referring to its justifying function for the whole of the EC. Regarding whether the EP is capable of having intentions, the issue turns into a very speculative one. A plausible conception of intention should, in my mind, be linked to the possibility the actor has in order to make quick decisions and use its informal powers to the maximum. Compared to the Commission’s ability to do this, the EP is nowhere close. Moreover, the EP is a much more diverse institution than both the Commission and the ECJ due to its composition of elected members.

The SEA implied a big change for the EP. The institutional changes introduced the cooperation procedure as a decision-making process, which among

⁶⁵ See e.g. Peters 1994; Nugent 1995.

⁶⁶ MacDonald 1997, p. 69.

⁶⁷ See Nugent 1997, p. 12-15.

⁶⁸ Nugent 1997, p. 16.

⁶⁹ Shackleton 1997, p. 73.

⁷⁰ See e.g. Corbett 1998, p. 82.

other things meant that the EP had the right to reject certain legislation.⁷¹ The EP thus was provided with certain agenda-setting power as well. Naturally this change had implications for its identity and thereby actorness. Nevertheless, the EP remained a rather weak actor during the whole period at issue, all things considered.

The same analysis naturally applies to the European Court of Justice (ECJ). The actorness of the ECJ does in important respects differ from both the Commission and the EP, due to its function as an arbiter. Arguably, this function of the ECJ is generally considered essential for the EC/EU, whereby no further justification seems necessary. Its role is in the same way unquestioned. Regarding its intention, the ECJ is often supposed to have no own agenda. This conclusion has, however, been seriously challenged, and the ECJ is now often seen as a 'policy-making body in its own right.'⁷²

⁷¹ Bomberg and Stubb 2004, p. 59. See also Andersson and Lindahl 1994, p. 35f.

⁷² Bomberg and Stubb 2004, p. 60.

5 Conclusions

The Single European Act (SEA) was in many ways a milestone that symbolized the break with the economic—but also political—recession of the 1970s and early 1980s. The EC did due to the SEA experience a period of economic and political integration that ultimately had the potential of changing Europe in fundamental ways. The events leading to the SEA and the implications of the treaty itself in this way implied changes in both the formal and informal institutions in the EC.

Traditional analyses of European integration have most often relied on certain rationalist assumptions about the nature of politics. This paper has been an attempt to break with this traditional approach and instead analyze the events of the SEA in constructivist terms. In so doing, the need for refinement and development of the constructivist ‘toolbox’ resulted in a specification of the conditions under which identity is shaped or reshaped. This specification draws on three different concepts connected to actorness: intention, role, and function. By applying these concepts to conventionally recognized important actors in the EC—the Commission, the European Parliament, and the European Court of Justice—this paper provides an interpretation of the SEA that in a number of important respects differ from the prevailing rationalist analyses, here represented by Liberal Intergovernmentalism (LI). First, LI does not acknowledge the importance of norms to a sufficient degree. Different norms have here been included in a plausible description of the events leading to the signing of the SEA. Second, the rationalist approach of understanding political action in terms of strategic action or the ‘logic of consequentialism’ seems to be inadequate to describe the events. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the constructivist ability to understand identity—as endogenously rather than exogenously determined—differs radically from the rationalist conception. By this approach, constructivism has a way of describing and understanding changes in identity over time in a highly intuitive way.

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