



**Science Meeting – Scientific Report**

***The Strains of Commitment: The Political Sources of  
Solidarity in Diverse Societies***

**European University Institute (EUI), Fiesole, Italy  
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## 1) Summary

Building and sustaining solidarity is an enduring challenge in all liberal-democratic societies. The claims of solidarity require individuals to tolerate views and practices they dislike, to accept democratic decisions that go against their beliefs or interests, and to moderate the pursuit of their own economic self-interest to help the disadvantaged. Ensuring that individuals are willing to accept these “strains of commitment,” to borrow John Rawls’ apt phrase, has been a worry even in relatively homogeneous societies, and the challenge may be even greater in ethnically and religiously diverse societies. Anxiety about the impact of diversity on solidarity has been a recurring theme in both academic scholarship and public debates around immigration and multiculturalism. In order to better understand the nature of this challenge, we need to explore in greater depth the meaning of solidarity, and the mechanisms by which it can be enhanced or diminished.

The conference focused on these challenges. As indicated in the programme (see section 4a), an introduction, twelve papers, and two commentaries pursued the issues over the two days.

The motivation for the project is both academic and practical: our ultimate goal is to identify what kinds of political institutions, processes and policies are available to societies to sustain and enhance solidarity. We have a particular focus on the political sources of solidarity. Considerable research has already been devoted to the analysis of the economic and social factors which influence the willingness of the public to accept and support newcomers and minorities. While such factors as perceptions of economic threat and patterns of inter-ethnic contact matter, so too do policy regimes (including welfare state and citizenship/integration regimes), political discourses and political identities (national narratives, stories of peoplehood), and the nature of public spaces and structures of political representation/ participation. However, the impact of these political factors is contested. Does nation-building promote or erode solidarity under conditions of diversity? Do multiculturalism policies promote or erode solidarity? Does easy access to citizenship or to the welfare state for immigrants and refugees promote or erode solidarity?

Our goal in this project is to bring together cutting-edge research about solidarity in diverse societies, exploring what we know about the impact of diversity on solidarity, and enhancing our understanding of the political contexts and conditions that shape this relationship. The workshop was organized through a partnership between RECODE, the Global Governance Programme at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies of the European University Institute, and the Queen's Chair in Public Policy at the Queen's University.

## 2) Description of the scientific content of and discussions at the event

The papers and discussion during the two days focused on three broad issues, each of which generated active debate:

- *What is solidarity and is it important?*
- *Is solidarity in decline and is diversity to blame?*
- *What are the political sources of solidarity?*

This report describes the content of the papers and the discussions they triggered under these three headings.

*What is solidarity and is it important?*

Like most concepts in the social sciences, the idea of ‘solidarity’ admits of a variety of meanings and uses. Following a set of definitions presented in a framework document circulated in advance by the organizers, the conference proceeded on the understanding that ‘solidarity’ refers to a set of *attitudes*, as opposed to practices or policies such as inclusive civic relations or redistributive programs, which may be sustained by such attitudes.<sup>1</sup> In particular, solidarity is taken to refer to attitudes of mutual acceptance, cooperation and mutual support in time of need. Further, the framework distinguishes between three different dimensions of solidarity and asks whether the sources of such attitudes differ from one dimension to the others:

- Civic Solidarity: characterized by mutual tolerance; an absence of prejudice; a commitment to living together in peace, free from inter-communal violence; acceptance of people of diverse ethnicities, languages and religions as legitimate members of the community, as belonging, as part of “us”; and an openness to newcomers from diverse parts of the world.
- Democratic solidarity: characterized by support for basic human rights and equalities, such as the equality of men and women; support for the rule of law and for democratic norms and processes, including the need to advance reasoned positions in public debates, equal participation of citizens from all backgrounds, tolerance for the political expression of diverse cultural views consistent with basic rights and equalities, and acceptance of compromises among legitimate contending interests.
- Redistributive Solidarity: characterized by support for redistribution towards the poor and vulnerable groups; support for the full access of people of all backgrounds, including newcomers, to core social programs; support for programs that recognize and accommodate the distinctive needs and identities of different ethnocultural groups.

The conceptual framework was also premised on the assumption that solidarity, conceived of in this way, is important to establishing and sustaining social justice. Solidarity helps to motivate people to accept the strains of commitment. Of course, if solidarity is to be effective, it needs to be politically mobilized – solidarity is not self-enacting, and it may sometimes be left untapped or may be politically blocked. Nonetheless, the starting assumption was that solidarity is a necessary, even if not sufficient, condition of a just society.

This assumption is by no means uncontroversial, and considerable debate focused on it at the conference. The papers by David Miller and Jacob Levy set the two poles of the debate. On one side, the paper by David Miller advances the proposition that solidarity is critical to the maintenance of just institutions, and that one cannot explain policies to support vulnerable groups without reference to such attitudes. On the other side, Jacob Levy argues that solidarity is not essential, and that historical advances towards social justice emerged from purely strategic, self-interested actions, as, for example, when political parties expanded the franchise or developed the welfare state in order to attract electoral support.

Thus the starting premise of the project immediately prompted a stimulating debate, in which the basic issues were laid out clearly. Nevertheless, in the end, the conference proceeded on the assumption that the pursuit of social justice, especially for ethnically diverse minorities, cannot depend on self-interested processes alone and that an underlying base of supportive attitudes is critical.

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<sup>1</sup> Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka, “The Strains of Commitment: The Political Sources of Solidarity in Diverse Societies: A framework document prepared for the RECODE conference” (2013).

*Is solidarity in decline and is diversity to blame?*

A second major debate focused on whether solidarity is in decline and whether ethnic or religious diversity is to blame. The project asks whether solidarity is fragile and perhaps eroding, and so needs to be actively shored up. This seems to be indicated by growing inequality, support for parties that cut taxes for the well-off while cutting benefits for the poor, support for parties that scapegoat minorities, or hardening attitudes towards recipients of state support, and so on.

The project also asks whether ethnic, racial, and religious diversity is a cause of the weakening of solidarity. Insofar as just institutions are built on ideas of bounded solidarity, they require citizens to view themselves as an ethical community bound together by distinctive ethical obligations to each other. This feeling has typically been grounded in a sense of shared nationhood – a sense amongst citizens that they belong together as a distinct people, that they form an ethical community of mutual obligation, that they form an intergenerational community of fate, that they share a common national language and public culture, and more generally that they share a certain national narrative or collective imaginary – a “story of peoplehood”. Increasing diversity can be seen as making it harder to sustain this sense of shared identity, and hence harder to share the trust and bounded solidarity built upon shared national identity

The assumption of declining solidarity was largely accepted by participants at the conference. However, there was considerably more debate about the extent to which diversity was one of the factors at work. The paper by Bonnie Honig, for example, placed much more emphasis on neoliberalism and the erosion of public space in western nations. From this perspective, diversity is not the only threat to solidarity, and a focus on diversity may really be a distraction that keeps us from paying attention to the real forces at work.

While none of the papers argued the opposite position -- that diversity inevitably erodes solidarity -- most of the papers proceeded on the assumption that diversity can weaken solidarity in particular contexts, and that it is important to understand the factors that either exacerbate or moderate the tensions. Moreover, there was a broad assumption that if diversity poses a threat to solidarity, the challenges differ across the three dimensions of solidarity.

The three quantitative papers explored these questions most directly, analyzing public attitudes towards diversity. The paper by Reeskens and van Oorschot adopts Marshall’s well-known categorization of rights, analyzing the factors influencing public attitudes towards civic, political and social rights for immigrants in Europe, and concluding that diversity has a much bigger negative impact on support for social rights for immigrants than civic and political rights. Drawing on new data from North America, Johnston et al. analyze the impact of national identity on redistributive solidarity, the ways in which the relationship is moderated by civic and democratic solidarity, and the extent to which these relationships vary from one country to another. Finally, the paper by Teney and Helbling compare attitudes of elites and the broad public on these issues in Germany, concluding that while there is an elite-mass gap in attitudes, it is not one which deeply threatens solidarity within Germany.

Additional light is shed on these questions by several of the case studies of countries in which the politics of diversity have been especially intense. Koning’s analysis of The Netherlands argues that there is no automatic relationship between actual problems in the economic integration of immigrants on one hand and the reaction of the broader public to immigrants on the other hand; the role of political parties and media elites is critical to the political mobilization of negative public reactions. In addition, Loobuyck and Sinardet test the limits of solidarity in the hard case of Belgium, where identity divisions constrain redistribution across the linguistic divide.

*What are the political sources of solidarity?*

The third debate centred on question of the *political* sources of solidarity. Insofar as diversity is one possible challenge to one or more dimensions of solidarity, to what extent does the broader political context mediate this relationship? Public institutions, policies and discourses are clearly not the only mediating factors - economic benefit/threat and social interactions are other mediators. But policy regimes (including welfare state and citizenship/integration regimes), political discourses and political identities (national narratives, stories of peoplehood), and the nature of public spaces and structures of political representation/participation also matter. Moreover, these political factors may be more subject to conscious redesign than other factors. It is here that we are most likely to find the policy levers that we can use to sustain and promote solidarity.

Analytical progress here involves two steps: understanding the political agents reinforcing solidarity in the contemporary period; and understanding the impact of particular institutions, practices and policies on solidarity that might be deployed in such efforts.

The paper by Peter Hall provides a framework for thinking about these questions. He distinguishes between the political agents who helped build solidaristic attitudes in earlier historical periods and the political agents who reinforce them in the contemporary period. Take, for example, redistributive solidarity. Historically, trade unions and social democratic parties played a vital political role in introducing social programs and nurturing the solidaristic attitudes or culture which could sustain them over time. Moreover, in some cases, these attitudes became embedded in the national identity or collective imaginary of the country. Such belief structures evolve slowly, often persisting over generations; but they are not immutable and need reinforcement in daily political life. The question thus becomes which political agents reinvigorate and enhance solidarity in the contemporary period. It is unclear how effectively the original champions of the welfare state can continue to play that role. While electoral combat clearly still matters, dramatic declines in both left party membership and trade union density, as well as other structural changes in the political economy of Western societies, suggest that we may need to identify additional mechanisms or agents of solidarity. Beneficiary groups and professional associations who deliver social programs undoubtedly help reinforce solidaristic attitudes; but their self-interest also leaves them vulnerable to challenge. Social movements and civil society organizations often try to fill the gap. Yet concern about the robustness of political agency lingered in the conference.

The second large question here is what are the political institutions, practices and policies that political agents can deploy to reinforce and build solidarity over time? Controversy swirls around these issues. Do nation-building policies promote or erode solidarity under conditions of diversity? Do multiculturalism policies promote or erode solidarity? Does easy access to the welfare state for immigrants and refugees promote or erode solidarity? There has been surprisingly little research done on the impact of these policies on solidarity in diverse societies. There has been considerable research done on the impact of these policies on other outcomes – for example, people have explored how different citizenship regimes affect labour market outcomes for immigrants. But for the purposes of this project, we are particularly interested in the impact of these political factors on solidarity. A policy reform that helps a society achieve better economic returns on immigration may be evidence of solidarity, or it may simply reflect and entrench a view of immigrants as a resource, rather than as equal members of society. The impacts of policy on solidarity need to be studied on their own terms.

The papers by Bauböck, Rothstein and Borevi address these issues most directly. Bauböck argues that citizenship regimes are a crucial basis for solidarity, since they signal both who is accepted as a member of society and the rights that flow from membership, but he argues that we need different citizenship regimes at different levels, from the city to the nation-state

to the EU, each with its own distinctive logic of membership, rights and solidarity. In contrast, Rothstein lays the emphasis on the quality of governance, which he sees as critical to social trust and support for collective action; further he finds that quality governance can reduce or even eliminate the impact of ethnic diversity on social trust. Finally, Karin Borevi assesses the argument that a robust welfare state can enhance solidarity by comparing Sweden, where the welfare state is seen as a potential promoter of social inclusion, and Denmark, where social cohesion and cultural homogeneity are seen as a precondition of a robust welfare state, a context in which immigration constitutes a more significant challenge.

### **3) Assessment of the results and impact of the event on the future directions of the field**

The conference was a great success. It brought together leading students of the sources of solidarity from Europe and North America. The papers they presented were of very high quality, and the quality of the discussion was exceptional.

The conference will have a continuing impact on the field. Oxford University Press has expressed considerable interest in the project, and Banting and Kymlicka are in the process of developing an edited book based on the papers presented. The editors have already provided all of the authors with detailed suggestions for revision, and authors have agreed to complete their revisions by July 2014. In addition, the editors have identified a couple of gaps and are commissioning additional papers to help fill them. They expect to have a full manuscript to submit to the press by sometime in the fall of 2014.

This volume is likely to significantly extend our understanding of the sources of social solidarity in contemporary democracy, the nature of the challenge which diversity poses to solidarity, and the political institutions, practices and policies which can mitigate the tension between diversity and solidarity. The project brings a number of real advantages to the field. First, the quality of the participants is outstanding. Second, the breadth of the project will give a more comprehensive view of solidarity in its multiple dimensions than is available elsewhere. Third, the project benefits from a compelling mix of methodologies, combining normative political theory, quantitative analysis of public attitudes, and qualitative cases studies of countries in which the politics of diversity have been particularly intense.

Finally, as noted earlier, we anticipate this project will have considerable social relevance. It marries its scholarly ambition with a very practical goal: to contribute to wider public debates about the challenges posed by growing diversity in contemporary democracies. Our ultimate goal is to better identify what types of political institutions and policies and discourses that can serve to sustain and develop solidarity in the years to come.

**4) Annexes 4a) and 4b): Programme of the meeting and full list of speakers and participants**

**Annex 4a: Programme of the meeting**

*The Strains of Commitment: The Political Sources of Solidarity in Diverse Societies*  
European University Institute, Florence, 20-21 February 2014

***Introduction:***

1. Keith Banting & Will Kymlicka, "The Strains of Commitment"

***Political Theories of Solidarity***

2. Jacob Levy, "Against fraternity: Democracy without solidarity" (Discussant: Will Kymlicka)
3. David Miller, "Solidarity and its Sources" (Discussant: Nils Holtug)
4. Bonnie Honig, "Demos, shared objects of political life, and solidarity" (Discussant: Richard Bellamy)

***The Politics of Diversity and Solidarity***

5. Peter Hall, "The Politics of Diversity in Historical Context" (Discussant: Sven Steinmo)
6. Rainer Baubock, "National Identity and European Solidarity" (Discussant: Hanspeter Kriesi)
7. Bo Rothstein, "Diversity, the Quality of Governance and Solidarity" (Discussant: Peter Kraus)

***Public Attitudes on Diversity and Solidarity***

8. Wim van Oorschot & Tim Reeskens, "Popular opinions on the citizenship rights of newcomers in Europe" (Discussant: Zoe Lefkofridi)
9. Marc Helbling & Celine Teney, "Elite versus public attitudes to diversity and solidarity in Germany" (Discussant: Stuart Soroka)
10. R. Johnston, S. Soroka, J. Citrin, M. Wright, "Diversity and solidarity: new evidence from Canada and the US" (Discussant: Michael Donnelly)

***The Politics of Diversity and Solidarity: country cases***

11. Karen Borevi, "Diversity and Solidarity in Sweden and Denmark" (Discussant: Birte Siim)
12. Edward Koning, "Identity, Solidarity, Nation-building: the Year 2002 in Dutch Politics" (Discussant: Anna Triandafyllidou)
13. Patrick Loobuyck/David Sinardet, "Belgium: Solidarity within and across communities" (Discussant: Johanne Poirier)

***Commentaries***

14. Joakim Palme
15. Philippe van Parijs

**Annex 4b: Full list of speakers and participants**

Speakers ESF funded

1. Rainer Bauböck, European University Institute, Italy
2. Karin Borevi, University of Uppsala, Sweden
3. Marc Helbling, WZB Berlin Social Science Centre, Germany
4. Bonnie Honig, Brown University, United States of America
5. Peter Kraus, University of Augsburg, Germany
6. Patrick Loobuyck, University of Antwerp, Belgium
7. Joakim Palme, University of Uppsala, Sweden
8. Johanne Poirier, Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium
9. Tim Reeskens, Tilburg University, the Netherlands
10. Bo Rothstein, University of Gotheborg, Sweden
11. Birte Siim, University of Aalborg, Denmark
12. David Sinardet, University of Antwerp, Belgium
13. Celine Teney, WZB Berlin Social Science Centre, Germany
14. Anna Triandafyllidou, European University Institute, Italy
15. Philippe van Parijs, University of Louvain, Belgium

Speakers non-ESF funded

16. Keith Banting, Queen's University, Canada
17. Peter Hall, Harvard University, United States of America
18. Nils Holtug, University of Copenhagen, Denmark
19. Richard Johnston, University of British Columbia, Canada
20. Edward Koning, University of Guelph, Canada
21. Will Kymlicka, Queen's University, Canada
22. Jacob Levy, McGill University, Canada
23. David Miller, Oxford University, United Kingdom
24. Stuart Soroka, McGill University, Canada
25. Matthew Wright, American University, United States of America

Participants and speakers EUI (additional)

26. Richard Bellamy, European University Institute, Italy
27. Rutger Birnie, European University Institute, Italy
28. Bouke De Vries, European University Institute, Italy
29. Jan Dobbernack, European University Institute, Italy
30. Michael Donnelly, European University Institute, Italy
31. Ruby Gropas, European University Institute, Italy
32. Hanspeter Kriesi, European University Institute, Italy
33. Zoe Lefkofridi, European University Institute, Italy
34. Sabrina Marchetti, European University Institute, Italy
35. Sven Steinmo, European University Institute, Italy
36. Iryna Ulasiuk, European University Institute, Italy