Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

THE AMBIVALENT EUROPEAN: EXPATRIATES IN BRUSSELS

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Doctoral thesis

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2021

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors Hugo and Miranda for fantastic support, patience and guidance throughout this process, as well as colleagues and fellow PhD students at UAB, notably my brother who inspired me to take this path. I am grateful for support from family and friends, not least Mari and JB. Furthermore, I am very thankful to all that have been partaking in interviews and informal discussions in Brussels, as well as acquaintances and friends. Finally, I would like to thank the Sixten Gemzéus foundation for economic support.

Abstract

Expatriates are often regarded as forerunners of globalisation and transnationalism. Mobile individuals within the European Union (EU) are seen as pioneers of European integration. Expatriates living and working in Brussels are considered to push the European agenda forward, defending "United in diversity" – the EU's official motto – even in critical times of Euroscepticism. But do expatriates in Brussels identify as Europeans? This thesis investigates the life of expatriates in Brussels from an anthropological perspective. It investigates who they are, how they live, whether they become socially embedded in Belgium, to what extent they identify themselves with Europe, and their perception of the EU.

Eurocrats in Brussels, their identification with Europe and their attitudes towards the EU have been subject to substantial research. The contribution of this study is to examine the "Eurobubble" in Brussels (i.e., those working in the field of European affairs in Brussels, within as well as outside the EU institutions) as a specific migrant community, using qualitative methods from the "inside" perspective of an expatriate.

This research shows that the expatriates settle in Brussels because of work or studies (often by chance) and are international-oriented, multilingual and pro-EU already upon arrival. Through a "bubble effect", they mainly socialise with each other and develop ties and networks in their new home town. Meanwhile, they stay connected to their homelands and fellow countrymen, and keep (and occasionally even overstate) selective parts of their native identity. They are both using and reproducing national stereotypes of themselves and other Europeans. Meanwhile, they are Europeanised, develop identification with Europe, and create belonging to a "European habitus". Thus, the expatriates have (at least) two layers of identities and loyalties. Established models for conceptualising coexistence of various layers of territorial identities however don't apply well on many of the expats, due to their mobility and complex mix of identification with several places.

The thesis suggests that the expatriate in Brussels is a mobile and cosmopolitan polyglot characterised by Europeanisation and modernity. The expats embody Europeanness and form a privileged sub-culture – a "bureaucratic class". Political

support for further integration and enhancement of power to the supranational level is fairly common, but they are often driven by an individual rather than an ideological agenda. This “European body”, where people identify themselves as Europeans, is widespread amongst expatriates in Brussels, whereas it is atypical for Europeans in general. The perception of the EU institutions and their policies is however an ambivalent one.

Brexit and increased Euroscepticism are problematic for the “European elite” in Brussels, as the ideological gap between this privileged group of expatriates and the ordinary European is growing. This affects the identity and belonging of expatriates in Brussels and creates a clash between their national and European loyalties and identities.

The research further reveals that expats are creating belonging to Europe and Brussels without embracing Belgium. The sense of belonging to Brussels as opposed to Belgium may in part be explained by the country’s division in different linguistic communities and complex national identity, the significant size of the Eurobubble, and the particularity and Europeanness of the Belgian capital. Brussels, rather than Belgium, becomes a “home away from home”, and the expatriates’ relationship to the host country is a balance between integration and (auto-)exclusion. The “pioneers of European integration” are often not integrated into the “capital of Europe” and in many cases live rather distant from the Europeans they are supposed to represent.

Contents

1. Introduction

> "If Europe were once united in the sharing of its common inheritance, there would be no limit to the happiness, to the prosperity and glory which its three or four hundred million people would enjoy. […] We must build a kind of United States of Europe."
>
> Winston Churchill, Speech to the academic youth, University of Zurich, 19 September 1946.

1.1 Background

The European Union (EU) as an organisation has experienced significant challenges since the late 2000s. The idea and notion of a pan-European identity are crumbling from within as Euroscepticism is growing across the continent alongside rising nationalism (Rooduijn 2015; Georgiadou, Rori & Roumanias 2018), and since the late 2000s, there are well established populist and Eurosceptic parties in practically all EU member states (Kriesi & Pappas 2015).

Globalisation, market liberalisation and increased competition, not least from Asia and the US, have had an irregular economic impact on EU member states (European Commission 2008). The EU's enlargement to Central and Eastern European countries in the 2000s and the establishment of a common currency zone have also had asymmetrical consequences across the EU, where some have been winners and other losers (Gasparotti & Kullas 2019).

The financial crisis starting in 2009 had severe economic consequences for the EU and its member states (Copelovitch, Frieden & Walter 2016). The European countries and regions were however unevenly hit by the crisis. In Spain, unemployment increased

by 13.4 percentage points between 2007 and 2011, whereas in Germany it fell by 2.8 percentage points during the same period (Eurofound 2012). Unemployment is still high in many countries, especially amongst young people, but varies greatly. For example, in 2019, unemployment in the Prague region in Czech Republic was 1.3 percent, while it was 24.6 percent in the Greek region of West Macedonia (European Commission 2020b). As a consequence of high unemployment, Europe has been at risk of creating a lost generation that competes with younger graduates fresh out of school or university, once the economies recover (ILO 2012; Orepoulos et al. 2012).

In a context of economic and social difficulties, the austerity measures imposed on EU member states by the EU during the economic crisis were widely unpopular and created scepticism towards the EU as well as individual member states pushing for those measures (Armingeon & Ceka 2014). There was a major discrepancy between the decision-making in Brussels and the every-day reality on local and regional level, and the EU solidarity was questioned. This created a division between northern and southern member states (Beramendi & Stegmueller 2020; Moravcsik 2012).

In 2015, the EU borders experienced an exceptionally high influx of migrants, which led to the so-called "refugee crisis", accompanied by increasingly negative media debate (e.g., Koch et al. 2020). The situation led to the closure of certain intra-EU borders (Lutz & Karstens 2021), and an internal debate in the EU over how to handle this crisis, during which an East-West divide could be discerned (Krastev 2017).

In 2016, the EU membership referendum in the United Kingdom (UK) resulted in 51.9 percent of the votes in favour of leaving the EU. This led to the first withdrawal of a member state from the EU, which provided nationalist movements around the continent confidence to question liberal democracy, market economy, open borders and free trade (Oliver 2016). These tendencies caused fear regarding the future of the EU and the risk of further disintegration (Hobolt 2016; Schimmelfennig 2018). Meanwhile, it has been argued that the EU through Brexit overcame the most substantial obstacle to further integration, hence resulting in strengthened EU integration (Collins 2017), which there is some evidence of (Leight et al. 2019).

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic hit the EU member states, its populations and economies hard. This was yet another difficult test for the European integration,

hampering the free movement within the EU and prompting discussions on financial solidarity among member states for an EU recovery fund (Bobzien & Kalleitner 2021).

In parallel to (or as a result of) these crises, nationalism has grown across Europe (Kneuer 2019; Taggart & Szczerbiak 2018). The once very appealing European project has in some ways become a scapegoat as Euroscepticism is on the rise (Rooduijn 2015). European solidarity, perceived as a founding value of the EU, is at stake and redefined (Michailidou & Trenz 2019).

Against this backdrop, it is interesting to scrutinise who is defending the idea of a united Europe and supports European solidarity in the midst of these crises. There is a link between European financial solidarity and European identity (Hix 2008; van Spanje & de Vreese 2011), and certain citizens are hence willing to sacrifice for their European identity (Verhaegen 2018), while people with mainly (sub-)national attachments are more negative towards cross-country financial redistribution (Nicoli, Kuhn & Burgoon 2019). Expatriates in Brussels, working in the field of European affairs, can be expected to have a strong identification with Europe. They form a group of mobile and high-skilled economic migrants. They are cosmopolitan people pushing for and personifying globalisation, and there is a positive link between cosmopolitanism in Europe and support to financial solidarity across EU member states (Kuhn, Solaz & van Elsas 2017).

Brussels – the "capital of Europe" – is a bit peculiar as an expat hub. With its high concentration of EU institutions and headquarters of other international organisations, Brussels has attracted Europeans and other foreigners for the last 60 years. There are migrants of different backgrounds, but many come to Brussels because of the presence of EU institutions. In 2019, 422,097 out of the population of 1,208,542 in Brussels Capital Region were foreigners (people of foreign nationality who do not simultaneously hold Belgian citizenship), of which 278,944 were EU citizens (IBSA 2020). This implies that 23 percent of the inhabitants of Brussels Capital Region were immigrants from other EU countries, and this constant influx of expatriates continues to impact the city.

Expatriates in Brussels working within the field of European affairs share various characteristics. First, they are professionally (and hence financially) related to European integration. Second, they form a privileged group of economic migrants that stay in a

foreign country for a variable period of time, sometimes for decades. Third, they constitute a large share of the host city's population. Fourth, they are personally embodying European integration. Brussels as an expatriate destination hence has a transnational, political and, possibly, ideological dimension, in a way that other European capitals might lack. Furthermore, due to the high percentage of expatriates working with European affairs, Brussels is an interesting place to study European identity formation.

If expatriates in Brussels are more EU-friendly than the average European, it is worth looking into where this origins from. Did these people have a European and international mindset upon arrival, and did they favour European integration already before arriving in Brussels through their professional orientation, or has this developed during their stay in Brussels? Living in an environment so characterised by Europe, European integration and multiculturalism, and socialising in a milieu where most people work with these issues in one way or another, may strengthen the belief in a united Europe.

This ethnographic research examines the lives of expatriates in Brussels. The study explores how they live, what unites them, and how are they connected to their homelands and fellow nationals. It scrutinises whether the expatriates in Brussels share a common European identity and, if so, what it consists of. It investigates how these people perceive the EU's policies and ideology, and their attitude towards European integration. Furthermore, it investigates the political tendencies amongst expatriates amid euro-scepticism and growing nationalism.

While EU officials and their identification with Europe have been subject to substantial research, the expat community Brussels in general has been less studied. The uniqueness of this study is that it examines the "Eurobubble" in Brussels (not only those working for the EU institutions) using qualitative methods from the "inside" perspective of an expatriate, looking both at how this particular migrant group lives, socialises and integrates in the host society, and how they identify with Europe.

1.2 Reasons for choosing the topic

As a child, I remember travelling across Europe by train and car with my family. I recall standing at the very east of the west, on the border between West and East Germany, looking towards "the other side". In Europe, each country had its culture, language (in most cases) and currency, and it all felt far from Sweden.

I remember the Swedish referendum on accessing the European Community in 1994. Sweden had just experienced a severe economic crisis, and the turnout of the referendum was positive, resulting in Sweden joining the EU in 1995. However, during my entire childhood, I had the sense that most people were sceptical towards the EU and only had vague ideas about this political cooperation and its implications on our society.

From my teenage years through university, I took part in various exchange programmes across Europe and developed an interest in European languages and cultures. The EU, however, was still something distant and political discussions seldom touched upon EU affairs.

It was not until I enrolled in a master programme focusing on EU politics in Belgium in 2008 that I got a deeper understanding of the European integration project. After my studies, I worked in Brussels for a year. I spent my days with expatriates from all over Europe and got to know the city and its people.

During that year, the idea of conducting a study on expatriates in Brussels emerged. I was interested in exploring their motivation for moving abroad, and how living in Brussels affected their identification with Europe. I wanted to understand how this affected their relationship and identification with their countries of origin and what they considered "home", and for what reasons. Furthermore, I was interested in the ideological and political motivations of moving to Brussels to work within European affairs. This nourished the idea of carrying out qualitative research on this topic from an anthropological point of view rather than political science, which would have been the natural choice given my background.

Since then, I have worked within international affairs for different employers (among them the EU) in different parts of the world, most of the time as an expatriate. This has increased my interest in the expats as a migrant group, and I have visited Brussels on a regular basis for work purposes. In Section 4.4 I explain how this experience has affected my fieldwork.

1.3 Research objective

This research aims at exploring the life and culture of expatriates in Brussels, as well as their identification with Europe and attitude towards the EU. I approach this through an anthropological perspective. I analyse how the expatriates' lifestyle, social and family life, and transnational features are characterised, and their reasons for settling in Brussels. I further investigate the relationship between the expatriates and the host society, and how this group is integrated in and affected by Brussels. I explore the identification with Europe within this group and examine what this identity consists of and how it develops over time. I also analyse how identification with Europe relates to national identities. In addition, I examine the expatriates' attitude towards European integration and the EU and how recent rise of nationalism and Euroscepticism has affected expatriates in Brussels, their identity, and loyalties.

1.4 Outline

The thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2 provides a description of the context and the history of the European integration project and gives a background to more recent Eurosceptic sentiments in EU member states.

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical background and framework of the study. It outlines the theories applied to better understand identity and belonging in Europe, and the attitudes towards European integration among expatriates. Furthermore, models to

understand the expatriate as a migrant group and their relationship to the host society are explored. Finally, the research questions are presented in detail.

Chapter 4 lays out the methodology used for sampling, data collection and analysis in the research project. Difficulties encountered and limitations are presented and discussed. Furthermore, ethical considerations are addressed.

Chapters 5 through 9 provide the ethnography. The fifth chapter serves as an introduction to the ethnographic study of expatriates in Brussels, starting with a description of Brussels and the geographical world the expatriates live and interact in. This is followed by in-depth portraits of four expatriates in Brussels.

Chapter 6 explores what characterises the expatriates in Brussels and their reasons for moving there, and why they choose to stay.

Chapter 7 explores how expatriates socialise and build networks. It also investigates the link between the expats and Belgium, how expatriates integrate in, are affected by, and have an impact on the host society, and how Brussels becomes a "home away from home".

Chapter 8 examines how expatriates identify with Europe and their countries of origin and the relationship between these identities. Furthermore, it scrutinises Europeanisation, social identities, and the use of stereotypes among expatriates in Brussels.

Chapter 9 analyses the expatriates' attitudes towards the European integration project and how this is affected by living in Brussels. I also explore elitism, Euroscepticism, and its implications on the expat community.

Finally, Chapter 10 summarises the results for each research question and discusses them from a broader perspective, considering current trends and the political realities. The chapter concludes the study, highlights strengths and limitations, and points out suggestions for future research.

2. The European integration project

> "The loneliness of the expatriate is of an odd and complicated kind, for it is inseparable from the feeling of being free, of having escaped."
>
> Adam Gopnik, *Paris to the Moon*, 2000.

2.1 Integration as a mean to prevent war

In the wake of the Second World War, there was a call for greater economic and political cooperation amongst Western European states to foster long-term peace and stability. On 9 May 1950, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, Robert Schuman, delivered a speech suggesting enhanced cooperation through common foundations for the economic development of France and West Germany – enemies since long – as a way to build solidarity and prevent conflict.

> "[…] Franco-German production of coal and steel as a whole be placed under a common High Authority, within the framework of an organisation open to the participation of the other countries of Europe. The pooling of coal and steel production should immediately provide for the setting up of common foundations for economic development as a first step in the federation of Europe, and will change the destinies of those regions which have long been devoted to the manufacture of munitions of war, of which they have been the most constant victims." (Schuman 1950).

The statement, generally referred to as the "Schuman Declaration", is considered a starting point of creation of the European Union, and Schuman is generally regarded as one of the "founding fathers" of modern European integration (Domingo 2017). Less than a year after Schuman delivered his statement, on 18 April 1951, the European Coal and Steel Community was established through the Treaty of Paris, signed by Belgium,

France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and West Germany. Entering into force in 1952, the Treaty integrated the economic sectors of the coal and steel industries.

The economic cooperation was enhanced and expanded through the signing of the Treaties of Rome in 1957, establishing the European Economic Community – a "common market", which allowed for goods, services and people to move freely across borders between the member states. In the same year, the European Atomic Energy Community was established. Together the three organisations were called the European Communities.

Ever since, new treaties have been signed as the European integration has widened and deepened, and new member states have joined. In 1993, through the entry into force of the Treaty on European Union (also known as the Maastricht Treaty), the EU was established, which prepared for the European Monetary Union and introduced areas of cooperation of more political nature, including foreign affairs, defence, justice and home affairs. The latest treaty is the Treaty of Lisbon, signed in 2007 and entering into force in 2009.

The European Communities were the first international organisations with supranational features, transferring power from the national to the supranational level. From the very start, the idea of supranationalism and economic cooperation has been a key ingredient in the European integration, which Schuman underlined in his speech in 1950.

> "The solidarity in production thus established will make it plain that any war between France and Germany becomes not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible." (Schuman 1950).

The idea of economic interdependence as a safeguard to peace is hence a cornerstone of the European integration project. Creating a common market and, later, a common currency, has pushed integration forward. Eventually, the cooperation widened to other policy areas and nowadays also includes the environment, fisheries, consumer protection, external policies, energy, public health etcetera. The European Communities, and later the EU, have progressively enlarged in 1973 (Denmark, Ireland, UK), 1981 (Greece), 1986 (Spain, Portugal), 1995 (Austria, Finland, Sweden), 2004 (Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia), 2007 (Bulgaria, Romania) and 2013 (Croatia), and negotiations

with potential future members are ongoing. The enlargement process has created a more diverse EU, made up of countries of different culture, wealth, and history. Meanwhile, the EU has been aiming at creating a common culture or "European public" within the supranational community. These ambitions have had limited success, and the EU could hence be said to suffer from a "cultural deficit" (Shore 1999; 2000).

2.2 Fragmented Europe: Euroscepticism and cultural backlash

Cooperation is easy in times of positive development and prosperity. When the economy is growing and possibilities are flourishing, differences and disparity can be set aside. The strength of the integration is however tested under challenging circumstances, and now – after the Euro crisis, the so-called "refugee crisis", Brexit, and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic – the situation is different.

We are experiencing a wave of populist and Eurosceptic parties across European countries (Kriesi & Pappas 2015; Rooduijn et al. 2019). Populist political parties based on national agendas have spread to most EU member states, and pushed for public debate on migration, protectionism, and the EU's added value (Rooduijn 2015). Populist movements have had a rise in the wake of the European debt crisis as well as in the so-called "refugee crisis" (Kneuer 2019), which is part of a general trend of growing populism around the world that to a certain degree can be seen as a response to globalisation (Kaltwasser 2015). The "costs" or "benefits" of the EU membership are more frequently discussed in the member states nowadays, and when costs are perceived as higher than benefits, Euroscepticism can grow (Vries 2018). The positions on the EU and the narratives behind the Euroscepticism vary however within for example the European extreme right movements and parties. Vasilopoulou (2009) distinguishes between three types of Eurosceptic positions among European extreme right parties. First, the "rejecting" type, being negative towards the EU in general. Second, the "conditional" type, accepting the principle of EU cooperation, but not the functioning. Third, the "compromising" type, accepting current EU cooperation but opposing further integration.

The British referendum on leaving the EU put the EU institutions in a crisis mode for years. It was a vote on EU membership, but the result can be linked to larger questions such as globalisation and migration. Those voting for leaving the EU were in general poorer, older, less educated, and were worried about multiculturalism than those voting to remain (Hobolt 2016). There are economic as well as cultural explanations to the result of the referendum. The economic rationale would be that those who have lost jobs or experienced cuts in wages would vote for Britain leaving the EU. With regards to the cultural aspects, populism can be seen as a reaction, or backlash, to rapid cultural change. Right-wing populism can be a response to the spread of "liberal" culture in the western world and the left-right political axis has been complemented with cultural factors, such as values and identity politics, over the last decades (Norris & Inglehart 2019).

Euroscepticism can also be derived from the omnipresence of EU policies in Europe, as a result of a deepened integration, which has limited the room for manoeuvre for national and local decision-making. This may to some extent explain the widespread concern regarding legitimacy for EU institutions and increased Euroscepticism across the continent (Vries 2018).

Possibly, the differences among EU member states and their populations as well as the difficulties of integrating have been underestimated while the importance of national identity has not been given enough weight. Given the current state of the Union, the idea of a common European identity may be perceived as naïve, not considering the diversity of culture and identity enough. While there has been a transfer of power from the national to the supranational level, a similar transfer of loyalty among the EU citizens is yet to be seen (Shore 1999).

3. Theoretical background

> "Bureaucracy is the death of all sound work."
>
> Albert Einstein, *The World as I See It*, 1949.

3.1 Identity and belonging in Europe

3.1.1 The idea of a common identity

The EU institutions are based on the idea of a common history and identity. The preamble of the Lisbon Treaty, signed by Heads of State and Government of the EU member states on 19 October 2007, states:

> "Drawing inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law, recalling the historic importance of the ending of the division of the European continent and the need to create firm bases for the construction of the future Europe." (Council of the European Union 2008:15).

The formulation is broad and vague and can be summarised by the motto of the EU: "United in diversity". The EU is hence aiming at increasing the identification of its citizens with Europe as well as the solidarity between Europeans. This common identity is important for building a European political community, and for further enlargement (Bergbauer 2018). The identification with Europe has however not spread in the way the founding fathers of the EU foresaw. Shore argues that the EU has failed in creating a European "people", "identity" or "consciousness", partly because factors such as history, religion, language and memory that normally constitute coherence to national identities generally are dividing people from different European countries rather than uniting them (Shore 1999:55).

The lack of a united European "demos" furthermore has political implications (Shore 2006a) and an alleged democratic deficit in Europe has been linked to the absence of a truly united European people (Colliot-Thélène 2016). Furthermore, the EU has since long been said to suffer from a leadership crisis (Van Esch 2017; Müller & Van Esch 2020) that can be described by the complex, multi-layered and fragmented characteristics of the EU polity (Tömmel & Verdun 2017). In response, a High Representative for foreign affairs and security policy was created as part of the Amsterdam Treaty in 2007 with the mission to strengthen the European voice on external affairs, represent the union internally as well as externally, and to create a perception and symbol of a common EU foreign policy (Meunier & McNamara 2002). Furthermore, a full-time President of the European Council was appointed in line with the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009, but there still does not seem to be an EU leadership recognised by the ordinary European (Müller & Van Esch 2020).

Meanwhile, European Union affairs have become ever more politicised during the last 20 years, and the intersections with domestic policies have increased (Risse 2010). Media coverage of the EU and its political manifestation has grown significantly across Europe since 2000, not least as a result of increased awareness of how the EU relates to national political debates (Aldrin 2013). The EU can achieve continuous integration despite widespread protests among EU citizens. Genschel and Jachtenfuchs (2016) argue that such integration can be achieved through conflict-minimising strategies and joint decision-making, hence avoiding intergovernmental friction. There is a link between European identity and support for European integration, but it is also possible to have a strong attachment to and identification with Europe without being a strong supporter of the EU institutions and policies (Kuhn 2019).

Against this background, it is interesting to explore whether there is actually such a thing as a common European identity at the individual level and how it manifests among Europeans.

3.1.2 Individual and collective identities

Identification with Europe can be understood through social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner 1986), which suggests that individuals tend to divide people and society into

social groups and identify with the group where they belong themselves. A person's "social identity" can be defined as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel 1981:255). Thus, identity formation creates "in-groups" and "out-groups". The "out-group" – or simply "the other" – plays a crucial role in creating the "in-group" and its boundaries. Consequently, there is no "we" without an "otherness", and thus a person's social identity is as much formed by what (s)he does not adhere to. Although all individuals are different and unique, social groups tend to downplay the differences within the "in-group", while exaggerating the differences between the "in-group" and the "other" (Tajfel & Turner 1986).

Individuals can hold several identities in parallel, that relate to different group memberships (Risse 2010), and these identities are liquid and changeable (Barth 1969). Speaking of "an identity" in singular can therefore be misleading. It is more accurate to speak of identification and the formation of identities as ongoing processes, where identity is continuously negotiated and renegotiated. Furthermore, people have several coexisting social identities, of which some are more prominent than others depending on the occasion (Tajfel and Turner 1986).

The formation of European identity refers both to citizens' individual identification with Europe and to a collective European identity. Bergbauer defines "individual identification with Europe" as "citizens' self-categorisation as European together with their evaluations of their membership in the European collective and their affective attachment to Europe and other Europeans" (Bergbauer 2018:18). Similarly, Duchesne (2008) describes it as a process whereby a citizen defines herself as part of a European political community. Thus, individual identification with Europe may be considered as a vertical relation (Westle 2003).

In parallel with the individual identification with Europe and the European integration project, the "collective identity" is the common and shared definition of Europeans and what European identity is and consists of. A collective identification with Europe relates to a shared and interactive definition produced by the individuals of Europe (Melucci 1995). This requires identification within a group and mutual

acceptance among group members (Gellner 1983), meaning that a collective identification with Europe can be seen as a horizontal relationship (Westle 2003).

Social identities can be explained as "collectively shared social constructions linking individuals to social groups, national or supranational imagined communities" (Risse 2010:9). Bergbauer uses the following operational definition for collective European identity: "a collective European identity will be the stronger, the higher the number of EU citizens who identify with Europe, the stronger citizens' identification with Europe, and the more citizens are aware of other citizens' identification with Europe" (Bergbauer 2018:24). This implies that the collective European identity would be the sum of the European individual citizens' identification with Europe, in terms of extensity and intensity (Fuchs 2011; Bergbauer 2018).

3.1.3 The relation between national and supranational identities

A supranational identity does typically not substitute a national one but complements it. Different theoretical models have been proposed to address the coexistence of supranational and national identities. European identity can be seen as an extension of national identity (Inglehart 1970) and the national identity can be seen as a prerequisite for the European one (Duchesne & Frognier 2002). Inglehart's theory of "cognitive mobilisation" suggests that a European identity may be composed of a more distant and abstract sense of belonging and solidarity than the national identity (Inglehart 1970).

Several models have been proposed to conceptualise how various layers of territorial identities can coexist (Díez & Gutiérrez 2001). In the so-called "nested model", one identity surrounds and embraces another, i.e., a local identification is nested inside a national one, surrounded by a supranational one, which can be visualised by a Russian matryoshka doll (Risse 2005). For example, Bavarian and German identities can exist in parallel for an individual or a group without contradiction. Hence, the supranational identification can coexist with and complement hierarchically lower territorial levels in the same way that a local, regional and national identity do – it merely adds another layer.

Another heuristic is the so-called "marble cake" model, inspired by the cake comprised of light and dark batters that are not mixed, but rather coexist in a complex,

unique way in every cake. This metaphor is a way to conceptualise that citizens can host national and European identities in ways that cannot be separated and that blend with one another, and that identities thus are not a matter of a zero-sum game (Risse 2005). To put it short, in this model, it is not that easy to define layers of identification, since they are intertwined.

National and European identities could also clash with each other, in the sense that the supranational and national level have to "compete" (McLaren 2006). For example, long before the Brexit referendum, the identification with the national and the supranational (the EU) level in the UK was suggested to be mutually exclusive (Díez Medrano 2010). There are other examples where the two territorially hierarchical levels conflict with one another, especially in cross-national regions such as Catalonia and Basque Country in Spain and France where secessionist movements are active.

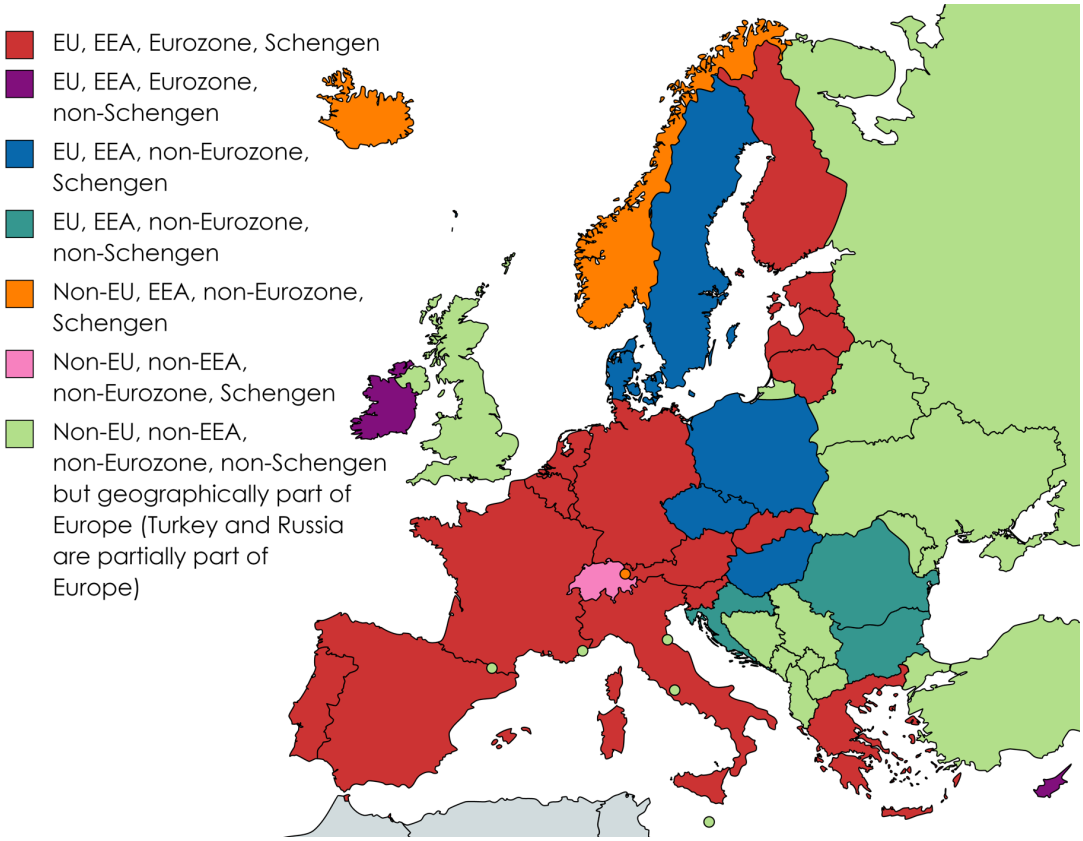
3.1.4 Identification with Europe

European integration and identification have been subject to much research since the first step towards what we now know as the European Union were taken in the wake of the Second World War. The European Union acknowledges that for EU integration, it is essential that people identify with the European project and feel a sense of belonging to a common culture (Shore 1999).

An initial challenge of identifying with Europe is to define its boundaries. There is no clear definition of Europe's frontiers, which can be an obstacle to identity formation among its inhabitants. Europe has clear geographical borders, but cultural and political borders differ (see Figure 1) depending on whether we refer to the geographical continent of Europe, the EU (27 states), the European Economic Area (EEA – EU plus the European Free Trade Association, excluding Switzerland, i.e., 30 states), the Eurozone (19 EU member states. Andorra, Monaco, San Marino, and Vatican City have a monetary agreement, while Kosovo and Montenegro are using the euro unilaterally, albeit not taking part of the Eurozone), or the Schengen Area (26 states of which 22 are EU countries. Monaco, San Marino and Vatican City are *de facto* members, through open borders with countries within the Schengen Area). Geographically, Europe comprises parts of Russia and Turkey. Cyprus is geographically part of Asia, although

a member of the EU. Meanwhile, some non-European countries are members of the Council of Europe and participate in the Union of European Football Association (UEFA) Cup and Eurovision Song Contest. Thus, in Europe, and even within the EU, there are different statuses.

Figure 1: **Map of the different country statuses within Europe in April 2021**



Source: Own elaboration created with mapchart.net.

Identification with Europe has different meanings for different persons and is hence multidimensional. This is also why European studies is "an inherently interdisciplinary field" (Favell & Guiraudon 2011:24). Bruter (2009) suggests a differentiation between two dimensions of European identity: a cultural one and a civic one. The cultural dimension is based on history, culture, language, and religion, while the civic one is related to citizen rights and political institutions. Delanty suggests that the cultural dimension requires a set of common norms that people believe in and respect, and a certain level of common culture as well as solidarity and integration

(2012). Bruter (2009) found that the civic identification with Europe is rather weak for most people, but still stronger than the cultural one, which can be explained by a great diversity among European countries in culture, history, language, and other characteristics. It is, however, debated whether Europe has sufficient common civic and cultural identification to create belonging and solidarity, and to give legitimacy to the European integration project (Favell 2005; Koos 2012).

Recchi (2014) distinguished between a culturalist and a structuralist model to explain how identification with and belonging to Europe is formed. The culturalist approach suggests that public discourse is spread top-down, which generates an internalisation of values and in turn spurs an identification with Europe. In contrast, the structuralist model centres around interpersonal relations, suggesting that the formation of a European identity is generated bottom-up by socialising with fellow Europeans.

The culturalist approach depends, therefore, on primary and secondary socialisation (Recchi 2014). Primary socialisation comprises education in European history and European issues, while secondary socialisation comprises exposure to European-friendly public discourse, through for example the media, and to European symbols, such as the EU flag and anthem.

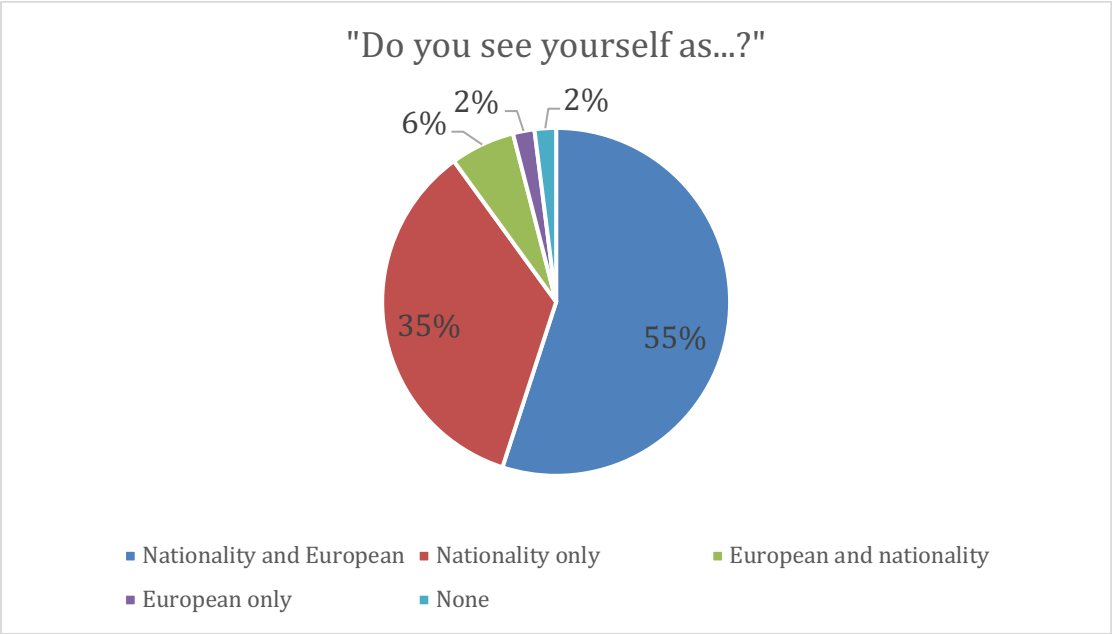
The structuralist model requires exposure to Europeans of other nationalities than one's own. Such exposure is mostly achieved through transnational mobility (Fog Olwig 2007; Schroedter, de Winter & Koelet, 2015; Lubbers et al. 2007; 2010; 2014). For instance, Fog Olwig (2007) argues that the feelings toward and identification with a place are determined by the social relationships an individual maintains in this place. The majority of Europeans, however, have limited exposure to Europeans of other countries, given that it in practice requires geographical mobility (Fligstein 2008). These Europeans, which Recchi et al. (2014) refer to as "locals", do not often cross an intra-EU border, neither physically nor virtually. On the other hand, there is a relatively small group of transnationals that are highly mobile and cross borders physically as well as virtually on a frequent basis, who therefore have a high exposure to other European nationalities. In the sample of the study of Recchi et al. (2014), these transnationals accounted for only six percent of the population.

In terms of the structuralist model, EU intra-marriages constitute a particularly strong driver for transnationalism and is an example of how European identity is built

"from below" by its citizens. Traditionally, not least when looking at the elite classes, intermarriage has been an indicator of such strong ties, given that it implies links of both emotional and capital or monetary kind. Marriages between two EU citizens of different countries of origin generally consist of either (i) one person living in a new country of residence and one staying in the country of origin (free mover/national stayer type), (ii) two persons living in a new country (free mover/free mover type), or (iii) two persons who have been born and raised in the country of residence but whose parents originate from other countries (Koelet & De Valk, 2014). Among these three, a marriage between two free movers is more likely to lead to a particular lifestyle and identity that resembles a denationalised existence, or rather less national and more European (Díez Medrano 2008; Gaspar 2009; cf. Rodríguez-García 2015). However, the first group of non-movers, having a relationship with nationals of another country, also shows a high identification with Europe through their daily exposure to a person of another EU country, as well as to their networks and frequent travelling to their home countries. This can be the case even though solidarity with other European countries is not necessarily strong (Van Mol, de Valk, & Wissen, 2015). Moreover, Koelet and De Valk (2014) claim that second-generation intra-EU couples also retain a stronger European identification, in other words, children of mixed families can also be expected to adopt a supranational identification.

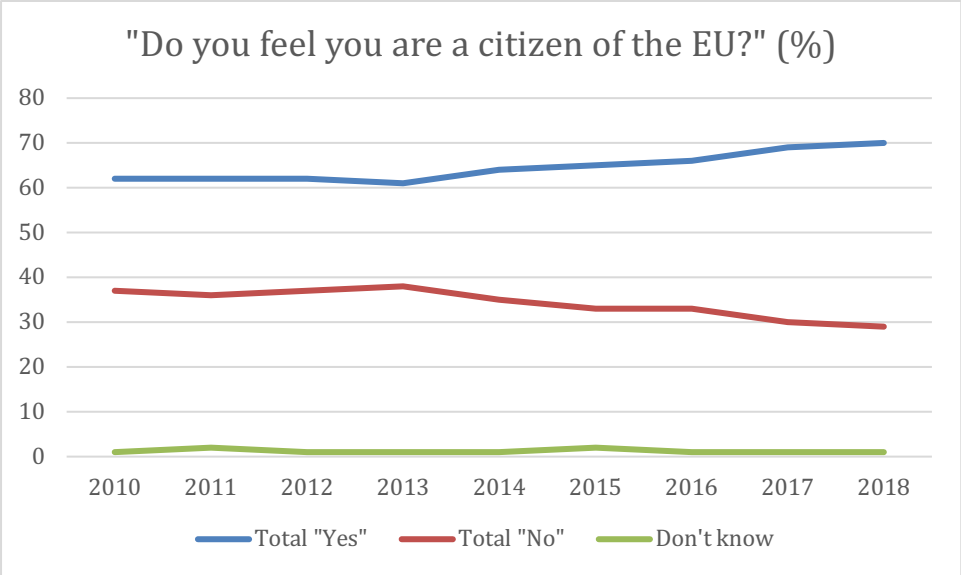
Risse (2010) argues that a European identity has been formed only partially, and that mainly two parallel and very different views of Europe are being presented in the public sphere: an "EU Europe" and a "nationalist Europe". The EU Europe is characterised by modern liberal democracy defending human rights, the rule of law, and the market economy. The nationalist Europe, on the other hand, is focusing on traditional conservative values, culture, national traditions, Christian religion, and clear geographical frontiers (Risse 2010:61). Identification with Europe hence implies different political narratives, depending on the individual. According to the Eurobarometer, more than 60 percent of European respondents see themselves as having a European citizenship to a higher or lower degree (European Commission 2018 – see Figure 2). The formation of a European identity is not merely a supranational issue, but depends on how individuals, communities and countries develop and transform. The formation of a European identity thus varies across European countries (Delanty & Rumford 2005).

Figure 2: National and European citizenship



Source: Standard Eurobarometer 89, spring 2018. Survey carried out in March 2018 in all EU member states (European Commission 2018).

Figure 3: EU citizenship



Source: Standard Eurobarometer 89, spring 2018. Survey carried out in March 2018 in all EU member states compared to survey results from 2010-2017 (European Commission 2018).

Gender, age, socio-economic status, knowledge of a foreign language, and exposure to foreign media are other factors that affect the identification with Europe (Pötzschke & Braun 2014). The proportion of Europeans that consider themselves as EU citizens have slightly increased in recent years (European Commission 2018 – see Figure 3). However, it is not obvious to distinguish identification with Europe and identification with the EU. Possibly, the attachment to Europe might be stronger than the EU attachment (Bergbauer 2018).

3.1.5 Europeanisation

The interaction or development of relations between the national and the European level can be referred to as "Europeanisation". On a political level Europeanisation refers to a process of national borders fading away while new borders are shaped and networks in different areas at different levels created, resulting in weaker national frontiers. This also holds for individuals and their thoughts about themselves and Europe. Risse argues that the Europeanisation of national public spheres and communities results in the emergence of a transnational European public sphere (2010).

However, when linked to identity, Europeanisation can be described as a measure of how much Europe and the EU are incorporated into national identity construction, on a general or individual level (Risse 2010). European identity can hence differ between different countries as well as individuals (Börzel & Risse 2007).

Europeanisation may be both "bottom-up" and "top-down", i.e., that national interests influence the EU as well as the EU has an impact on national policies, culture and identities (Börzel & Risse 2007:483.). A Europeanisation process can apply on culture and identity, on the societal as well as the individual level (Fligstein 2000). It affects individuals differently, and Favell (2007) highlights that mobile and transnational elites in Europe may de-nationalise as they move between different countries, but that it does not per se mean that they are Europeanised.

The rapid European integration in the economic, social and political spheres has resulted in a Europeanisation of behaviour (Díez Medrano 2008). Migration and mobility are indicators of (and contributing to) Europeanisation, and for many EU citizens these are considered among the most important advantages of the EU

membership (Díez Medrano 2008). Within the EU, a large number of people have moved from Central and Eastern Europe towards the West. During the ten years following the EU enlargement in 2004, there was a net inflow of five million migrants from Central and Eastern Europe to the old member states (Fihel et al. 2015). A migration flow from southern European countries northwards has also taken place, especially in the wake of the financial crisis. These migration flows have resulted in increased diversity in terms of culture, ethnicity and religion (Fligstein, Polyakova & Sandholtz 2012). The considerable enlargement of the European Union eastwards in 2004 and 2007 reconfirmed the Europeanness for Central and Eastern European countries, and hence was a driver to the Europeanisation.

3.1.6 Initiatives to form a European identity

EU officials often emphasise the importance of "bringing the Union closer to its citizens" and "giving people a sense of belonging to the Community" (Shore 2006a:710), which has been used to legitimise collective action on the European level (Kuhn 2019). European institutions have pushed for the development of a common European identity through certain initiatives. The most famous is probably the student mobility programme Erasmus, named after the Dutch philosopher and renaissance humanist Desiderius Erasmus, allowing students and academic staff to spend time at a university in another country. Fostering European identity among young Europeans was one of the aims of the Erasmus programme, launched in 1987. Ever since, more than ten million people have participated in the programme (European Commission 2020a). This, as well as financing research centres and think-tanks that are focusing on European studies, are examples of identity-creating efforts of the EU institutions (Shore 2006a).

The EU has also been working extensively on promoting European symbolism. Establishing symbols of Europe and the EU, including harmonised car number plates, driving licenses, passports, and introducing a European anthem and "European Capitals of Culture", are examples of how the institutions have been trying to push for European integration and unification (Shore 1996). One of the most significant examples of a symbol of a united Europe is the establishment of a common currency. The launch of the euro has been important for the economic integration in the EU and the common

market but has furthermore significantly contributed to the construction of Europe. The European institutions put great efforts in the symbolism of the design of the euro coins and the bank notes (Shore 2013).

Garton-Ash (1998) argues that the name "European Union" manifests what these institutions are "meant to be" rather than what they "are", meaning that it is not an actual union yet. Similarly, White (2012) calls the European identity an illusion, invented to respond to a need, while this identity actually does not exist. The European Commission has identified lack of awareness of a common and shared European identity and cultural heritage among EU citizens as a problem (Shore 1996), but it has proven difficult to develop a common culture and identity through a top-down approach. Shore writes about the contradicting presentation of European culture and identity by the EU institutions where it is "portrayed simultaneously as a transcendental historical given founded upon 'fundamental values' that are distinctly 'European', and at the same time as something so insipid and non-existent in the mind's eye of ordinary Europeans that it has to be created instrumentally by elites, 'using culture as a vehicle'" (Shore 2006b:20). Despite efforts from the EU institutions, the top-down identity formation initiatives have hence not been very successful in enhancing the identification with Europe among European citizens (Bergbauer 2018).

Thus, it can be discussed whether the European identity, as seen by the EU institutions, is an artificial creation formed in order to enhance its *raison d'être*. In addition, the success of these efforts can be scrutinised. Saurugger and Thatcher (2019) suggest that EU institutions have had limited success in the construction of an EU political identity, as a result of existing national identities as well as coexisting rival political identities. White (2012) argues that the terms "being European" and "identifying with Europe" have been misused, as they often refer to public attitudes towards EU institutions and support for European integration, which is different from the concept of European identity. In a similar way, using "attitudes towards Europe" to measure support to the EU in surveys can be misleading, and a way by a European elite to gain support for European integration. For the EU institutions, speaking about "Europe" rather than "the EU" has hence been part of a strategy (Haller & Ressler 2006).

3.1.7 A privileged sub-culture?

It is argued that the development of European integration and the formation of the European Union since the 1950s have been designed by and for a political (and possibly economic) elite. The political elite across Europe is among the most positive towards European integration (Conti 2018), and those who consider themselves as upper class are more likely to be attached to the EU than those defining themselves as part of lower economic classes (European Commission 2018). A cleavage between the mobile, privileged elites in Europe that generally identify strongly with Europe and the EU, and the less privileged groups from lower socio-economic classes that to a greater extent identify with nation states, can hence be discerned (Fligstein 2008; Verhaegen et al. 2017). Some argue that the European elite has very different opinions on Europe than ordinary citizens, and that only the privileged socio-economic class that benefits from the current set-up of European integration has a European perspective and horizon (Haller 2008). There is however limited empirical evidence that those who individually benefit from the EU identify more with Europe (Risse 2010).

Socialisation with fellow Europeans tends to affect the feelings towards and identification with Europe and the EU, but the effects and the magnitude differ across Europe. Socialisation, networking and communication with European colleagues have an especially significant effect on the elites of the newer member states of the EU, for whom a strong link between intensive contacts with EU representatives and European networks on the one hand, and Euroenthusiasm on the other, has been identified (Matonyte & Šumskas 2017).

Robert Schuman himself was a transnational individual. German by birth he became a French citizen in 1919 after Alsace-Lorraine was returned to France as part of the Treaty of Versailles. He hence had a personal experience of different European countries. Some studies suggest a positive relationship between transnational solidarity and level of identification with Europe (Ciornei 2014). People with high education and a broad interest in society and political affairs tend to identify themselves strong with the EU than other groups. They further develop a feeling of a belongingness to a pan-European elite based on shared cultural believes (Best, Lengyel & Verzichelli 2012).

Maybe Europeanism nowadays is a privileged sub-culture, ideologically pushing for ever more integration? Shore writes that ”what we are witnessing in the case of the

EU could be described as the 'Europeanisation of Europe', or perhaps 'Europe's colonization of itself' – although in this case it is EU elites that occupy the colonising role" (Shore 1999:63). But are the elites in Brussels actually identifying with Europe to a greater extent than other Europeans and, if so, what does this identification entail? This thesis aims at answering these questions.

3.2 Expatriates in Brussels

3.2.1 Transnationalism and cosmopolitanism in Europe

The world has shrunk through globalisation and enhanced communication, and the meaning of national boundaries and borders is changing, creating concepts such as "global culture" (Smith 1990) and "world culture" (Hannerz 1990). Bauman identified the continuous change as "postmodernity" and used the term "liquid modernity" to describe the constant mobility and change in modern society as regards economics, relationships, identities, etcetera, in contrast to a "solid modernity" of the past (Bauman 2000). Augé used the term "supermodernity" to describe the present time, arguing that there rather is an excess of modernity than a post-modernity, focusing on time, space (as well as non-place) and individuality (Augé 1995). Modernity can hence be said to have created unexpected settings and new paths for life choices, and expatriates can be seen as examples of a liquid modernity (Bauman 2000).

Migration results in transnational social fields as migrants remain links with their country of origin and other places (Paerregaard 2008). Transnationalism has developed new kind of communities stretching across borders, that affect phenomena such as identity and a sense of belonging (Molina & Rodríguez-García 2018). Anderson suggests that specific communities, based on nationalism, are imagined. Since they are popularised in media and by politicians, these imagined communities push for comradeship and fraternity to be used as a tool of power (Anderson 1983), which can be applied also to trans-national communities.

Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) differentiate between different kinds of transnational practices: "ways of being" and "ways of belonging". The former refers to

actual practices and social relations that transnational people are engaged in, whereas the latter is linked to identities and self-perception as a result of conscious connections to a particular group. Transnational persons combine these both ways individually (Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004).

Migration may require, or lead to, a certain cultural openness, implying increased interest in engaging in and connecting with individuals and experiences representing cultural diversity (Roudometof 2005). This openness is linked to cosmopolitanism, which can be defined as a state of mind characterised by deterritorialisation of social identity (Hannerz 1990). In a globalised society, where many individuals live a mobile, transnational lifestyle, cosmopolitanism is a relevant term. This is especially the case for people that refer to themselves as "world citizens" and have cross-cultural interests and values (Grinstein & Wathieu 2012).

Cosmopolitanism implies a flexible attitude towards difference and "a search for contrast rather than uniformity – the allure of elsewhere and Otherness" (Salazar 2021:4). This is created through a cosmopolitanisation process that affects the thinking and acting of individuals, implies an increased global consciousness, and has an impact on their comprehension of nation state and nationality (Beck 2006). Social and professional interactions in a culturally diverse setting further enhance the cosmopolitan identity formation process (Mao & Shen 2015).

Many migrants possess a certain "cosmopolitan capital" (Hannerz 1990), but less privileged migration groups, such as refugees, maybe not possess cultural and economic capital linked with a cosmopolitan life (Nava 2002). Cosmopolitanism is mainly associated with a high level of cultural capital, which often can be found among globally mobile professionals, including expatriates.

When speaking about transnationalism in Europe, it is important to keep in mind that most Europeans do not move from the country where they originate. In 2017, merely 3.3 percent of the total population in the EU were nationals of another EU country than where they resided (Marchand, Fajth & Siegel 2019).

3.2.2 The expatriate – a peculiar group of migrants

As communication tools develop, languages become global, and notably English is accepted as a working language in an increasing number of places and sectors, the obstacles to take up a professional duty abroad are reduced. Hence, globalisation spurs trans-national workforce mobility. High-skilled, internationally mobile people working abroad are sometimes referred to as expatriates, or simply "expats". Globalisation has pushed for an increase in the number of expatriates around the world (Bolino 2007).

The word expatriate originates from the Latin words of "ex" (out of) and "patria" (fatherland, country). Expatriates work or study in a foreign country, independently or sent by an organisation (Grinstein & Wathieu 2012), traditionally a government (diplomacy), an international organisation, or a multinational company. There is a tendency to see them as a transnational capitalist elite class (Fechter 2007). Expats could be compared with Florida´s definition of the "creative class", as they are high-skilled workers with an international network bringing wealth to a city and demanding a rich selection of culture to meet their diverse and individualistic lifestyle (Florida 2002). To what extent and in what way the general expatriate is "creative" could however be discussed.

Expats in Brussels can be both wealthy Eurocrats and young Europeans of the Erasmus generation pursuing unpaid internships. They are all international, but not necessarily wealthier than their Belgian hosts. In Brussels, the expat community does not only consist of a small elite, but of a large community that constitutes a significant share of the population.

Cohen wrote a pioneer work, "Expatriate Communities" (1977), and later published a range of pieces on expatriates, elaborating on the foreigner that leaves the habitat but never "goes local" in the new environment, and hence lives in a state of "permanent liminality" (Cohen 1984). This builds upon the Turner's (1969) ideas of liminality as an intermediate state of being "in between", related to the middle stage of a rite of passage, or more general where individuals are striped from the usual identity and possibly in a social or personal transformation,

As subjects of study, expatriates form an example of "studying up", as Laura Nader (1969) made a case for, in order to bring a larger pattern of globalisation effects into

view. Many academic works on expatriates have focused on western expatriates in the non-Western world. This generally implies that challenges to integration are significant, and that there are major economic differences between the expatriate and the host society.

Expatriates can be assigned or self-initiated. Assigned expatriate means that the parent organisation or company sends out an employee to a foreign country. On the other hand, self-initiated expatriates make a move on their own and pursue an international career without the direct support of an employer (Przytula 2015). Given that the move results from one's own interest, the self-initiated expatriates are likely to be more satisfied and stay longer than other expatriates (Selmer & Lauring 2012). The self-initiated expatriate has often had more individual and personal motives for being an expatriate, such as an interest in travel, languages, as well as love and other relationships. This kind of expats tend to have more long-term perspectives on their sojourn abroad (Przytula 2015).

The stereotype of the expat is a high-skilled worker from the West working abroad for a limited period, enjoying good working conditions and a high salary, and socialising with other expats in an international, mostly English-speaking, environment while having limited contact with the local. Expatriates are often perceived as having a cosmopolitan lifestyle and identity, which may imply being open, adaptable and globalised (Grinstein & Wathieu 2012), and are said to be characterised by cultural adaptability and nomadic ability (Thompson & Tambyah 1999).

The expatriate is, as Fechter points out, a "peculiar tribe" (2007:156). Many of them struggle with questions about loyalty, belonging, identity and future, thinking about who they are, where they belong and where they will go next. A significant portion of uncertainty is part of their everyday life, and in many cases the time-horizon for planning is short. These questions are individual, and the expat society can be seen as very individualistic. What expatriate especially have in common is their current geographic habitat (Fechter 2007).

Expatriates are, in certain ways, forerunners of globalisation, mobility, and transnationalism. Studies have shown that communication skills, cultural fit and previous experience of being an expat are features that correlate with being a "successful expatriate", although it is difficult to measure and hard to know whether

the relationship is factual (Holopainen & Björkman 2005). The expats have better possibilities and options than other economic migrants to deal with acculturation and develop a trans-national identity (Adams & Van de Vijver 2015). They often have fragmented and multi-layered identities, where the national one may be one of several layers (Bochove & Engbersen 2015).

Socialisation is part of settling down in one's new home town, and creating professional and social networks is hence essential for expatriates arriving to a new duty station, given that many lack friends and family in the host country at the point of departure. The social network can play an important role in terms of emotional, instrumental and informational support to expatriates, and is crucial for their well-being (Bader & Schuster 2015; Wang 2002). Therefore, expatriates start building networks, with fellow countrymen, with expatriates from other countries, and with the locals. The cultural diversity and cross-cultural interconnectedness within these networks contribute to the multicultural identities within expatriate communities (Mao & Shen 2015).

Expatriates can be cosmopolitan in the sense of "non-nationals", i.e., downplaying national characteristics as well as cultural differences. Meanwhile, they can highlight certain national "cultural features" appreciated in their own community. Furthermore, pointing out the difference between the "cosmopolitan" expatriate group and mono-cultural national groups (i.e., the other) is common (Skovgaard-Smith & Poulfelt 2018).

Children growing up in a country other than the one of their nationality, sometimes referred to as "third culture kids", are increasing in numbers. Third culture kids grow up with high and frequent mobility, mixed with transition of cultures, languages, and social spheres. These children have a complicated relationship to places (Pollock & Van Reken 2009). The notion of not living at "home", or not even having a "home" which they feel belonging and loyalty to, is haunting many third culture kids as they grow older (Triebel 2015). "Where are you from?" is a ubiquitous question among newly acquainted people, no matter where they meet. We tend to have a geographical place in mind, somewhere where one feels "at home" (Triebel 2015). Many third culture kids continue with a mobile lifestyle of some sort in their adult life (Cottrell & Useem 1994). In this context, Triebel (2015) questions Augé's (1995) ideas of non-places and suggests that third culture kids, growing up without a "home", can find "non-

places" such as airports familiar and reassuring, hence like a proper "place". This would mean that some places that are "non-places" for most people actually are "places" for others.

3.2.3 Acculturation and integration in the host society

Integrating into a new home, a new neighbourhood, a new town or country entails an adaptative process. Uncertainty and the lack of stable social forms and institutions requires flexibility, adaptability, and possibility to quickly change commitment, loyalties and geographic location, as well as skills in calculating and planning opportunities (Bauman 2007). This is a reality for many expats, having left their home, not knowing whether they will return or not, feeling loyalty towards both the host country, their home country, and the international community in parallel (Korstanje 2009).

The integration process, as the societal view on what integration is and whether it is needed, differs amongst migration groups. A privileged migration group like expatriates working in European affairs in Brussels is probably viewed differently from refugees and other less privileged groups. Due to their mobility and economic privileges, expatriates are not dependent on integration into the host country in the same way as other economic migrants. Meanwhile, their economic power influences the political and social situation in the host society.

When migrants move to a place characterised by another prevailing culture, a cultural exchange process starts. Adjusting to this new cultural realm can be defined as "acculturation" (Berry 1997). This process – the acculturation experience – can generate practical and emotional difficulties, which Berry (2006) refers to as "acculturative stress".

Berry's acculturation model claims that migrants' interaction with the host society can be defined through four acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation (Berry & Sam 1997). Specifically related to the expatriate, Adams and Van de Vijver (2015) have identified three antecedents regarding the acculturation: cultural distance, the support network of the expatriate and the purpose of the expatriate sojourn. Cultural distance refers to the difference between the

culture of the host society and that of the expatriates' countries of origin, especially as regards cultural practices and language. Purpose of the expatriation refers to initial reasons of taking up the assignment abroad, or for the employer to assign someone. The support network of expatriates includes family, colleagues and friends, including people of the same nationality.

Expatriates and other migrants are not only affected by their new country of residence; they also are agents in shaping the city and society they live in (Glick Schiller & Schmidt 2015). Expatriates can work as a globalising engine, resulting in economic prosperity and investments in the host country. Sometimes this international influx can change sociological patterns as members of an international community interact with each other as well as with the locals. The adaptation process can be psychological and sociocultural, where the latter implies identification with the host society and learning about culture and habits through interaction (Ward & Kennedy 1999). Since interaction is a vital ingredient in integration, the locals' attitude towards the migrants is a crucial factor in the cultural adaptation process (Berry 1997). Having a social network with the local population in the host country can enhance the feeling of belonging as well as the wellbeing of the expatriates (Bader & Schuster 2015) and is a crucial element to embed into local mainstream culture (Mao & Shen 2015).

Cosmopolitans are not least able to move between cultures and get to know these more superficially than engaging deeply in new cultures and societies (Hannerz 1990). This "broad" openness could be useful to get to know new cultures at the superficial level, but not to get to know a culture in depth, which potentially could cause limited integration in the host society amongst expatriates. The meeting between the expatriate and the local is often a complex one. Expats are not seldom critical towards the host society, and among expats it is not unusual to complain on or joke about the country they live in and its inhabitants. This generates a certain solidarity between them, but makes their integration with the wider society more complicated.

3.3 The expatriate as a pioneer of European integration

3.3.1. Brussels – a European melting pot

Brussels, with its concentration of institutions and headquarters and the *de facto* status as the political capital of Europe, has attracted foreigners for the last 60 years. Belgium's capital has developed from a sleepy city to a vibrant international metropolis. Expatriates in Brussels come for a period of time that can be intended to be short, but may ultimately last for decades. The expats live in a mix of national culture (that embodies those beliefs, learned behaviour patterns, values, and institutions that are shared by citizens of the same nation) and international culture (which extends beyond and across national boundaries). On the one hand, they may want to claim their European and international identity (especially when in their home country), and on the other, they may be proud of their roots (especially when abroad). This produces an interesting mix of Europeanism, local patriotism, and nationalism. In this multilingual environment, language plays an important role in identities. In Brussels, where English and French are lingua franca, using the native language – the vernacular – is a way to show your roots and feel at home.

Brussels has attracted many economic migrants from different parts of Europe, particularly in the wake of the financial crisis in Europe starting in 2008. Many of these migrants come to Brussels not to work for the EU or within European affairs, but rather to find a job in the service sector. Given the international custom base there are good opportunities for shops and restaurants to specialise in products of a particular country or region. These places further attract people from their respective countries or regions they represent. There is hence a multiplier effect on Europeans coming to Brussels. Meanwhile, Brussels has become one of the wealthiest cities in Europe. In 2018, Brussels capital region was one of four regions in the EU (together with Luxembourg and the Irish regions of Eastland and Midland (Dublin)) whose GDP per capita was over twice the EU average (European Commission 2020b).

Brussels is a multicultural city, segregated along social as well as ethnic lines (Bousetta, Favell & Martiniello 2017; Haandrikman et al. 2019) and a city of paradoxes. Economically highly unequal, international yet local, and metropolitan as well as

provincial. Brussels is also the capital of a country that is divided between the French-speaking Wallonia, the Dutch-speaking[1] Flanders, and a minor German-speaking community.

Given its supranational and intergovernmental features and *sui generis* nature, the EU has a unique democratic set-up. It is more than anything else a bureaucratic project (Nicolaïdis & Watson 2016). More than 40,000 officials and non-permanent staff are working for the EU institutions in Brussels. Spinelli wrote about these "Eurocrats" already in 1966 (Spinelli 1966), but the term had already been coined a few years earlier. Georgakakis and Rowell argue that Eurocrats tend to symbolise "a system of actors with seemingly convergent interests acting as a reified entity" but point out that the definition varies from focusing on merely a small group of permanent civil servants employed by the EU institutions to, more broadly, the political elite negotiating in Brussels (Georgakakis & Rowell 2013:3).

Eurocracy is not limited to the EU institutions' bureaucracy but includes a broader professional diversity of actors who work for Europe, including lobbyists, business leaders, politicians, and advisors (Georgakakis & Rowell 2013). There is an abundance of think-tanks in Brussels, employing researchers and experts. Many of them receive financial support from EU institutions, private foundations, and multinational companies (Aldrin 2013). The vast European lobbying system can be explained as the relationships between EU institutions and various interest groups. It is based on a "system of exchange" where the EU institutions, such as the Commission and the Parliament, need information and expertise that can be provided by the interest groups, while these organisations need political and financial support. This system can be called an "elite pluralism". Lobbyism at the European level has been present since the early days of post-Second World War European integration (Courty & Michel 2013). Transparency International estimated that there were around 30,000 lobbyists in Brussels in 2016. In contrast, the voluntary EU lobby register declared approximately 10,000 organisations registered with a total of more than 90,000 people involved in

[1] The Dutch spoken in Belgium is sometimes referred to as Flemish, Flemish Dutch, Belgian Dutch or Southern Dutch. In this thesis I use the term Dutch.

their lobbying activities towards EU institutions (Transparency International 2016). The lobbyists often have personal contacts with the ones they are supposed to lobby in the EU institutions. They often live in the same areas, their children know each other, and they are part of the same European community (Courty & Michel 2013).

3.3.2 Personifying European identity

Expatriates in Brussels working with European affairs can be perceived as personifying a "European identity." They come from one country, may have a relationship with a person of another nationality, speak different European languages, and work with people of yet other nationalities. As mobile individuals, they are seen as pioneers of European integration (Recchi & Favell 2009). Furthermore, in many cases, their children grow up in this environment. Georgakakis (2013) uses the term "homo communautaurus" to describe people who grew up in a Eurocrat family in Brussels, went to European school, and pursued a career in the European institutions.

People from different European countries going to Brussels for work in the field of European affairs are not average Europeans. Usually, they already speak a couple of European languages and have a CV with an international touch, including internships and studies abroad, upon arrival. Many expatriates hence have experienced a European socialisation prior to moving to Brussels (Suvarierol 2007; 2011).

As an expat in Brussels, it is possible to live in a "bubble". Inspired by Lefebvre's theory on space, Lewicki (2017) uses the term "EU-space" – an imaginative social and cultural space comprised of EU civil servants and people working in institutions, interest groups, permanent representations of the member states to the EU etcetera. Such metaphor applies also to the term "Brussels bubble", which Busby (2013) uses, and which is widely recognised in Brussels. In this study, I mainly use the term "Eurobubble" to refer to the community working with European affairs in Brussels.

EU civil servants are (and possibly to an even greater extent used to be) part of a common ideology and socio-political construction based on the production and reproduction of a "European capital", having specific EU knowledge, a certain economic and social status, a multinational network, etcetera. This background suggests a symbolic capital that sometimes gages an authority to speak in the name of

Europe (Georgakakis 2017). The permanent Eurocrats are in a position to "legitimately represent a common European interest" (Georgakakis 2013:230) as well as a European identity.

Anderson (1983), in his discussion on imagined communities, refers to a comradeship and fraternity that can be used as a tool of power. Living in a pan-European bubble far away from one's national context, this imagined community could possibly apply to an expat community, where it could be argued that there is a comradeship in being "international" or away from home. As regards European identity, transnational ties and economic integration could create an imagined community that sees the EU institutions as more important than the national ones.

Among the expatriates in Brussels, adapting to a "European lifestyle" can be said to be an example of cultural Europeanisation. Observing expatriates in Brussels, a number of examples of top-down Europeanisation can be discerned as regards politics as well as identity, behaviour and culture. Adopting political ideas of deepening the European integration and supporting strong supranational institutions, could examples on Europeanisation on the individual level.

The "bottom-up" approach of Europeanisation is more difficult to define. One could ask whether there is an "ideal European" despite that the EU is constantly changing as time passes by. Furthermore, one could ask the homogeneity of the concept across different member states. Lewicki claims that a cultural power he defines as the "Eurostyle" is held firmly by citizens from old, Western member states, particularly the founding members (Lewicki 2016; 2017). Expatriates from newer member states may have a different position in this hierarchy. For example, the Poles are learning French, Spanish and German; but the French, Spanish and German are not learning Polish. This suggests that Europeanisation on the individual level for expatriates is influenced by their country and culture of origin, as well as economic and cultural power hierarchies within the EU, that are manifested in Brussels.

3.3.3 The Eurocrat and the Eurobubble: forming the European Union and its policies

Assuming that the human nature is cooperative and rational, Haas suggested in 1958 that the European cooperation could be explained by a step-by-step integration, which implies a gradual transfer of competences to supranational institutions pushed by a spill-over effect from one area to another (Haas 1958). This theoretical framework to explain European integration is known as neo-functionalism, and suggests that a "political community", defined by loyalty among groups and individuals towards the central political institutions, i.e., the European institutions, would emerge over time (Nugent 2006).

Civil servants and officials develop loyalty towards the supranational level in the decision-making process. European loyalty and preferences emerge, and amongst people living in Brussels for a long time, the European identity might become stronger than the national one. The European elite develops a pan-European norm and tries to spread these ideas to the elites on the national level (Jensen 2019). Thus, the European elite is considered to push the agenda of the European Commission (that wants more power and hence more supranationalism). Commission officials are expected to hold a European perspective, and the socialisation of the European elites, holding European norms and ideas rather than national ones, would hence push for federalism (less politicised and more technocratic). Haas (1958) concluded that "group pressure will spill over into the federal sphere and thereby add to the integrative impulse", and neo-functionalism has generally been regarded as an elite approach to European integration (Niemann & Schmitter 2009). Possibly this is valid also for ideas and identity.

The organisational set-up has changed, or at least developed, over time and while the power of the EU institutions has grown. The EU policy process is based on a multi-level governance structure. Political, economic and social elites on the national arena are deeply involved in the European integration process, both as driving agents and as responsible representatives towards citizens on the national arena (Haller 2008). Nevertheless, the issue of democratic deficit in the EU is often reoccurring in public debate, particularly on the member state level. Likewise, the distance regarding the European integration project between European politicians and bureaucrats contra the

general national EU citizen is often criticised (Haller 2008). Another feature is the increasing lack of trust among Europeans towards Brussels, as well as towards politics and politicians in general, also on the national arena. This can be manifested in low voter turnouts, in the rise of populism parties, and in the relatively wide-spread popular support to leave the EU in certain member states (Colliot-Thélène 2016). Kuhn (2019) argues that neo-functionalism and other European integration theories as a result of their focus on elites and rational interest-seeking actors have underestimated the power of identity politics and populistic movements as an obstacle to European integration.

Civil servants of the EU institutions are regulated to be merely bureaucrats, but there is quite some space for interpretation in the course of the policy-making processes, providing them *de-facto* influence (Romanyshyn & Neuhold 2013). The EU institutions are still fairly young, and changing, as the EU has enlarged (Shore 2007). Several have applied theories developed by Bourdieu on research on European Affairs (Georgakakis & Rowell 2013; Fligstein 2008; Lewicki 2017). His work on bureaucracy suits well on the situation in Brussels, given that he has been considering different institutional positions and resources, including different actors such as civil servants, experts, lobbyists and politicians, and how they act to pursue their institutional interests. (Georgakakis & Rowell 2013).

Generally, the criticism towards "powerful Eurocrats" comes from Eurosceptic sources, but sometimes also from within the system. In 2006, the then Commissioner for Enterprise and Industry, Günter Verheugen, criticised civil servants of the Commission for being arrogant and having far too much power, making it difficult for the political leaders to control them (Bauer & Ege 2013). The European Parliament has during recent years steadily increased its influence and power in the EU policy-making process as legislative actor as well as supervisor of the executive, but these are elected politicians. Meanwhile, the Council is defining the political process of the EU more in detail. This implies that the Commission has experienced a significant loss of power, albeit the influence as agenda-setter should not be underestimated (Bauer & Ege 2013).

Civil servants of the European Union institutions hence not only work with EU policies, they also form them. However, Brussels is also full of national, regional, and local administrations, as well as universities, non-governmental organisations (NGO), and companies that have hired staff with EU competencies, many based in Brussels,

and many with a similar background. They, as well as all the lobbyists, are all participating in the Brussels policy-making machinery (Haller 2008).

3.4 Research questions

As I have argued in this chapter, the EU is based on the notion of promoting peace through political and economic interdependence. The founding fathers of the EU imagined that as cooperation grows, the identification with and loyalties to the European institutions would follow. This has not been the case for the ordinary European. Europeans working with European affairs in Brussels however constitute a special case in this regard. They live in a European environment, are economically dependent on the EU, and take part in the EU policy-making. Hence, expatriates in Brussels are an interesting group to explore further regarding their special characteristics as well as their attitudes towards EU integration and their identification with Europe.

This chapter has presented a theoretical framework, which provides an instrument to investigate the expatriate's world (mainly European citizens working in the field of European affairs) in Brussels. From this theoretical background, I derive four research topics that I will address in this thesis. First, the thesis explores who the expatriates in Brussels are, their characteristics, and the main reasons why they settle in Brussels. Second, it explores expatriates' daily lives in Brussels, where many of them stay for years or decades. I investigate how they socialise and their relationship with and integration into their host-society. I examine how they identify with Belgium and to what extent they perceive Brussels as "home". Third, "Europe" is omnipresent in Brussels, and in the everyday lives of these expatriates. I investigate how expatriates in Brussels identify with Europe, how this identification impacts their national identities, and how nationalities manifest among expatriates in Brussels. Finally, the thesis analyses the expatriates' attitudes towards the EU and how they develop over time. I further explore how a recent rise in Euroscepticism and populism across Europe has affected expatriates' identification with Europe and opinions regarding the EU.

More precisely, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What makes expatriates working within EU affairs settle and stay in Brussels?

2. How do expatriates integrate into their host society, and to what degree do they consider Brussels to be "home"?

3. In what way, and to what extent, do expatriates in Brussels identify with Europe, and how do their European identities relate to their national identities?

4. To what extent do expatriates in Brussels advocate European integration within the framework of the EU, and how do Eurosceptic tendencies across Europe affect the attitude of the expatriates towards the EU as well as their identification with Europe?

From the onset, regarding the first question and based on the theoretical framework, we would expect that expatriates working within EU affairs decide to settle in Brussels partly for ideological reasons and partly for the career opportunities. The decision is furthermore likely to result from these individuals being mobile, transnational and cosmopolitan, and moving to the capital of Europe may include expectations of status and class that an expat life can imply.

For the second question, on integration in Belgium, we could expect that forerunners of globalisation and pioneers of European integration would quickly adapt and integrate into the host society. Cosmopolitans that are flexible, open-minded, and equipped with linguistic skills would presumably not have major difficulties integrating in a capital in Western Europe. Meanwhile, cosmopolitan people tend to be good in moving between cultures, but not necessarily to deeply indulge a culture, which possibly could be an obstacle to integration. The length of the sojourn as well as social and family networks are likely to be relevant factors in the integration process.

For question three, we would believe that the expatriates in the Eurobubble in Brussels would identify with Europe, and probably increasingly so the longer they stay in Brussels and the more they socialise among Europeans from other countries than their own. Meanwhile, their identification with their countries of origin probably remains, and the two layers of identity may exist in parallel, intertwined in line with the marble cake model, depending on their individual background and context.

Lastly, regarding question four, it is plausible that the expatriates in Brussels working in the field of European affairs are strongly advocating the EU and its institutions. There is not much literature on how the Eurosceptic tendencies across Europe affect the Eurobubble in Brussels as regards their attitude towards the EU and identification with Europe. Hence this is a question worth exploring.

The four research questions are addressed respectively in Chapters 6 through 9. The findings and results related to these research questions are concluded in Section 10.2.

First, however, I will introduce the research methodology adopted in this study in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5 I will describe Brussels – "the field" – from an ethnographic perspective, as well as present several life stories of informants in depth, to personalise the "European expatriate in Brussels", which will serve as an introduction to the ethnography.

4. Methodology

> "In my lifetime all our problems have come from mainland Europe and all the solutions have come from the English-speaking nations across the world."
>
> Margaret Thatcher, in the margin of the UK Conservative Party Conference 1999 (MacAskill 1999).

4.1 Research method

From a qualitative approach, this study aims to understand the lives and identities of expatriates living and working in Brussels. The research is based on fieldwork in Brussels carried out between 2015 and 2020. Every year I did a number of longer and shorter sojourns in Brussels of a total length of approximately four and a half months. Data was collected through ethnographic fieldwork, including semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and informal conversations.

A major activity in the field has been to meet with expatriates and spend time at places frequented by them, in order to pursue "deep hanging out" (Clifford 1997:54). These include restaurants, bars, cafés, cultural institutions, public spaces, private parties and premises of the EU institutions. I have also participated in meetings in the Council of the European Union and at the European External Action Service. Through my formal and informal interviews (see below), I obtained information on different places where it could be worth spending time. While visiting these, I observed how people acted and socialised, which languages they spoke, how they were dressed, etcetera This provided me with an understanding of expatriates' everyday lives and ways to socialise.

The European quarter in Brussels is ultimately relatively small, and one keeps returning to the same places and bumping into the same people in the streets. I also

spent much time in the areas of Brussels where expatriates typically reside, at bars, restaurants, and cafés. These venues were good places to obtain new contacts.

In-depth interviews with expatriates, as well as with a few Belgians (see Section 4.2), have been the other primary source of information for this study. I interviewed a total of 29 persons on one or several occasions on topics ranging from life experiences, national and European identity formation, and their opinion about the EU.

During the fieldwork, I also communicated with expatriates and others in more informal settings. These conversations have been crucial to understand the field and the lives of expatriates in Brussels and played an essential role in making the interview guide. I kept notes of observations and insights from the field.

4.2 Sample

I had in-depth interviews with a total of 29 persons (14 women and 15 men) between November 2015 and March 2020 (see Table 1). I recruited these respondents following purposive sampling techniques and sometimes snowball techniques. The main criterion for recruitment was that respondents had to be working as expatriates in Brussels. Because of my close relationship with Brussels since several years, I already had a considerable pool of potential informants: some I knew or had heard of, some were acquaintances of acquaintances, and some I met while conducting participant observation.

Table 1: List of respondents

No	Pseudonym[2]	Gender	Nationality	Age	Profession
1	Harry	Male	British	30-34	Journalist
2	Anastasia	Female	Italian/Greek	30-34	Medical doctor
3	Oliver	Male	Irish	30-34	Civil servant, European Parliament
4	Thomas	Male	German	30-34	Lobbyist
5	James	Male	British/French	35-39	Civil servant, European Commission
6	Sophie	Female	French	30-34	Civil servant, European Commission
7	Penelope	Female	Greek	30-34	Corporate lawyer
8	Manon	Female	Belgian	30-34	Food industry expert
9	Louise	Female	Belgian	30-34	NGO worker
10	Alexandra	Female	Swedish	35-39	Civil servant, European Commission
11	Isabelle	Female	French	30-34	Civil servant, European Commission
12	Vegar	Male	Norwegian	35-39	Lobbyist
13	Carolina	Female	Argentinian/Italian	35-39	Culture consultant
14	Zoe	Female	Greek	35-39	Lawyer
15	Marie	Female	French	30-34	Communication expert
16	Konstantinos	Male	Greek	35-39	Lobbyist
17	Alice	Female	Belgian/ British	30-34	Civil servant, European Council
18	Riccardo	Male	Italian	35-39	Lobbyist
19	Leo	Male	British/French	30-34	Journalist
20	Wolfgang	Male	German	40-44	Lawyer
21	Hans	Male	German	30-34	Civil servant, European Commission
22	Sara	Female	Spanish	35-39	Lobbyist
23	Gustav	Male	Swedish	30-34	Member state diplomat
24	Paul	Male	German	35-39	Member state diplomat
25	Malin	Female	Swedish	25-29	Member state diplomat
26	Oscar	Male	Swedish	40-44	Seconded to the European External Action Service
27	Anna	Female	Bulgarian	35-39	Civil servant, European Commission
28	Boris	Male	Bulgarian	35-39	Civil servant, European Commission
29	Johannes	Male	German	40-44	Seconded to the European External Action Service

[2] All names are pseudonyms to protect the identities of the informants.

I decided not to limit the study to citizens of EU member states. I also included Europeans with dual and triple citizenships, of which one is non-European. In addition, I interviewed one Norwegian, to provide an insight in the view on the EU and the identification with Europe from the perspective of a European from a non-EU country. In order to better understand the integration of expatriates in Belgium, I further interviewed two Belgian persons who were not currently expatriates (see Table 1). These persons grew up in Brussels but had lived abroad being expatriates themselves and were thus used to an international environment. Including these divergent cases helped me to obtain a more complete understanding of the expatriate in Brussels.

Apart from this variation in origins in an EU or non-EU country, I intended to maximise variation in the sample in terms of gender, nationality, and occupation. As Table 1 shows, the interviewees represent a good gender parity and a wide variation in nationalities, even though it was more difficult to find expats from some countries than others. All interviewees were in the age span of late 20s to early 40s, and the vast majority (86 percent) were between 30 and 40 years old. I wanted to focus on this age span to be able to analyse different stories of people coming to Brussels approximately at the same time, belonging to more or less the same generations. In most cases, the respondents worked within European affairs, as civil servants, diplomats, lobbyists, journalists, and lawyers. I interviewed two expatriates working in other fields too, intending to obtain a broader understanding of the variety of expatriates in Brussels.

I also met a number of my interviewees informally on several occasions, and in three cases, when I wanted more information, I had follow-up interviews with the same informants.

The criterion of saturation determined the number of interviews. The marginal utility of each interview decreased with time, and after 29 interviews I felt I had reached a certain data saturation, as the amount of new and relevant information provided by the last interviews was limited. Furthermore, the cases covered the diversity of the population.

It was relatively easy to identify informants who were of interest and who were willing to be interviewed. The topics addressed were not perceived as sensitive, and the

respondents were open and positive to provide information. Often, they had already been thinking about these subjects a fair amount and were interested in sharing their experiences. Their responses to my questions tended to be quite elaborate and reflexive, which allowed me to gather rich information about their lives, identities, and opinions.

4.3 The interviews

Interviews were carried out in various settings frequented by Brussels' expatriates, such as cafés, bars and restaurants, homes, and workplaces, depending upon what the respondent in question preferred. Some interviews (including follow-up interviews) were administered via telephone or videoconference, but I had in all cases met the respondent in person in Brussels before. Three interviews were carried out with more than one respondent at a time, which proved to create an interesting dynamic enriching the interviews, as they became more of a focus group. Interviews were conducted in English, French and Swedish, and in the case of the latter two, I have translated the transcriptions to English.

The semi-structured interviews followed a loose interview guide (see Annex 1) with areas and questions to cover. I started with an open question inviting informants to talk about themselves and their lives. Other questions covered why the respondents stay in Brussels, how they live and socialise, and how they integrate in Belgium. I further asked questions on how the respondents identify with Europe and their home countries, respectively, and how they reflect on their own identity, as well as their opinion on the EU. The interviews lasted between 35 and 135 minutes.

Every interview was unique, and the interviews developed in different directions, despite the same point of departure. As I was conducting interviews, I sometimes discovered new questions and areas of interest that I integrated in following interviews, meaning that the interview questions to a certain degree developed over time. One such example is the use of stereotypes among expatriates. Seventeen of the interviews were recorded, with the consent of the respondents, and the others were documented through notes and fieldwork diary. Reasons for not recording interviews were that some places

were quite noisy, and other times, I felt that the respondent would be uncomfortable even if they would give their consent. The 17 recorded interviews were transcribed. In the interview extracts presented in the text, I chose to edit the wording slightly to avoid repetitions, maintain the flow of the conversation, or correct grammatical errors.

In my analysis, I first explored the interview data case by case to reconstruct individuals' life stories and their narratives of identity construction, comparing the data to the theoretical constructs discussed in Chapter 3. I then compared the cases to detect differences and communalities and identify transversally emerging themes. Based on this comparison, I have also selected four cases which I present in depth in Chapter 5, to personalise the concept of the expatriates in Brussels' Eurobubble and show the heterogeneity of the respondents.

4.4 Positionality and ethics

In 2010, I lived in Brussels for almost one year, and have ever since visited the city a few times per year. My experiences from being an expat myself have had both advantages and disadvantages. It has been a clear advantage in terms of having pre-existing networks that helped with sampling, and the possibility to blend in. However, this proximity should be handled with care. Studying your own "tribe" generates intersections, "reflecting the tension between the roles of the detached observer and engaged participant" (Colic-Peisker 2004:84). This requires constant reflexivity on the research process and results, as well as maintaining a certain mental distance from the informants. Despite potential methodological and ethical difficulties, an insider's ethnography can be valuable (Colic-Peisker 2004), as the pre-existing knowledge can lead to greater empathy and deeper understanding. On the other hand, to study a bureaucratic elite (Shore 2007) or to "study up" (Solarino & Aguinis, 2021) is difficult in terms of gaining access and the reversed power differentials in and thus control of the interview, among other potential problems. My position as an "insider" and as an equal has been helpful in this regard. I believe that my insights and networks have been valuable in reaching interesting informants and gaining access and trust.

In all formal interviews, I have clearly stated that I was conducting research for the purpose of writing an ethnography on how expatriates live and act in Brussels. This message has generally generated interest and curiosity. All interviewees have given oral consent to participate in the study prior to the interview and, when applicable, to record it. The interviews and interviewees are subject to confidentiality. To this end, all names of respondents and the people they mentioned have been replaced with pseudonyms in the text, and in the case studies, some details have been left out to avoid individual identification.

5. An introduction to the Eurobubble

> "You're an expatriate. You've lost touch with the soil. You get precious. Fake European standards have ruined you. You drink yourself to death. You become obsessed with sex. You spend all your time talking, not working. You are an expatriate, see?"
>
> Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, 1926.

5.1 An introduction to the capital of Europe and its expatriates

Upon arrival at Brussels international airport, a sign saying "Welcome to Brussels – the heart of Europe" awaits you in the arrival hall. On the way to the exit, you pass by a tax-free shop selling the same brands of chocolate, liquor and fragrance as in airports all over the world, there is a place selling waffles, and you can order Belgian beers. And of course, French fries and chocolate. There are Belgian souvenirs. Tintin comic books and gadgets, small versions of Manneken Pis, and t-shirts with the Atomium. There is a modern railway station at the airport from which I take a train towards the city centre. The train is almost empty and must be very old. It reminds me of interrail in Eastern Europe in the early years of the century. A train conductor in his sixties approaches me and has a look at my ticket. He wears a funny hat that reminds me of the French gendarme. There is no real countryside between the airport and Brussels, but a couple of villages, and soon we are in the suburbs of Brussels. We are approaching one of the city's train stations – Gare du Midi – and the view out on the urban landscape is gloomy. I see dirty and run-down houses that seem to be built without any urban planning. There is garbage in the streets and the sky is dark. Is this really the capital of Europe? At the train station, however, there is an international feeling. You can take fast trains to London, Paris, Amsterdam and Cologne. There is

an ordinary vending machine for drinks and snacks, including two types of beer that you can buy all night long. Quite different from the Swedish state-run alcohol monopoly.

In this chapter, I will present Brussels and the expatriates living there. The chapter aims to provide an understanding of the setting in which the expatriates live and to present a number of case studies. Section 5.2 presents the city of Brussels, its geography and characteristics, as well as some history related to Brussels hosting the EU headquarters and how it has affected the town. This is followed by four case studies of expatriates in Brussels. These presentations contain longer quotes, giving the sampled individuals a possibility to present themselves. These cases have been chosen because they represent different characteristics of the Eurobubble with diverse identification with Europe and their home countries. They further show differences in their opinion on the EU as a political project, and their ideological beliefs, as well as how they integrate in Belgium as a host society. Section 5.7 summarises the chapter.

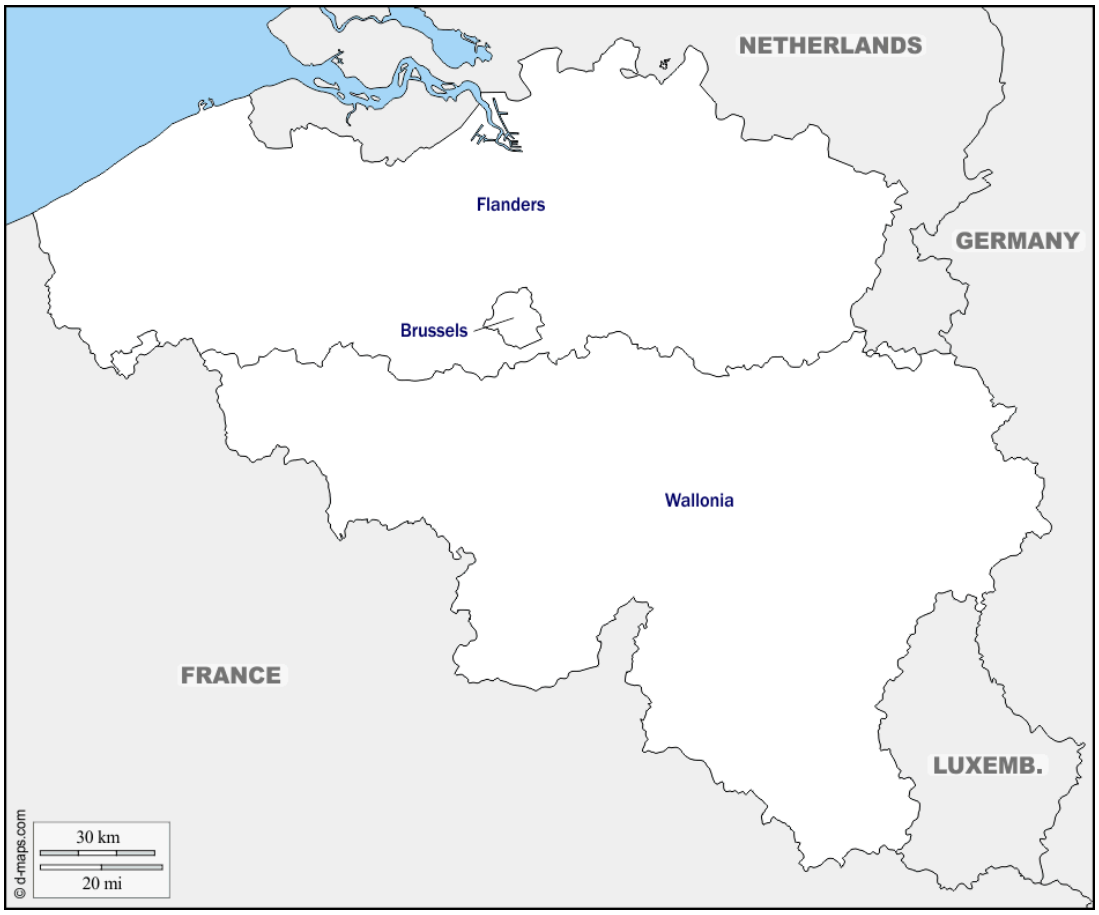
5.2 The expat geography in Brussels

Brussels is the main centre of EU politics and European affairs, as well as the headquarters of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The city hosts more than 1,000 governmental and NGOs, about 165 embassies and diplomatic missions, and around 700 multinational corporations (IBSA 2020). These institutions explain the presence of many expats in the city, not only from Europe but from all over the world.

Belgium is a federal state made up of the geographic region-states Brussels, Flanders and Wallonia (see Figure 4), as well as the linguistic French, Dutch and German community-states. There is a division of power between the overlapping states and communities. Brussels Capital Region is not only the capital of Belgium, but also the capital of the French community of Belgium as well as of Flanders (both region and community). This implies that regional capital institutions, such as the Flemish

Parliament, the Flemish government and its administration, are present in Brussels. Therefore, there are also many Belgian civil servants in the city.

Figure 4: Map of the geographic region states of Belgium



Source: d-maps.com.

The Brussels Capital Region is an agglomeration constituting of 19 municipalities (see Figure 6). The city of Brussels is one of them and is divided into nine quarters. The Capital Region is an independent region state located as an island within Flanders, where Dutch is predominantly spoken. In Brussels, however, French is the most common language. According to a survey from 2018 on languages spoken in Brussels in the home environment in which the current inhabitants grew up, 52 percent speak French, 11 percent Dutch and French, 6 percent Dutch, 10 percent French and another

language, while 21 percent speak another language (Janssens 2018). Brussels is officially a bilingual city, although English is widely used as well.

As mentioned above, 23 percent of the approximately 1.2 million inhabitants in Brussels Capital Region are immigrants from the EU, while 12 percent are immigrants from other countries. The largest foreign nationalities living in Brussels are French, Romanians, Moroccans, Turks and Italians (IBSA 2020)[3].

The EU institutions have offices at different locations in Brussels, but the so-called European quarter, or Quartier Leopold[4], is situated east of the city centre (see Figure 5). This unofficial name generally refers to the area between Parc Leopold, Parc Cinquantenaire, and Parc Bruxelles. The epicentre of the EU institutions is the Rond Point Schuman, around which the headquarters of the European Commission, the European Council, the Council of the European Union, and the European External Action Service are situated. A satellite to this epicentre is found a few hundred metres away, at the Place Luxembourg, where the European Parliament is located[5] between the Parc Leopold and Place Luxembourg, an area called Espace Leopold. It consists of two different buildings: Paul-Henri Spaak and Altiero Spinelli.

Most of the permanent representations to the EU of different countries (EU member states as well as others) are located in the European quarter, as well as offices of lobbying and PR firms, law firms, media companies, NGOs and others working within European Affairs. The area has an international flavour, and strolling around in the Parliament feels like a world of its own – possibly one of the most "European" places that exists. Next to the Parliament, the House of European History is situated, linked to and initiated by the European Parliament. What used to be a predominantly residential area has during the last 50 years become more office-oriented.

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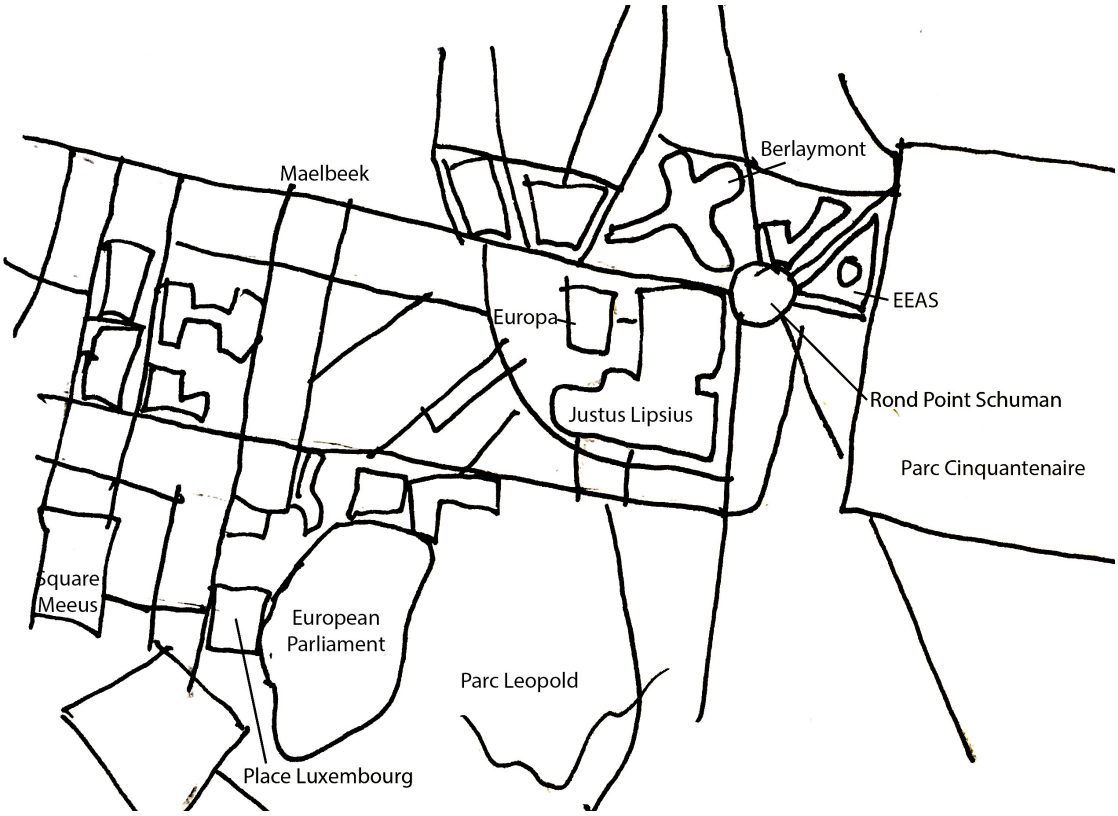
[3] This paragraph refers to people of foreign nationality that do not hold Belgian citizenship in parallel.

[4] Most places and streets in Brussels have names in French as well as Flemish. Since the majority of my informants refer to the French names, I have chosen to use French names on places in Brussels in this thesis.

[5] There are premises of the European Parliament in Luxemburg and Strasbourg, France, as well.

The European quarter has a reputation of being grey, with cold architecture characterised by glass, steel and concrete. Berlaymont – the headquarters of the European Commission – is probably the most famous EU building. This iconic building was designed by architects Lucien de Vestel, Andre Polak and Jean Gilson and constructed in the 1960s. Just opposite of Berlaymont the Justus Lipsius building, hosting the Council of the European Union, is situated. It was built in the mid-1990s, as the EU was growing. The European External Action Service is located opposite Berlaymont in the Triangle building, just at the Rond Point Schuman. The Delors building is seat to the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee on the Regions. Several of the EU buildings and premises have names in Latin or are named after (mainly male) Europeans that have played a central role in European history or in the construction of the European integration project, such as Schuman, Monnet, Delors, Spinelli, Spaak, and Charlemagne. The most recent building, also situated in Schuman area, is the Europa building, hosting the Council of Europe.

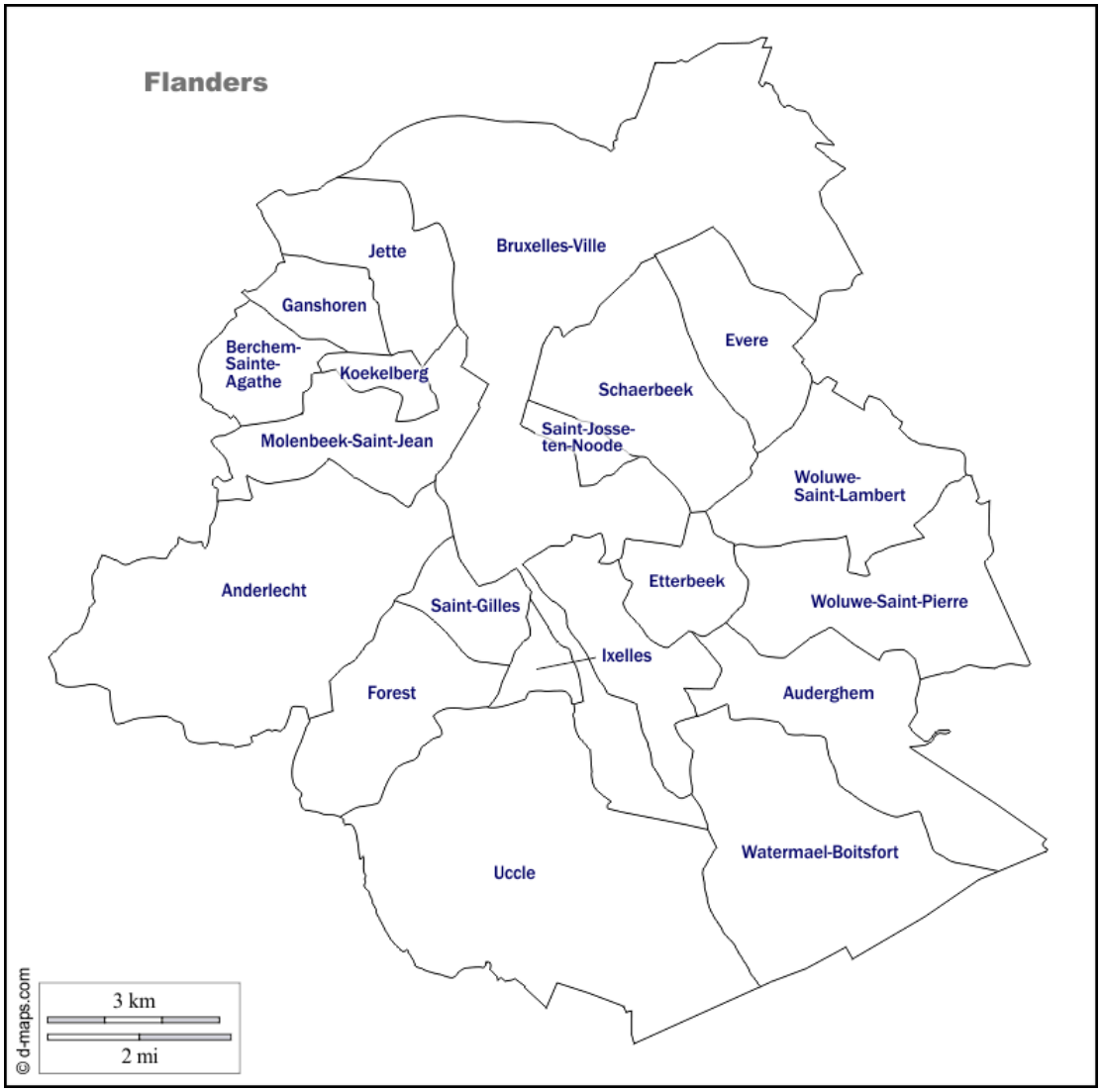
Figure 5: Map of the European quarter in Brussels



Source: Own creation.

Brussels is a segregated city. There are affluent suburbs, and the city centre includes poorer as well as richer neighbourhoods. Many expatriates live in residential and fairly affluent areas east of the European quarter. However, with time, the expatriates have spread to different parts of the city, such as Ixelles, Saint-Gilles, Uccle, Forest and Brussels City (see Figure 6). These municipalities are situated not far from Molenbeek, which received international attention in the wake of the terror attacks in Paris and Brussels given that a few of the alleged perpetrators were living in this area. Very close, but still very different.

Figure 6: Map of the 19 municipalities of the Brussels Capital Region



Source: d-maps.com.

Brussels, being the capital of Europe, also attracts an international people not working with European affairs. Given the international customer base, there are good opportunities for shops and restaurants to specialise in products of a particular country or region. Italian pizzerias and Japanese sushi restaurants can be found in many places around the world. In Brussels there are however also Polish supermarkets and Swedish cafés. Despite its relative moderate size, Brussels has an impressive number of international services, such as restaurants, bars, supermarkets, as well as international schools. These places are often staffed by people from the respective countries they represent, and many young people from different European countries work in the service sector in Brussels. At the weekly market at Place Chatelain in Ixelles, there are food stalls from different European countries.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will present four of the participants of this research in depth, as a way to introduce who the expats in Brussels are. I have selected four cases who are diverse in their relationship with Brussels, Belgium, Europe, the EU, and their countries of origin. Chapters 6 to 9 then discuss the topics that emerge in detail and for the entire sample.

5.3 Konstantinos: European rather than Greek

In Saint-Gilles, south of the city centre, I meet up with Konstantinos. He is a Greek in his mid-thirties who has been living in Brussels for eight years. We sit at the terrace of a small, low-key Portuguese bar at a corner close to the town hall. The bar serves Portuguese beer and traditional Portuguese food. Inside, a family is having lunch and a few older men are sitting on their own, some of them watching football on the television. It is a beautiful spring day, and despite the wind we can enjoy the sunny weather. There are several languages spoken at the tables around us: French, English, Spanish, Portuguese. The setting is strikingly pan-European, as in many places in Brussels.

Konstantinos came to Brussels for a six-months long internship at the European Commission. As we order a drink, he describes his first impressions of the town.

> "For me, as well as for many other people, Brussels was never really a first choice. I believe that nobody comes here as a first choice. Everyone just kind of ends up here, by mistake, by chance or by whatever. It is normal that when that happens, you look around the city and you like think, 'this is kind of a random place'. I found myself here randomly, and also the city feels random. I am sure you have had this feeling as well. And everyone who has been here feels that. It is provincial, but it also is supposed to be the centre of Europe. It has all these locals that never mix with the expats as well. It feels like two different cities in parallel to each other.

His description of "two different cities in parallel," that of the locals and that of the expats, nicely describes how I experienced Brussels.

Konstantinos continues by describing how he never imagined himself staying in Brussels, but nevertheless has stayed there for eight years.

> "So, when I first arrived, I focused more on what I was doing here, and less on the city. I like 'I'm here to do an internship, to get some experience, and who cares about Brussels, I don't care. I just use it as a steppingstone.' Then, I got a job. And that was the first time in my life that I left the loop of short-term decisions. Like 'OK, I'm gonna do a one-year masters' or 'I'm gonna do this one more year in school and then next year it's gonna be different'. So, this ended. These continuous milestones that you would reach ended, because I was offered a job with a long-term contract, and then suddenly the horizon just expands a lot. Instead of thinking in terms of months, you start thinking in terms of years. And then you realise 'OK, this is it'. Like 'I have climbed a mountain, I reached the top, do I like what I see? Do I like this place to be my home?' And my first reaction was: 'not necessarily'. I don't find it a very… captivating place. It is not very… lively, it is not very big, and weather is crap obviously. It is an indifferent city that has been made interesting through the activities in it from a very specific segment of population."

For Konstantinos, the city is thus made interesting by the expats.

Like many people, Konstantinos came to Brussels for professional reasons. He explains that he never had a real desire to live in Brussels but ended up there due to coincidences and randomness. For several years, he has been working as a lobbyist in the field of European affairs. He has been working with different industries, and in different positions, but always within public relations, communication and interest representation/lobbyism. Ending up working in this sector was not a result of a specific plan.

"Nobody ever becomes a lobbyist as a first choice. There are no kids walking around saying 'I wanna be a lobbyist'. That does not exist. I never thought I would become a lobbyist, and I probably did not know very much about it. And now, here I am."

Expatriates in Brussels might have "good" jobs in the sense of stability and good salary, which, as Konstantinos points out, does not per se mean that it feels meaningful.

"I like parts of the job. But it is a Brussels thing you can't find elsewhere. This entire town is an enormous administration creating work for itself. You add layers to the structure that manage each other. The lobby industry is a self-licking lollipop. The machinery could go working on its own without any connection to the real world for a very long time."

This fragment suggests that, for some expatriates in Brussels, the ideologic sense of working with or for Europe and the EU should not be overestimated, at least not after a few initial years. In general, there is a hesitation of the usefulness of the EU affairs sector at large, and many seem to engage in "empty labour" (see Graeber 2018; Paulsen 2014).

Konstantinos lives a few blocks away from the bar where we sit. He has a few favourite bars, restaurants and cafés in the neighbourhood that he frequently visits. Several of his expatriate friends live close to him, and since he moved to the area, it has become more and more gentrified. I ask Konstantinos for his opinion on Brussels.

"That is a good question. I ask myself, and I ask people around me, why they like Brussels. Then they say 'it's not too big, it is not too small. Not too expensive, very human size, you can walk everywhere, you can cycle everywhere. The jobs are good'. This sort of stuff. To me, it always sounded like practical considerations. None of it sounded like these people were in love with the city. It just sounded like it made sense to them to be here. And it sounded to me like the way people would talk about a marriage that just started a very long time ago. It's like 'yeah, it makes sense. This person is a good father, he brings food to the table. We have built a life together. It makes sense.' What is missing, of course, is the love for the place.

You would never talk about Brussels the same way you might have talked about Rio de Janeiro. Rio can be a fucking mess, but you still like it, because it has something. You're passionate about it. You can love Rio; you cannot love Brussels. I don't think people love this city from the gut. Like, 'oh man, I feel like I love Brussels'. No, I don't think so. There's no culture to buy into either. It's kind of vague. You can be who you are here, which is good, but it makes the place colourless.

> The only people that come here, come for work. There are the tourists, of course, but I don't think people fly from China just to see Belgium. Belgium is usually on the way to other things, and you're like, 'hey, why don't we all go and check out Brussels, have a waffle, see the little peeing man.' I don't think people in China are dreaming like, 'oh man, we have to go to Brussels.' And it's just okay. Unfortunately, nothing super cool ever happens here and the weather's never really great and in terms of physical beauty, it's like a flat pan.
>
> […] What is interesting is to see how expats compromise with the idea of an uninteresting place and try to make it their home. I think the easiest way to accept it is through applying practicality. Is that it makes sense."

Konstantinos lives in Brussels for work reasons, which seems to provide him with a practical relationship towards the town he resides in. His feelings towards Brussels are somewhat complicated. As a child, Konstantinos moved from one country to another with his diplomat parents. He has never before lived eight years in the same place, and now he stays in a place he does not really love.

I ask him what he feels towards Greece, and if living in Brussels makes him feel European.

> "I don't feel like Greek. Less and less, I never did. I just spent five years in Greece. To foreigners I am Greek, to Greeks I am a foreigner. I am comfortable saying that I am European. I am less comfortable saying that I am Greek, because when you say that there are certain ideas about what that means, and I do not fill the boxes, and the same with Belgian, which I definitely do not feel comfortable with. Being less specific, that I am European, it's easier. This is of course a product of that I am son of diplomats, but it has been accentuated by living in Brussels. If you don't have strong roots in a country, a broader definition of identity suits better."

Konstantinos' identification with Europe is hence not primarily a result of ideology, but rather the lack of identification with a nation state. He does not feel comfortable with neither Greek nor Belgian identity, and thus zooms out to a broader identity.

Konstantinos would not be in Brussels if it did not host the EU institutions, and neither would his friends. I ask Konstantinos what he thinks about the EU today.

> "If you live in Brussels, EU is always present wherever you go. The institutions are here, there is a high probability that I work in the institutions, as well as my friends. So, it is more relevant to me when I live here than would I have lived in Greece, because it is a process

that I am closer to and can follow closely, and it affects my work situation. Everyone I know is doing the same thing. Would I have been in my home country it would have been much more distant and irrelevant.

EU is two things: an idea, and a concrete manifestation of that idea. By being in Brussels, I see much more of the concrete manifestations. I follow the debate, see the Commission, the MEPs[6], and see how the beast works. Funnily I am less aware of the idea and symbolism, because I am in the machinery. It is the difference of seeing a car and being a car mechanic. For me the car is nuts and bolts, and oil. The symbolic part is losing because I am too close to it. "

When asking Konstantinos about his view on current developments of the EU and the future of European integration, he answers a bit cynically.

"[…] I have turned pessimistic, not because it is going super bad, despite Brexit, but there is a fatigue. […] There are no leaders. You only see technocrats, but no leaders. When something fails to inspire you for too long, you start taking it for granted and don't really listen to it. It starts to stagnate. No excitement when you speak about the EU, a technocratic machine focusing on producing legislation, rather than looking at the brotherhood of nations. Maybe it is to be expected. Previous generations had to heal their wounds, and for us it is just that I do not know what we came from, and I do not know where we are going.

Failure to inspire makes me pessimistic. EU is a cool club to be part of, like a coupon system at the supermarket. But it is not inspiring. It could be possible though, but it is not, and it is a lot of failure. It has to reconnect with something more aspirational."

Konstantinos has an ambivalent relationship towards the EU. Since he lives in Brussels and works within the field of European affairs, he is more into the details of EU administration and policy-making than the idea of a united Europe. This may suggest that living and working in the epicentre of the EU makes one forget about the ideological reasons to the integration in everyday life.

Konstantinos generally likes Brussels, but is not overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the city, and feels that he is part of a group of expatriates just lingering around for practical reasons without taking a deliberate decision to stay. A sojourn in Brussels

[6] Member of the European Parliament.

that initially was meant to take a semester gets prolonged. With time, it gets more difficult to leave, and the opportunity cost of leaving Brussels and the job security increases as time passes by. Konstantinos himself has thought about leaving Brussels many times, but he has opted for staying so far. He admires those who decide to leave and thinks that it requires a bit of courage and a certain level of personal drive.

> "There is no certainty necessarily where you're going. You're basically going out on a limb. You're just stepping into the unknown. I have respect for the people who do that. Even if, sometimes, this comes from a misguided sense of restlessness. Like, 'there must be something more.' But sometimes people are so restless that they'll just leave stuff that are good for them and just chase wild dreams. But still, I admire them for pursuing something that might not make sense, but something that they love. Because, in general, Brussels, from a job´s perspective and from a living perspective, and a social perspective, is a complacency trap. You can very easily end up in a job that is kind of interesting, not maybe super exciting but it pays super well. That allows you to have a great apartment, you have a partner, and a kid. It all makes sense, so you will not push for something different."

Although Konstantinos has been living in Brussels for eight years, he is constantly thinking about leaving, going elsewhere or going to Greece. Konstantinos came into a professional sector, lobbyism, without any specific ambitions, and then stayed in it. His story is in this sense typical for expatriates in Brussels. He further has a complicated relationship to the host society and is fairly unimpressed and uninterested in Belgium and Brussels. Konstantinos also shows ambivalent opinions regarding the EU, and the European affairs sector, which he is part of himself. Nonetheless, he is an example of someone who identifies himself with Europe, partly because it is the label that suits best (or least bad). In general, Konstantinos is an example of a transnational, cosmopolitan European without strong links to any country, who could live in many different places.

5.4 Zoe: An accidental *bruxelloise*[7]

I am invited to a birthday party in Saint-Gilles. A French lawyer is celebrating her 30th birthday in her apartment, where she lives with her boyfriend. An old narrow tram passes by as I reach the impressive town hall. It is a wet and cold Saturday night in March. Just a block away I reach the flat. There are quite some people in their late twenties and early thirties of several nationalities. Most people speak French and English. I grab a slice of cold pizza and a can of beer – the widely popular Belgian lager Jupiler. Some are chatting in the kitchen. A couple of people are having a smoke at the wet terrace facing the courtyard. A group of men standing in the living room having a conversation in German. I start to speak to another guest in the kitchen. She is from Greece and is hanging out with two other Greeks. She presents herself as Zoe, and as a colleague of the French host – they are both working with EU competition law at an American law firm. We start speaking about being a foreigner in Brussels, and make the usual jokes about the rainy weather, comparing it to Greece and Sweden.

Some time after the party, I contact Zoe again, and she tells me her expat story. She was born and raised in a small town in the middle of Greece, and after high school, she moved to Athens to study law. After graduating she moved to Paris for a master programme in European law. Three years later she did another master in Belgium, and afterwards accepted a job offer.

> "At the time I was not really looking to necessarily stay abroad, but I got in contact with law firms in Brussels during career days, and was invited to interviews. I did not have anything waiting for me in Greece. I would have needed to go back and look from scratch. And when they made a good offer from a law firm to start immediately as an associate, because I was qualified, I was like 'OK, I stay for a bit and I see'. So I returned to Belgium after two months of holidays break and ever since I am here. I live in the same house; I have the same job. I have not only the same group of friends, but the initial group of friends is still around. Some of the colleagues are the same. I have been here for ten years now."

[7] French for somebody living in or originating from Brussels.

Zoe has now lived for a decade in Belgium; like Konstantinos, she stayed longer in Brussels than she had imagined. She speaks French, but no Dutch. She lives alone in a flat in Brussels, is single, and has many expatriate friends. However, she has no close Belgian friends; those she knows are colleagues.

> "I have some very, very close friends here now. People that I know from university and life brought us both to Brussels, so we are now here. Or friends from my master, that I consider very, very close friends. Or friends that I met at work and through them I met other people, so it keeps going."

Zoe reflects on her interactions with locals, and how it took her a long time to interact at a personal level with the local population in Brussels.

> "In the past it was much worse, I had very, very little interaction with the Belgians. It was until the level of the services they were providing me with. I would go to the shop, they would serve me or I would pay for a product that I would buy. But lately I think it is changing a little bit. For example, I go, not as regularly as I should, but I go to some yoga classes where Belgian people go as well. And sometimes we do say 'oh we should go grab a beer afterwards' and sometimes we do that. […] I have been taking some Japanese classes, and the teacher is Japanese, but she is married to a Belgian and she has Belgian daughters. She tells me things about Belgium… But to be honest, I live in the Eurobubble. And we do interact with the Brussels people belonging to the Eurobubble. They offer services to us, and we take them. It is in the periphery that somehow we can come across."

Zoe's description of the Eurobubble and of locals and expats only meeting "in the periphery" is similar to Konstantinos' description of "two different cities in parallel." She thinks that it is difficult to integrate in a new society the way people would integrate if they moved to another city in their home country.

> "My friend has a Belgian partner. She is more integrated. She gives me details of the Belgian life much more, I don't know, every other week they will go to the town where her partner comes from, and she will tell you stories. But even for her, she is not as integrated as you would be if you were a Greek person living in another city than your home town. Like I was in Athens, there is no comparison as to how integrated I was there, compared to what I am in Brussels."

Zoe maintains her friendships in Greece, but is well aware that she as well as her friends have changed since she migrated. She further knows that her life the last ten

years differs greatly from that of her friends back home, and that she has a more privileged economic situation.

> "It is not that I don't have close friends back in Greece, but I don't know if I would have met them every day, if it would be the same. I go well along with the Greek once in Greece. Precisely because I am the exotic bird in a way, the one that comes from abroad. They can present themselves as they want to me, and likewise, I can present myself to them as I want. They don't really know if it's hard to work, I don't know, nineteen hours in a row. I don't know how it is for them to not necessarily have the means to go out every day, as you can here in Brussels, because life in Athens is not what it used to be."

I ask her if she considers Belgium home.

> "Both Greece and Belgium is my home. Let's put it differently, my home here is my home. I will go back to the house where I was born, and I will be very happy, and there will be other types of comforts there. But at a certain point I will say, and I will say it out loud, 'ok it's time to go home now'. I consider this house home. Brussels is my town – yes, it grows more and more on me. Belgium is not more my home than Greece is. You see, this house is my home. Brussels is my town. I care about it. I want the best for it. But Greece is my country. Belgium, I like it. People are saying 'are you considering taking Belgian nationality?' But I am not considering it, also because I am lazy, and because it hasn't gotten to the point that they really kick us out of the Union so that I would need to think what I would do in the future. Above all I think I am Greek, bottom line."

Brussels and her flat there has over the years become "home" for Zoe. This suggests that time matters in creating attachment to the host city. With time, her interactions with Belgians have increased, although it is still at a low level, which also has influenced the feelings towards Brussels. She still identifies as Greek, but meanwhile feels more distant to her home country the longer she stays abroad. This suggests that an increased sensation of belonging to a foreign country or city can have a negative impact on the attachment to your country of origin.

Although Zoe had already indicated that she does not feel Belgian, she feels that Brussels is her home. I therefore ask her what she likes about Brussels.

> "I like Brussels for what it is. For being a melting pot. For having the opportunity to listen to all the languages and meet all the people. That being said, I know that it is not very Belgian. It is something quite unique. It could be anywhere, I guess that in Luxemburg you could also say that, which is a much smaller place. What else do I like in the country? I like

the point that people are living well, having good restaurants, having good kitchens, from all over the place. I think they are quite… what's the word, accepting as a society. They are an open society more or less. I am super mainstream, there is nothing challenging they should accept with me, I am a very ok type of person, but I think all in all they are quite open."

"I like the location of the country. It's so easy to travel around in the country with the train system they have, I go everywhere with my car, but still I find it very practical. I think the Belgians deep down are southerners. They live the good life. I like that they consume the most amount of champagne per capita. I like that. It makes them "bon viveur" in a good way. I like that they are a little bit of a joke. I like that French and Germans make fun of them in a way. And they don't care so much."

Thus, apart from the location (a reason that Konstantinos would label as practical), Zoe also likes the "southern" nature of Belgians, although she has limited contact with them.

Nonetheless, she also complains about the Belgium and its capital. She has an ambivalent relationship with the city.

"I do not like living here from a practical point of view. Like the time schedules. I do not like that everything is closed by seven. I do not like that the office opens at nine. These things don't happen in Greece. The time schedules are totally different. Services are open at seven thirty. And yes, they might close at two, but you have possibility to do things before. And shops close at nine. I find it user-unfriendly somehow. So, I do not like the level of services on this type of things. And above all I don't like the attitude. I do understand their regulation, but I when I come at ten to eight at the door to quickly buy something frozen to put in my microwave to eat, please don't close the door in my face. It will be quick. When we say it closes at eight, it doesn't mean that at eight it's gonna be locked up. It's still ok if you let me in and it closes at three minutes past eight for example. That's something I dislike profoundly."

"It does not affect me, but I do not like how they do not take advantage of the fact that they have this duality of cultures. The French speaking and the Dutch speaking one. This is a blessing, that children could have been born practically bilingual, and take the best of two worlds. For whatever historical reason they don't make the best out of that."

Yet, in contrast to some others who feel they only work in Brussels, Zoe enjoys living in Brussels.

> "Brussels for me is my reality. Some people I know find that the relationships in Brussels are more superficial and the people are less willing to commit. That they are all a bit 'rush rush rush', saying 'I do not even care to stay in Brussels for the weekends, I do not even care to bond too much. I'm here for some months and some years.' Especially at our age, you are past 30 or even 35, if you are not already in a relationship, of either a compatriot of yours, or someone else that is also established in Brussels, they find that people are not so interested in committing, and making more stable friendships and relationships for life. I hear what they say, and I don't necessarily disagree in the sense that there are a lot of people having this approach of like 'I don't live in Brussels, I only work in Brussels. Over the weekends, if I can, I will make city trips or I will go home, or I prefer not creating relationships with people with whom I just work together'. But for me it's not like that. Especially recently I found that I like this place, and there are people here I like. Right now, I am going through a phase when I am catching up with people. I don't know. I have an affinity with the city that I don't want to downgrade it to simply be the place where I just operate throughout the week, and in the weekend I either choose to leave the place or I choose to do nothing of whatever it offers. I go to concerts, I go to movies, I go to the restaurants, I go for a beer. And I am enjoying it a lot actually."

Zoe considers Brussels to be "home," but she maintains a certain distance to the Belgian society. After ten years in the country, she still considers herself to be an expat. She never uses "we" when talking about Belgians or the Belgian society.

Born and raised in Greece, Zoe still considers herself Greek, as indicated above. I ask Zoe about her relationship to Greece and how it has developed, and whether she is contemplating going back. She explains that she visits Greece multiple times a year.

> "Always for Christmas, always for summer, most of the Easters, most of the orthodox Easters, and one or more time, depending if I only see the family."

Yet, she has not seriously thought about moving back, for two reasons:

> "One, because in the meantime the crisis hit Greece badly, and it is not really… or it is always an option, but I never considered it very seriously. And two, because on some levels, it would be a change that I would not necessarily be willing to make. First of all, I have never practiced law in Greece, so I would have to start from scratch. I feel that I would not immediately be able to do high-quality work there. I mean all the people that have been living and working since 2004 practically, they established themselves, they found clientele,

> they know how to do things. For me, I would need to start from scratch. […] So the professional aspect is not really great."

Zoe hence sees herself staying in Brussels, and the main reasons of not going back to Greece are of professional nature. Family is for Zoe not a reason either to go back. Despite her being an only child and her father having passed away a year and a half ago,

> "[M]y mum hasn't said that 'oh maybe you should consider going back to be near' etc. And in any event, even if I were to return to Greece, I would not return to live in my home town, I would probably be living in Athens."

> "[I feel at home] in Athens and in my home town. In different ways. In my home town because there is my mother and my aunt, my childhood friends. There are memories. It is a very protected nice feeling that I have for my home town, there are no bad things happening there. Athens has a different flare. It was the first place where I was a young adult, and I went to the university and I was free. I learned and I explored Athens on my own. I walked around it, I loved it. It was a period when I was saying 'there is not a city like Athens anywhere in the world'. I believe that it is very unique. I don't know if it is the most beautiful city in the world but still, I think it is quite unique. But it has been many years that I have not been living properly there. I feel I owe a second chance to Athens to live there a little bit longer, a bit more, not as someone passing by. I have a lot of affinity."

It is interesting to note how Zoe relates differently with the three places (her home town in Greece, Athens, and Brussels), in relation to the different life stages she spent in these places. Her home town from her youth means safety; Athens, where she studied, means freedom, and Brussels, where she works, comfort. In a way, her passionate description of Athens fits with Konstantinos terms' of "loving a place", in contrast to living in Brussels, which simply "makes sense".

One indication of belonging is voting. Zoe voted in the European Parliament elections in Belgium, but not in the local elections, although she is entitled to. I ask her how closely she follows Belgian news and politics.

"Normally I read the very international ones like BBC, CNN, New York Times, and The Economist. Irregularly I read Belgian papers. I read Le Soir[8], sometimes. Irregularly in the sense, you know with the attacks[9] and all, I follow it on Twitter, and if you hear something it would be the first site I would go to. I often watch TV, but I mostly watch French TV, I don't watch the news from the Belgian TV. I don't like it somehow. I sometimes read some blogs about restaurants and things like this, but I don't know if maybe expats write them."

Zoe shows limited interest in news about Belgian society and politics. In the wake of the terror attacks in Brussels in 2016, she did so for the first time, which suggests that a crisis can create an interest in news, because finally it affects you, and it furthermore can contribute to develop attachment and a sense of belonging. She follows the Belgian news more accidentally.

"I was quite interested, and I followed and read about the change of the king, when Albert abdicated for Philippe. There was a little bit of a voyeuristic aspect in it. You know, his role is not as important as who is going to be the next prime minister. It was more like 'how will the ceremony be?'. I was following a bit when they did not have a government, there was this instability for more than a year and a half I think, until Di Rupo[10] took over. Now I have to say that I am not following. I know the name of the prime minister, that is as far as it goes."

I then ask her if she, after more than a decade abroad, is still following Greek news and media.

"Yes, like crazy, you can't imagine. I listen to the radio every morning, I read the newspapers. It's Greece – you understand there is a lot of activity happening. I always go back to vote. In 2015 I went back three times to vote. You cannot vote in the embassy in Brussels, so you have to go back, and in these times it's really important for me to vote."

Zoe is probably more interested in politics than the general Greek, and cares about voting to the extent that she goes back to Greece from Brussels to do so. Working in the field of European affairs, the general expatriate in the Eurobubble seems to be more

[8] Belgian daily newspaper in French.

[9] Terror attacks in Belgium 2016.

[10] Elio Di Rupo, Prime Minister of Belgium 2011-2014.

interested in politics than most Europeans, meaning that they are likely to follow news and media in their home country while living in Brussels. In the case of Greece, there has been a strong link between European affairs and domestic politics since the start of the financial crisis, which further has increased interest from a Brussels perspective. During the 13 years Zoe has been out of Greece, the country has changed. Greece entered the Eurozone and experienced high growth, but was severely hit by the economic crisis a few years later, which had strong political implications. For Zoe, the opportunity cost of going back to Greece is steadily increasing, because of her lack of experience from working with Greek law as well as the economic situation. The longer she stays in Brussels, the more she has to "lose" by moving back to Greece.

The financial crisis has affected Greece's relationship to the EU, which many Greeks blamed for the situation. I ask Zoe how this development has affected her, as a Greek living in the capital of Europe.

> "I still believe in the idea of a united Europe. I am very critical towards Greek politics, of the mistakes done in the past, of the choices made. But after a certain point, I believe Europe does not necessarily… some of the European countries are a bit overly stubborn about that things [should be] done in a special way. This type of punishing attitude that I do not think necessarily gets us anywhere. It is the seventh if not the eight year of crisis in Greece. And even if the numbers are getting a little bit better, which is not even the case, but let's say that the numbers have the perspective of getting a little bit better, the society is hit. I consider this a lost generation."

> "I understand that you make a plan, that you stick by it and we should try and see. But after a certain point, if it for some reason doesn't work, they should reconsider aspects of the plan. I am very critical to how we, the Greeks, behaved, for some of the Greek politicians that are a little bit overly proud of what it means to be Greek etc. We, the people that try to be a little bit more balanced, are traitors, they are using this type of language. But the last two-three years I am coming also to admit that being so strict about the way they want things to be done, it only makes the average man in Greece more Eurosceptic."

Speaking about the political and economic situation in Greece, and the EU response to the financial crisis, Zoe always speaks about Greece as "we" while Europe and the EU are "they". This shows the belonging she feels towards Greece after 13 years abroad, and how she identifies with the Greek people also in critical times. As Zoe speaks about the sovereign debt crisis in Greece, bailouts, and austerity measures,

it is obvious that these are sensitive and difficult issues for her. Zoe is critical towards Greek politicians, but finds the response, attitude and conditions from the EU and certain member states to be too rigid and contra-productive. She is privately torn between different loyalties.

I ask whether Zoe has felt that people in Greece, due to the financial crisis, are sceptical towards her because she lives in Brussels and works with European affairs.

> "I have to say that consciously, or sub-consciously, I specify that I did not leave because of the crisis."

Given the special developments in Greek politics and attitudes towards the EU since the financial crisis, Zoe is slightly cautious about the fact that she, as a Greek, works in Brussels with European affairs. It has become a more sensitive issue, although she does not even work for the EU institutions. This suggests that the political developments in the EU member states, including growing Euroscepticism, affect the expats of that nationality in Brussels in terms of pride about their work.

Zoe is Greek, like Konstantinos, but she is more integrated into Belgium than he is. Zoe feels at home in Brussels as well as in Greece, but her heart is somehow, maybe most nostalgically, with Greece. She is also very connected to current affairs in Greece. According to Zoe, the longer one stays in Brussels the higher the opportunity cost to move back to one's home country, where the individual potentially needs to start from scratch, privately as well as professionally. Her belonging to Greece and Belgium mesh in interesting ways, and the supranational identity is therefore fitting. She could hence be said to be an example of the "nested model" with different layers of identities. However, since the economic crisis and the EU's hard stance toward Greece, the two identities also conflict a bit, particularly for her friends and family in Greece. She also shows how the European financial crisis, which hit Greece particularly hard, affects expatriates in Brussels regarding their loyalties with their countries of origin and the EU.

5.5 Marie: A European outside the Eurobubble

A friend introduced me to her French flatmate Marie in her early thirties. Marie is born and raised in rural Brittany in western France, working with communication and design. The two of them live in an old, narrow, and beautiful building on the border between the municipalities of Saint-Gilles and Ixelles. It is nicely decorated and has a cosiness that makes me believe that they have been in Brussels for some time. There are signs of Marie's great interest in photography and art all over the flat. I ask her why she came to Brussels.

> "I came here to study journalism when I was 20. I had stayed [abroad] for one year after high school, and there I met some Belgian people who told me about this journalism school. In France these schools are very pricy, and here they are not. So, I said, why not give it a try. It was in French as well, so not a big difference. So therefore, I came here, for the studies. First, I did not like it at all. It was grey, rainy, in September. I missed [the foreign country I lived in before]. I thought I would stay for two-three years to do a bachelor and then go back to France to do a master. With time I started to like it more, and third year was great, I met friends and got into the school and the town. So I stayed, I have been here more than twelve years now. I had a break when I was [abroad] for two years, otherwise I have stayed here."

Marie did not come to Brussels because of European affairs. She did not study law or political science and did not have much of a notion of the EU before coming here as a student. The language was the same, and the difference between moving to another place in France and to Belgium was not that significant. Marie acculturated quickly.

Marie is working as a scientific communication coordinator for a Belgian government agency, strengthening the link between scientists and policy-makers. She works extensively with projects related to or funded by the EU. In addition, Marie has her own company where she produces reports from meetings in the EU sphere independently. Although she did not come to Brussels because of the EU, she has been drawn into it, having one leg in the EU affairs, and one in the Belgian national administration. Now she thinks she will stay in Brussels.

> "I think I will stay here. There is a lot of interesting jobs here. In Brittany there is not a lot, and in Paris it is a bit hectic. So Brussels is a good place. I would probably not have stayed

in Brussels would it not be for the [EU] institutions. What I am doing here is quite related to EU. The same job is more interesting here than in Paris, because of the EU institutions. I really like to live here."

She likes Brussels for its cultural activities.

"I love the cultural life of Brussels. Love it. So many things, so different. Very alternative, and very classical. Something for everybody. Many workshops. Very nice and small things. I like it the most. Small city but very good diversity of things to do. Accessible. International. However, the expat community is not so involved. There are many international people that are outside the EU bubble."

Interestingly, in contrast to Konstantinos and Zoe, Marie indicates that the international community is larger than the EU bubble, and that within this community, the Eurobubble remains a bit closed and inward-looking, and less involved in the cultural life of the city. This shows that there are different expat or migrant communities in Brussels, like in other European capitals.

Marie did not know much about the EU before arriving in Brussels, but she has been drawn into the Eurobubble bit by bit, professionally as well as privately. However, she does not really feel part of the Eurobubble, and meets many Belgian and non-Belgian people that are not part of this community.

"I feel part of the European bubble in terms of work, or at least a bit, but not too much personally. I hang out with different kind of people. I did not come here for the EU, and I hang mostly out with people outside the bubble."

My impression is that Marie – being part of (at least) two international communities – is an exception in Brussels.

Marie speaks perfect English and has started to learn Dutch. The interest in learning Dutch seems also unusual in the Eurobubble, particularly for a native French speaker. I ask Marie how she feels about Brussels and Belgium after twelve years in the country, and how she integrates in society.

"I do not feel at home, not until I settle down. I don't feel Belgian. I have no kids. I have been changing flats so many times, I have flat mates. It is my home, but not completely. It is fairly easy to integrate in Belgium however. Anyway, France is still my home somehow. Belgium is not my home, Brussels is however. Brussels is [home], but not Belgium. I do not

follow Belgian news very much. I would not say I am part of the Belgian society so much. However, I have quite a few Belgian friends. I work with Belgians. I studied here so I know quite a few people."

The distinction Marie draws between Belgium and Brussels is worth noting – Brussels feels more or less like home, but Belgium does not. After more than a decade in Brussels, Marie still considers herself French, but also to an increasing extent as a European. Marie links the lack of belonging to Belgium to the fact that she has not settled down. Being single and having moved around between many apartments, she may not feel emotionally and physically settled in the Belgian capital yet, and her discourse suggests that she has been staying in a prolonged temporariness. Marie is not voting in Belgium, despite being able to vote in municipal elections. She votes in France and follows French news and politics much closer than Belgian. She is eligible to apply for Belgian citizenship but has not considered it.

I ask how Marie feels about being an expatriate.

"There are many positive things about being an expat. I can learn other languages. You get to know more people. More opportunities to live a rich life. In France, I would probably have children, have a house, not see much. Here you get more opportunities to do different things in your life. So many people from everywhere, many projects. On the other hand, you are far from home. You have to do things alone. I cannot go home for a weekend. It is not as being home. You are more alone and face more difficulties alone. If I lived in Paris I would go home more often. There is also a high turnover of expatriates, so some people you really like leave."

"I do not really feel as an expat anymore. I have been here too long. But still I do not feel at home. In another ten years I am probably not an expat. I meet a lot of people through culture. Many of them are foreigners, but not necessarily expats. There is a difference between an expat and an immigrant. The expat is more affluent. Immigrant has sort of other reasons to come here. Fleeing or migrating for economic reasons. I know people from all over. Mostly from Europe, but also from India for example. I think that many expats meet through work, or their neighbours, or through different websites. I, however, have mostly got to know people through culture, both internationals and Belgians."

Marie sees advantages and disadvantages of being an expat. She does not really feel like an expatriate anymore, suggesting that after a certain number of years, or a certain level of integration, some do not see themselves as expatriates anymore. Marie

also compares being an expat in Asia, where she also lived, and in Brussels, saying that it is entirely different, since you are so similar to Belgians, and you look the same, speak the same language, have the same living standard etcetera. In Asia, she experienced completely separated lives between the locals and the expatriates.

I ask her whether she in her everyday life can feel the EU institutions' presence in Brussels.

> "It affects the town a lot. Infrastructure, and economy. There are so many new opportunities of businesses because of the EU. It also affects in a bad way. Many Belgians are completely detached from the EU, just like French people are. And they do not necessarily like all those expats that are here."

Marie did not come to Brussels because of the EU but is staying here partly because of the opportunities the EU institutions create. When asked what she thinks about the EU and how living in Brussels has affected her view on European integration, she answers:

> "[The EU is] created with a good idea and it is a pity it is going down now. The idea is beautiful, and we should fight for it. […] Maybe the new generation does not understand the value of peace. I always remember my grandmother telling me about the Germans coming to her little village during World War II. I always felt grateful for having peace in this continent. The terrorist attack was the first time I felt unsafe in Europe, and it was a very new and strange feeling."

> "Thanks to Brussels I have learned about the EU and the idea behind it. However, I have also seen the other side, and the lobbyism. The not so nice part of EU policy-making. I also see the abuses of the institutions, which is a reason that many people do not like it. That companies have a large say. So, I have seen the two sides. We also have to discuss what Europe means. There is a lot of distrust. Rebrand EU and Europe might be necessary. In a way we get more space to redefine social rights for people. I can understand Euroscepticism. Due to bad economic situation, many are in difficult situation, and that national politicians are blaming the EU. The economic problems are not a result of the EU, but the EU is not helping."

Marie is critical towards the "over-bureaucratic EU-institutions" that she thinks are detached from reality, and are built on a neo-liberal idea, and further believes that lobbyists are too influential in Brussels. She calls for a closer European cooperation for

the purpose of better lives and climate, more sustainability, and more ethics and solidarity. She believes that Brexit, although sad, can be a new start for the EU. I ask if she would like to work for the EU institutions.

> "No, I don't know if I could work for the EU institutions. I do not like the policy and the lobbyists. I think people are too comfortable. No, I do not want to work there."

Marie shows on the one hand that there are several kinds of expatriates in Brussels and that not all are part of the Eurobubble. On the other, Marie's case shows us how present Europe and the EU is in Brussels, and that the EU institutions affect many that are not working directly within European affairs. Marie, who is not directly working within the Eurobubble, has a somewhat different view on Brussels and Belgium, and feels that it is relatively easy to integrate. She does not feel as an expat anymore. Marie is sceptical towards the current functioning of the EU, but meanwhile thinks that it is providing exciting job opportunities. Although she indicated that she would not want to work for EU institutions, when I speak to Marie a few years later, she is a permanent staff member of the European Commission.

5.6 Wolfgang: A German European returning to Brussels

I have a plate of two sausages with mustard in front of me. And some fries from the *friterie* down the road. To make it even more German, Wolfgang serves me a *Weissbier*. We sit at the terrace of his flat a few blocks from Place Flagey in Ixelles, speaking about Europe and Brussels.

> "Europe is characterised by a dual personality. You know where you are coming from, but given the geography, you are aware that your own living does not stop at the border. That is very European to be aware of that. If you speak to American citizens, they speak about states. There is a cultural awareness. In Europe, you drive four hours and pass four countries, completely different in cultural heritage, what is their approach and what is important. That is fantastic. These two sides of being from one territory but connected to others is very European."

Wolfgang is a German lawyer in his late thirties who has lived in Brussels for three years. He has however lived in Brussels before. The first time Wolfgang moved there was in the early 2000s, and since then he has been back for another two extended sojourns, both for work and studies. He is working for an international company outside Brussels, far from the European quarter. His job has not much to do with EU affairs, but Wolfgang says that the company's European headquarters would not be situated in Brussels would it not be because of the EU institutions. Among his colleagues, there are Belgians as well as foreigners from within and outside Europe. When Wolfgang previously lived in Brussels, he was part of the Eurobubble to a greater extent, and most of his friends in Brussels are still working within European affairs. He is socialising extensively with Germans, but also with people from all over Europe. He does not have many Belgian friends; those he meets are above all his colleagues, and he hardly meets them outside work. Furthermore, he has not many friends from Eastern Europe.

I ask him whether Brussels feels like home.

"Belgium and Brussels is not a home. I don't think it ever will be. […] Connecting with Belgians is funny, and difficult. I have a language barrier, meaning that I do not really read newspapers or follow local politics. I have not voted in local elections here. I know a bit about national Belgian politics. Sometimes I listen to Belgian broadcasting from the German part in the car on my way to work. Belgian German news, and Belgian politics. I feel like it is a different world. It is a smaller country, the news are very provincial. Unbelievable. In general, integration with the Belgians happens within services, restaurants, and through work.

As a foreigner here you suffer from the high taxes that you do not get anything for, the poor service and bad administration. The language issue [Dutch, French and German] is such an issue. Amazing. It makes it so difficult to get behind the scene. It makes it more difficult to get to know the country. It is extremely difficult to get to know the Flemish.

In Brussels, I'm an expat, but still part of the town. Brussels without the Eurobubble would be very different, and the bubble is changing the town. Sometimes I ask myself whether it would even exist [without the EU institutions]."

"However, in Brussels, if you want to, you can really join an extremely interesting group of people. In Berlin, I met one guy who lived in Brussels ten years ago. He said something I think was completely right. He meant you can divide Brussels into three parts: the Eurobubble, the Belgians, and those left behind, meaning other migrants. Are you fortunate

to be part of the European bubble, it can be fantastic. I am very privileged, since I can choose to be part of that when I want, and opt out when I want. I think it can also be a bit claustrophobic. I really love it."

"The first time I came here, back in the time, people had some kind of a common vision. Even if you are not the strongest supporter of the EU, you are still here, you see the effects, so many around you are working with the same thing. First time I was here in 2005. All these political views, nations. I still got the feeling that everyone was working towards the same goal. It might have changed now, but generally, everybody here are extremely nice, extremely open-minded, extremely… trying to connect. That creates an interesting atmosphere. However, there are cons as well with living in this bubble. It is difficult to distinguish between private and work life, which is not attractive. You have to be more reserved, because it gets too personal."

Despite not working in European affairs, Wolfgang considers himself to be part of the Eurobubble, and he feels that his everyday life is more "European" than if he would have been living elsewhere. He sees both pros and cons with the Eurobubble, but above all feels that it is a community of very interesting people. Wolfgang is not integrated into the Belgian society, despite working with many Belgians, and shows a distance towards Belgium. Working outside the field of European affairs hence does not mean that one necessarily integrates more.

Wolfgang is aware of the political machinery of the EU, which partly is a result from living in Brussels.

"I follow EU politics a lot. Probably because I am part of the Eurobubble, and I live close to the heart of the EU. I have become more politicised. I am very upset with the current situation. In 2005, the first time I lived in Brussels, my parents were visiting. I made a tour in the Parliament, where I was working. They could not stop saying 'this is amazing, our parents should see this'. For Germans, we know how bad it can be, and we see what can come up from a joint effort. It is not perfect, but it is extremely clear that this is the way to go. Therefore, it is sad to see how it is treated. Ignorance, negligence, personal interest take over. […] The personal experience of pain, grievance, horror are so far away. Then you have the luxury to destroy what has been built up. And that is extremely sad.

Two years ago, our old chancellor died, Schmidt[11], a rock star, smoking, loved by the public after office. He had a very clear mind, you could like it or not. The good thing about him is that he had a clear agenda, and a clear thought. What he said did not come from personal interest, but from personal beliefs. That's fantastic. I have the feeling that there is a longing of these kind of leaders. It is easy to fake, but also easy to see through.

Now there is a tendency of conservative movements, not least in the US, Hungary, and a bit all over, also in Germany. Anti-refugee agenda. Works extremely well. The reference model is completely wrong. There are so many achievements, but these are not seen. It is becoming extremely nationalistic in a sense. Unthinkable to cut very basic democratic principles that now are under fire. Facts do not matter.

What I like in Brussels is that people are ideological here, in different spectra. But I see a lot of struggle in the decision-making process from realising the problems and making a good action plan. Again, Europe needs a new narrative. We had a fantastic story, a peace project. Now, all the benefits of living in a secure place, you don't see it. You just see when it lacks. How to bring that across, all the benefits."

"When I came here the first time, nobody really criticised integration. Now, you can make a career from opposing. I think that we need… everybody needs to draw in the same directions, which is difficult to achieve, between different member states. So many domestic issues to take into account. The idea of two velocities, some going deeper, that could work. Strangely I now think there would be so much potential for that. It is pretty amazing hearing from France to go for more integration. That is a promise."

Wolfgang is an example of an expatriate with a true European ideology and identity. His interest in going to Brussels in the first place was linked to this ideology, and he continues to refer to the EU as a peace project. His German background and family stories have been crucial in forming his positive mind towards European integration, and he is truly worried about current political developments. This case underlines that the notions and attitudes towards Europe differ between European countries. As a German, it is easy for Wolfgang to refer to the EU as a result of the experiences from the Second World War, in a way that probably a Swede would not do to the same extent. Although Wolfgang has lived abroad for many years and has

[11] Helmut Schmidt (1918-2015), Chancellor of West Germany 1974-1982.

returned to Brussels several times, he has always kept a close relationship to his home country.

> "I feel German, even more than before. I used to not feel too German, nor was [I] very linked to the region I come from. I felt more European in a way. I grew up in a place where I never felt I belonged, my parents did not come from there, and I always felt from elsewhere. My parents are still there, but it does not feel like home. I do not have many friends there anymore. Feeling German is a lot about the language. I can make myself well understood here, but much better in Germany. Not only language, but also some perceptions about how things should work. Cultures are different. I always felt European."

Wolfgang hence has a strong link to Germany, rather than a specific home town. He is exemplifying the importance of language as identity builder in Europe.

Wolfgang would like to stay in Brussels for some time, although it depends on his personal life. He would not mind having a family in Brussels, since his own family is spread over different countries – his sister living abroad as well – and he never wanted to stay where he grew up. I ask Wolfgang what he misses from home.

> "It is a good thing is that Germany is not that far away. But still, there are things I miss from Germany. The language. My sister is an expat moving around the world. She is losing the language. And her children don't speak proper German. To me that would be sad. Because I really enjoy the language. It is never the same using a second or third language. And I miss the German bread."

Wolfgang is one of the expatriates in Brussels that have been returning to the city over time. Despite its flaws, there is something in Brussels which he likes, professionally as well as privately. He holds a strong European identity since many years, since already before he arrived in Brussels. Meanwhile, he feels very German, and misses certain aspects of Germany. He is hence an example of a "marble cake" identity model, where two identities coexist in parallel (Risse 2005). As he put it: "I feel more of a borderless mindset, I feel German and European". Although Wolfgang currently is not working directly in European affairs, he is still very attached to the Eurobubble and its members.

5.7 Summary

This chapter has served as an introduction to the expatriate community in Brussels, by describing the geography they live in and making portraits of four expatriates. These individuals are diverse regarding their integration in Brussels and Belgium. The expatriates presented in-depth show how identification with their countries of origin changed as they became attached to a new place, and exemplify how European and national identities can coexist, which can be explained by different theoretical models. In two cases, the European identity coexists with a strong national identity as predicted by the "nested model" of identity formation (Risse, 2005), whereas others formed a European identity precisely because national identity was weak, or had a European identity that was to some extent in conflict with the national identity, given the EU austerity measures during the Euro crisis and the Euroscepticism that followed in certain member states. Thus, these diverse testimonials show that an identification with Europe as well as with the country of origin can be formed by the particularities of the home country as well as individuals' personal background. These cases furthermore all show devotion to Europe and European politics, which does not per se imply uncritical support to the EU.

In the coming chapters the topics touched upon in these four cases will be investigated in detail, reflecting the entire sample and fieldwork.

6. The transnational Eurocrat: life of expatriates in Brussels

> "From the opening of their session there had been consensus that Europe's crisis could be solved only with those very methods that brought it on in the first place."
>
> Robert Menasse, *The Capital*, 2017.

6.1 Paths to Brussels

Before I got to Belgium I did not know much about neither the EU nor Brussels. I had no idea about how the presence of the EU institutions impacted the ambience. Furthermore, I was not aware of the number of people working in the field of European affairs but outside the EU-institutions. It is an industry. And it attracts people from all over Europe. The European quarter in Brussels is a European microcosm, with people from different parts of Europe, with individual stories and motivation for moving to Brussels. Leaving your home for another country is a sign of individualism. Part of the globalisation and transnationalism is that you are distancing from a specific nation, and acting more as an individual global citizen. You might come from one country, study in another, and work in a third. The question "where do you come from?" is not as relevant as "where do you live?" or "what do you call home?". As a global citizen, you can adapt to new surroundings and feeling "home" in different places. You realise that much of what is related to a citizenship does not really affect you when you live abroad for some time. Furthermore, citizenship can change. If you work in another country, you are paying tax there, using its social services and health system, your children take part of the local school system, and pay into that country's pension system. This takes you away from many of the more practical implications of "being a citizen".

Brussels has attracted other European citizens that for the last 60 years have impacted European integration and the city. They now form a significant part of Brussels' inhabitants and the city would be very different without them. The cultural identity of Brussels is fed by the presence, interaction, cultural traits, as cosmopolitism of the expatriate. In this section, I examine who these expatriates are, as well as how and why they chose Brussels as their destination.

Who are these European expatriates? It is essential to point out that it is not a homogenous group. There is not one kind of expat in Brussels, but many, with different backgrounds, origins, interests, and special reasons to end up in Brussels. Nevertheless, there are quite a few patterns that can be discerned regarding the expatriates and how they live. The EU expats constitute a vast and multinational bubble well integrated into the city landscape of Brussels.

I am meeting up with Riccardo from Italy. We are sitting at a hip beer bar in Saint-Gilles, just behind Maison Communal. Riccardo lives with his expat girlfriend from the UK a few blocks away. He has been living in Brussels for nine years. Now he is working with EU public relations and interest representation for a multinational financial company. When I ask him how he ended up in Brussels, he immediately goes back to his student years in Milan.

> "Leaving Sicily to go to the north of Italy was of course a big step. Leaving your parents' place, your friends etcetera, and going to a new town. After a few years, I went on an Erasmus exchange in France. This was in some ways an even more important step. To go abroad. I got to know many people from all over Europe, and many of them I am still in contact with. It was an eye-opener. I really liked to meet all these people. So open, and so interesting. Speaking foreign languages and getting a perspective on your home country. Once I was back in Milan, I started to get involved in the Erasmus association, to make Erasmus students feel welcome. I liked the international setting. I think that Erasmus is an important reason why I started to get interested in the EU and that I now live in Brussels."

Riccardo is an example of a self-initiated expatriate, going to Belgium and Brussels on his own initiative (Przytula 2015). A university exchange in France was an important experience for Riccardo, providing him with an interest in international settings. Most expatriates I speak to came to Brussels for work reasons. They were interested in

pursuing a career in European and international affairs, or were already before working within this field, and had ambitions to live abroad long before actually arriving in Brussels. Many expats who came to Brussels in their late twenties or early thirties had previously studied abroad, either through a university exchange programme or by studying an entire degree at a foreign university. Studying abroad has been a denominating factor in pursuing an international career or settling down in another European country. Many have been on Erasmus exchange in Belgium, or studying an entire university degree there. Hence, they are examples of expatriates who were used to socialise with fellow Europeans already prior to settling in Belgium (Suvarierol 2007; 2011). In some cases, they had a career in the EU in mind, but often it was a coincidence. The expatriates often had a prior experience of living abroad, liked it and wanted to do it again. Most expats I speak to have studied social sciences, such as political science, international relations or law.

Konstantinos, whose life story was presented in Chapter 5, also mentioned that he ended up in Brussels a bit by accident. Nevertheless, his background and academic specialisation made it attractive for him to go to Brussels, where there were specific opportunities he would not find elsewhere. Many expatriates in Brussels have had a general interest in international affairs rather than specifically in the EU. However, Brussels tends to be an accessible place with many opportunities to find a job within this domain. Those who did not have substantial knowledge and interest in the EU when arriving in Brussels, usually gained it soon afterwards, since the EU and its institutions are omnipresent, and the expat community is highly EU-focused.

Language is also a denominating factor. People who speak or want to learn French go to a French-speaking place; they could also have ended up in Paris, Geneva or Lyon. Brussels is attractive for those speaking French, or having ambitions to learn. Hence, the interest in language can initially be more appealing than the interest in EU politics. The entire EU machinery attracts Francophiles from all over Europe. Although some expats started learning French in Brussels, many spoke French before they arrived.

Gustav, a Swedish diplomat in his mid-thirties, was sent to Brussels by the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs to work at the country's Permanent Representation to the EU. He has a three-year assignment. Gustav's wife and their two kids joined him, and they live in a townhouse in Ixelles provided by his employer. In his previous positions

at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Sweden he went to Brussels regularly, but he never lived there before. Being sent by an employer for a limited number of years is a traditional "expatriate way" to come to Brussels. We sit outside the Swedish Permanent representation at Square Meus in the European district. He explains to me that most of his colleagues stay in Brussels between three and five years, and that although he has just been here for a year, he is already considering prolonging the contract. He never really had Brussels as a destination in mind and did not like the town very much when he was there for work trips before. However, since there are so many job opportunities, it is a good posting, because it permits his wife to find work as well. He further adds that Brussels is a natural destination for a diplomat, that the EU plays such an important role in Swedish foreign policy, and that it hence is good to pass by Brussels at some point in your career. Now he and his family have settled and like it.

Another common way to end up in Brussels is by pursuing a professional traineeship. In Brussels, young Europeans *en masse* are doing internships of different kinds. These internships are either unpaid or low-paid and generally last between three and six months. The EU institutions have internship programmes that recruit hundreds of young Europeans every semester. Most EU agencies, permanent representations, and many companies and associations offer internships in different forms. For many long-term expats in Brussels, this has been the way into a fixed job in Brussels.

Most young Europeans going to Brussels for studies or an internship come with the idea not to stay in Brussels for more than a year. Nevertheless, many end up staying longer than expected, as was the case of Konstantinos and Zoe. This is the particular case of those who become permanent officials at the European institutions. Hans, a German in his mid-thirties, has lived in Brussels for nine years. He arrived there to do an internship, and was interested in working internationally. However, at the point of departure, he did not have a specific interest in Brussels or the EU.

> "Many of us ended up in Brussels because we have done school exchanges, we have done a lot of trips, we have learned foreign languages. As stupid as it might sound, but initiatives like interrail ticket and Erasmus and so on is probably more successful than all the billions of euros we push into the agricultural sector and infrastructure."

> "I have the impression that a good share of the people here ended up in Brussels by chance. So did I. I had no plan of being in a European movement, and most friends and the colleagues

are pro-European, committed to what they are doing, but not grass-root activists of European integration."

For the last few years, Hans is working for the European Commission after passing the entry-test to get a fixed position – the *concours*. During his time as an intern at the European Commission, he met Sara from Spain. They are now married and have a one-year-old child.

Hans' wife Sara also ended up in Brussels a bit by chance. Originally from the Canary Islands, but having studied in Madrid, she has also been in Brussels for about ten years. She initially came for an internship as well. Sara has been working for the European Commission for many years. However, now she is working for an industry association, hence being part of the large Brussels lobbying machinery. She believes that a general interest in travelling and international affairs has been the most important factor for her to pursue a career in Brussels.

"People came here mostly because they wanted to do something international. So it was for me. And this is a good spot, where there are many job opportunities. But maybe I did not necessarily want to do something EU-focused, but international in general."

Oscar from Sweden also had an interest in travelling and meeting international people.

"This is not the first time I live abroad. I am used to being an expat, and it is very much part of my personality. I love to be back in Sweden, but equally love to go abroad again. I like the fact that you can discover something new in the everyday life. Meet new people, and learn new things. You can learn a lot about yourself as well."

Alexandra also testifies a general will to go abroad as a driving factor. She has been in Brussels for more than ten years. She grew up in a small town in Sweden that already in her childhood felt too small for her. She knew that she wanted to go abroad. She disliked the mentality in Sweden, the social groups and the way of life. Hence, she was eager to explore the world. She went abroad at an early stage, and has lived in London and several years in Paris. As an expat she feels that diversity is encouraged, and it suits her much better than a purely national setting. She could not imagine going back to a national context after such a long time abroad.

"I always felt my town was a bit too small for me. I knew I wanted to leave, and I left directly after high school."

The stories of Hans, Sara, Oscar, Alexandra and others suggest that many expatriates were driven by a general interest in international affairs and living abroad. It seems like the drive to live abroad, and be part of something "international", is stronger than an ideology of Europeanism, at least at the onset.

Thus, although some move to Brussels for their specific interest in European affairs or interest in joining the EU institutions, a typical young expat in Brussels comes here because of a general interest in international affairs, travelling, and a curiosity in exploring other countries, cultures, and languages. Many want to travel abroad, to see something new, out of curiosity or specific interest. Search for prestige may also be a dominant factor. An internship, an exchange semester at a university, or a master degree might be the reason to go to Brussels. Sometimes they had an experience from an Erasmus exchange in another European country and wanted to do something similar, no matter where, just to go abroad again. It is for many highly educated Europeans a reasonably easy option, an affordable alternative not too far away, with many opportunities. However, Brussels itself, the capital of Belgium, is seldom the main reason why people move here.

The expatriates are all different, but they also have a lot in common. Many have studied social sciences, not least political science or law. They have an interest in international affairs and a wish to live abroad. They generally speak several languages, which is also linked to cultural capital, and have been doing parts of their university education in another country. These are characteristics they share with only a tiny fraction of the Europeans. Those who are slightly older and are sent out by their employers, such as member states diplomats, are in Brussels because of European Affairs, which they are likely to have particular skill or interest in.

For people from Central and Eastern Europe, as well as some of the Mediterranean countries, Brussels is attractive in terms of offering well-paid jobs. Particularly during the financial crisis, many came to Brussels to find jobs, either in the section of European affairs, or in the service sector. Many nationalities work in the restaurants and cafés in Brussels. From the EU member states of Central and Eastern Europe, there is more of a systemic and constant flow of people, partly because a position within the EU institutions pays many times more than an equivalent job in the national administration.

To conclude, young people coming to Brussels are often interested in going abroad, curious about new places, and have international aspirations. These aspirations are partly linked to a curiosity and will to be part of "something bigger" and a cosmopolitan lifestyle, but also to the prestige, salary and status that the jobs often imply. They are likely to be interested in European affairs, but would be likely interested in working for the UN system in Geneva or New York.

6.2 The particularities of being an expat

When I lived in Stockholm, I hung out with many of my high-school friends. We grew up in southern Sweden but ended up in Stockholm at some point because of work. My colleagues came from all over the country, and we used to joke saying "nobody in Stockholm comes from Stockholm". I get reminded of this as I sit at a café in Ixelles. I had spent a few hours there already, from late morning until early afternoon. The waitress addresses me in English and does not seem to be Belgian. Around me people are coming and going. Parents with their children, some students. I hear many languages and it seems like many of the guests are non-Belgians. The menu is in English and it is one of these places that could be almost anywhere in Europe, as long as there is an international crowd. Some expats I speak to hang out primarily with fellow countrymen, with whom they mainly have their nationality in common. Once out of your habitat, you look for people that remind you of home. The same seems to apply for internal migrants in Stockholm and for expatriates in Brussels.

The expatriates in Brussels are foreigners in a new country. Initially, the place is new to you, but a routine develops after some time, and you may feel at home. Nevertheless, you are facing a foreign culture, places and possibly languages, and you are away from family and friends. All these issues affect expatriates in different ways. In this section, we will describe the characteristics of everyday lives of expatriates in Brussels.

One characteristic that my informants share is the (initially) temporary nature of their jobs. Malin is a Swedish citizen in her late twenties who arrived in Brussels one

and a half year ago. She has a temporary employment at the Swedish Permanent Representation to the EU. The contract was initially for one year, but was prolonged. She plans to move back to Sweden, where her partner lives, in six months. When she first moved to Brussels she did not know anyone, and she had never been there before. She liked Brussels from the very beginning.

> "It is so close to all over Europe. Even to Stockholm. I have five hours door to door. It is the same time it takes for me to go from Stockholm to the north of Sweden where I am from. That means that many can pay a visit, and that I can go back frequently to meet my partner and friends. There are also so many people passing by Brussels for work, meaning that I can meet up with colleagues or friends from Sweden or other European countries. On the other hand, this means that one doesn't really commit or engage in the town. I probably would have engaged in relations and also maybe invested in things would I have known from the beginning that I would stay for two years. But I am here for one plus one year. I live in a small, furnished studio. Feels a bit like being a student again."

Since Malin initially did not know for how long she would stay, she has not engaged in relations and in investing in her flat to the extent that she would have done otherwise. This is something many expatriates speak about, and that differs from their lives back home. Vegar from Norway also discusses how temporariness characterises his life as an expat in Brussels, even if he has lived there for many years:

> "No one admits you gonna stay here forever. But they end up staying here for a long time. You are never really settled. Even those that bought a house. Everything is very temporary. Far away from home. Much admin and practicalities.
>
> Living a stretch temporary life affects planning and decision-making. Some are easier to make, some are more difficult. Decide upon your home. Buying a house. I will always have a connection to Oslo. But here, maybe not."

Thus, the expatriates live in a temporariness. Knowing that you might soon leave, makes you invest less, and hence it is difficult to create a "home", both physically and emotionally, although this temporariness may be prolonged for years. I have visited many flats and houses of expatriates in Brussels. A home can reveal how settled people are, and their horizons for their sojourn in Brussels. Expatriates who are sent out from their home countries often have homes full of things. They got all their furniture shipped to Brussels. Free movers, who came to Brussels on their own, often have cheaper furniture. There is a specific white IKEA drawer that I saw in almost every

expat's home I visited. Many expatriates say that they came to Brussels for a temporary sojourn. They came with a one-way ticket with two suitcases, especially those arriving in their twenties. They bought some cheap furniture, since they intended to stay for merely a few months. However, they stayed, sometimes for years, but often prolonged it with one year at a time, and therefore never cared about investing properly in furniture, as well as many other things. This suggests that some expatriates live in a certain kind of temporariness, despite the fact that some have stayed in Brussels for many years.

I get the feeling that the same kind of cautiousness about investing time, money and energy can be seen in the relation to personal relationships. People do not know whether the relationships will last, and hence they do not put their soul into it. The turnover in social relationships with other expats, who are also likely to leave after some years (see also Section 7.1), adds to the feeling of temporariness, as Marie recounted in Section 5.5.

Malin thinks that life in Brussels is very different from being an expat in other cities or working as a diplomat in other places. She finds the expat community to be large and varied. She finds a sense of "normality" in the expat life, which makes it feel both temporary and permanent. You can live an everyday life with a separation between work and private life, partly because the differences between Brussels and the capitals of the expatriates' countries of origin are not dramatic, in contrast to the experiences of European expatriates based in, for example, African or Asian capitals.

Another characteristic is that most participants move in only a relatively small part of the urban space. Malin lives in Saint-Gilles and works in the European quarter. She moves within a small area in Brussels, between the EU district, where she works and eats lunch with colleagues; and Saint-Gilles and Ixelles, where she lives and meets with friends. She occasionally goes to the city centre, and then mainly for a specific reason, such as visiting a museum or shopping. But generally, she is moving within a small triangle.

Malin is not unique in this perspective. Many expatriates hang out in the same areas. They work in the European quarter, and live around there, or south or south-west of the city centre. They move around these neighbourhoods, and sometimes go to the city centre for a specific event, or visit at a museum. In that sense, the expatriate

community can be considered a privileged "ethnic enclave" (cf. Valenzuela-Garcia, Molina & Lubbers 2020; Valenzuela-Garcia et al. 2018), except that they come from multiple countries of origin.

Naturally, another feature that expats share is that they have a cosmopolitan lifestyle. To some extent, the expatriate personalises globalisation and can be called a globalised tribe. They travel frequently, adapt to new places, and socialise in a global, or at least European, environment. This is further reflected in their consumption and media patterns. There seems to be a "glocal" tendency, where the global outlook is mixed with the local reality of their, usually, original town or village in their home country.

The expatriates are a mobile community per se, but on top of that they travel extensively in their free time. It is not unusual with a trip abroad one or two weekends a month to meet family and friends in your home country or the country of your partner. The expatriates also seem to invest more time and money than the average on travelling to new places. This hyper-mobility may be an additional reason for never really rooting in Brussels. A lack of local embeddedness may also provoke the mobility. A number of expatriates I interview have been enculturated into mobility and travelling from an early age, through their parents, who were during certain periods expatriates themselves.

The reasons for expatriates to move to Brussels affect their everyday lives there. I meet with Oscar from Sweden in a bar in Saint Boniface. It is situated just a few hundred meters from the EU quarter, but the atmosphere is different. A beautiful church dominates the small square. It is rainy and cold outside, but in the large restaurant it is warm and cosy. Oscar arrived in Brussels only a month earlier. He is in his early forties and seconded by Sweden to work for the European External Action Service. He has an initial contract for a year but considers prolonging to four years. He has found himself a nice apartment right at the square where the restaurant is situated. He had been to Brussels for work before, but never lived there. He speaks about his experience of living abroad.

> "Since you are abroad, you can act more individually, and be more 'young'. You do not have to grow up. This is nice, but also dangerous. Life can just pass by, without you noticing

it, and it is easy to consume too much alcohol etc. since there is no network of friends and family around you to keep an eye on you."

"I can also get very annoyed by feeling 'as a stranger' when you need to be in contact with local authorities in a language that you do not understand etc. It takes a lot of energy."

Oscar is an example of an experienced expatriate, who has lived abroad in different countries before. His story suggests that the expat community is liberal in some senses, far away the social control of family and friends back home. Oscar says that you can remain young as an expatriate. As you move out of your normal environment, the pressure from society on what you should do at a certain age, and how you should act and socialise, disappears. Furthermore, being abroad is a way to rebrand or reinvent yourself. You can do things you normally do not do at home. This brings a certain level of freedom and possibility to break restrictions that may be more limiting in a national context when you are closer to the family. Many young people I speak to emphasise the freedom they feel when leaving their home country. Once you are out of your usual surroundings and habitat, you can act in a way that maybe is not expected from you, and adapt freely to a new reality.

However, this can be a trap, as there is no family nor old friends on your side. The lack of secure social network can push for certain behaviour, including unhealthy habits. When you are newly arrived in Brussels, you need to socialise to create a network, and much of expatriates' socialisation is centred around going out to restaurants and bars, meaning that alcohol potentially can play a central role. Furthermore, there is a lot of networking taking place at official gatherings, receptions and so on, where free alcohol is often served.

The identification with the word "expatriate" varies between the foreigners I interview and can develop over time, but it is often associated with something enriching. Isabelle from France has been in Brussels for eight years. She grew up in Paris, but felt she wanted to leave France already at a young age. Isabelle always wanted to become an expat and associates the word to something positive. She was attracted by the flexibility, mobility and ever-changing plans that an international career can imply, and hence had ambitions about moving abroad for work already at an early stage (see also Bauman 2007). She was further attracted by Brussels as a city and likes the high quality of life, the accessibility, and the manageable size of the Belgian capital,

compared to Paris. She says that being an expat in Brussels is easy, safe, cheap, and she can be much more relaxed and spontaneous than she would have been in France. She considers herself being an expat and likes it. Although she more or less accidentally arrived in Brussels, being an expat is the result of a long-term plan. Her boyfriend is Dutch, and she says that it makes sense for them to stay in Brussels, between their countries of origin. Nevertheless, she sometimes misses Paris and France, but the language is the same, and she can go to her parents in Paris in merely two hours door to door. The cultural distance (Van de Vijver 2015) is hence relatively small. Brussels has become a home that she likes.

Anna is a Bulgarian citizen who has lived in Brussels for over ten years. Her partner is also an expat, although from a non-EU country, and they have a two and a half years old son. She grew up mostly abroad and is used to being an expat. Like Isabelle, she also thinks that it is mostly positive. She has been working for the European Commission for many years.

> "Constantly meeting with people from different countries, at work and in private, is enriching. You get a broader spectrum of ideas. You get even more open-minded, as you hear stories and perspectives from different countries that you maybe had not thought of. In Bulgaria I feel that it is a bit more narrow. I also like that it is very easy to connect to people here, at least expats. And professionally, it is so interesting to be in an international place. It is open-minded. I don't know if I could go to a national administration now."

Anna's thoughts seem to be typical for the expatriates. She likes the international flavour, both privately and professionally, and in comparison, a purely national setting feels narrow-minded and less attractive. This international milieu seems to be what brings many expatriates in Brussels to move abroad and pursue an international career, and one of the aspects of the everyday life that they appreciate the most. Being "international" has become part of their self-perception, and something that they want to be characterised with, particularly when back home in their countries of origin. The expatriates often like to be foreigners. They like being exposed to different cultures and languages, and appreciate the daily excitement of being abroad. The expatriates in Brussels live and work in a multilingual environment. Typically, expatriates speak at least two languages on a daily basis. All speak English, some speak French, and only very few speak Dutch. In addition, many expatriates speak other European languages

at an acceptable level. Living in a European setting, and feeling European, is considered positive.

Being abroad and far away from home certainly includes negative aspects as well. Many expatriates mention the fact that you are away from family and friends as a major disadvantage. The expatriates lose touch with family members and childhood friends. Meanwhile, this migrant group generally are in the privileged position that they can travel and meet their relatives on a regular basis, and in some cases, for expats from Belgium's neighbouring countries, the distance is not substantial. Of practical nature, it can be complicated to deal with a foreign administration. Health care systems, social security, taxes, etcetera, are things you have to deal with in a foreign language, following a foreign culture and set of rules. How to manage this is far from obvious and adds an element of insecurity to life. Furthermore, in difficult times, you can feel very lost and lonely in a foreign country. Isabelle, among others, mention that the fact that friends she gets to know and like might leave, and that there is an uncertainty in the long-term perspectives in everything she does. However, with time, her friends have, just as herself, settled and stayed.

A European going to Tanzania or Bangladesh to work for a company or an embassy are seen as expatriates among the local population. They may look different. They probably have an economic situation that differs greatly from the general citizen of the host society. They are part of a relatively small community of foreigners. In Brussels, it is different. In most cases, their look and appearance do not reveal that they are expatriates, and their "bureaucratic style" does not differ from Belgian civil servants, clerks or lawyers. If you speak French or Dutch you can easily communicate with the local society, and English is widely spoken. Although Eurocrats generally have high incomes, the difference compared to the local Belgians is likely to be considerably lower than in most places in Africa and Asia. Hence, expatriates in Brussels can easily blend into society in Brussels, at least in theory. Furthermore, the group of expatriates in Brussels is so big, that it almost constitutes a society on its own, a "city within the city", or an "imagined community" (Anderson 1983).

This makes life of expats in Brussels fairly similar to the lives they live in their home countries. Globalisation and Europeanisation have made European capitals more similar, and life does not differ significantly between Brussels, Madrid, Warsaw or

Copenhagen. The pedestrian zones are characterised by the same multinational market and shopping chains, and the cultures of European urban centres are increasingly resembling.

To conclude, the daily experiences of expatriates in Brussels are characterised by the centrality of careers, a sense of temporariness and fluidity, by hypermobility but at the same time only using a small part of the urban space, by a sense of freedom, open-mindedness and individualism. It seems accurate to call the expatriates in Brussels a privileged sub-culture of cosmopolitan pioneers of Europeanisation and modernity. Some of them are rootless cosmopolitans, whereas others just changed city within Europe, and will now stay there for a few decades. The expatriates in the Eurobubble live in a multicultural and multilinguistic environment. They have a shorter time-horizon, where the younger expatriates do not know how long they will stay or where they will live in a year. They often have one foot in Brussels and one elsewhere, which provides a certain temporariness to their existence. They can be considered open-minded, ambitious, self-confident and non-conformist in the way that they have left their countries of origin. They have certain cultural and economic resources, and have language skills already before coming to Brussels. Often, they have been abroad before, either as part of their international-oriented profession or, for the younger ones, a university exchange. It is not uncommon that they have been growing up in an international and mobile environment – meaning that the habitus is not unfamiliar to them. The expats often have a university education in social science.

6.3 What makes expatriates stay in Brussels?

Technology, infrastructure and communication connect the world and make it easier to be flexible and adjustable. With an internet connection and a smartphone, one can connect with friends and family from wherever, as well as listen to the same music, read the same news, watch the same TV shows, and instantly react to posts on social media. Low budget airlines make it easier to see your friends and family, at least within Europe, on a regular basis, at a cost comparable to domestic train tickets – and even

international train tickets can be expected to become more affordable with the pressure from environmental concerns. I ask myself how this possibility to always virtually and frequently physically be in the country of origin affects expats in Brussels as regards their integration in Belgium.

As indicated before, many young expatriates arriving in Brussels do not know how long they will be staying. At this phase, they are very mobile, and still have not settled in their new home town. For some people, Brussels is almost like what Augé (1995) would call a "non-place" of supermodernity, a place where you work and nothing else. Many people leave Brussels during weekends and spend as little time as possible there.

Meanwhile, most participants like the city, and embrace it. But despite getting to know people, making friends, and liking the city, they could easily move elsewhere. So, what makes people stay in Brussels? In this section, I examine what factors make expatriates stay in Brussels for a longer period of time.

Based on interviews and chats, I have identified four main reasons for expatriates (mainly concerning younger expatriates that are free-movers) to stay in Brussels for a longer period: (i) job, (ii) relationship, (iii) investments in real estate, and (iv) children. Once the internship or temporary contract has become a fixed position, expats feel more settled in town. Often, especially for expatriates originating from southern and eastern EU member states, Brussels' work conditions are hard to match back home. Hence, they have an incentive to stay. This is the case also for James, from the UK, who is continuously looking into new opportunities to go back to his home country and be closer to his family, but it has to be something better, and he does not know where and what that would be. Meanwhile, he stays in Brussels partly as a result of conformity, since there is no good alternative. Those working for the EU institutions usually are bound to Brussels or Luxembourg, although there are other possibilities both within and outside the EU.

Long-term romantic relationship is another reason. The absence of family and childhood friends for most expats make many people feel "temporary" in Brussels, despite staying there for a few years. A long-term romantic relationship can play a crucial role in bringing a sense of stability and belonging. However, there are (at least)

two situations with different outcomes. First, given that many expatriates hang out with people from their own country, it is not unlikely to engage in a relationship with someone of your own nationality. If so, the relationship may spur them to leave Brussels earlier than they would if they were alone, given that the couple may plan for a shared future in their home country. Couples from the same country of origin tend to go back "home" at some point, especially when they get children. This can be explained by that they want to strengthen the ties between the child and their home country and family. In addition, in Brussels they are far away from parents and other family members who can help taking care of children. In the other case, that is when expats start a romantic relationship with someone with another nationality than their own, their ties with Brussels are likely to strengthen, especially if the partner would be Belgian. If an expatriate engages in a romantic relationship with an expat from another country, "going home" implies not one, but two destinations. Brussels may then become a good compromise, and the place where the couple build up their life, careers, and networks. Meeting a partner in Brussels not only gives individuals a stronger connection to the city, but also access to local social network.

Buying a house is an important step in the settlement process. First of all, people need to know where to buy a flat or house. Second, it requires significant contact with both Belgian private sector (real estate agents, lawyers, banks, craftsmen), the public sector (municipality for registration, for instance), and individuals (the people expats are buying real estate from). Furthermore, they must know how the system works. Expats tell me that owning a house in Brussels made them change their perspective on how long they will stay in this town, and consider it more like a "home". For instance, Sophie and her partner bought a charming attic duplex in Saint-Gilles in southern Brussels. In recent years the area has become increasingly popular among young expatriates as well as Belgians. The Parvis de Saint-Gilles, a square in front of a church, is full of young (as well as not so young) hipsters from early morning until late night. As the area is gentrified, some old shops are replaced by smart cafés and the usual suspect retail chains. From Sophie's balcony we can see a complex system of backyards and gardens of the different houses in the block. The balcony is newly built, by her partner, and they have carefully renovated the loft they bought a few years earlier. Sophie is not the only one buying a house and referring to it as a step towards integration in Belgium and a sign to oneself and others of an intention to stay.

> "Owning a place actually really makes you get to know your town. You have to learn the rules and regulation when you buy something. You have to be in contact with the bank, the tax authorities, the notary public, and the real estate agent. Furthermore, we wanted to do some renovations and do some major changes, due to which we were in contact with the municipality and of course craftsmen of different kinds."

However, the most critical consequence of buying a place is that you interact with your neighbours, says Sophie. She lives in a small building with just a couple of flats. She explains that they own the shared areas in common, including the roof, the pipes, etcetera, which requires cooperation and good relations with the neighbours. However, in a city and area where expatriates represent a significant minority, the people they integrate with are not always the Belgians.

Finally, having children in Brussels and realising that they might consider Brussels to be "home" has a substantial impact on settlement intentions and feelings of belonging to the city. It also requires people to contact the local authorities and to get to know the welfare system and its institutions. Besides, the children act as bridges and catalysts in the contact with the locals. Speaking with the neighbours, and the fellow parents at kindergarten and primary school generates a sense of belonging to Brussels, or at least to the quarter where they live. Nonetheless, as I will show in Section 6.4, children can also be the reason that people want to go back to their home countries, to strengthen their children´s identification with the homeland and their family ties.

The younger expats are when they come to Brussels, the more likely they are to stay. In formative years, between 25 and 35, many find a job within a field of work that they like (European affairs), which they will not easily find in their home countries. A typical story is that a young European comes to Brussels for an internship or a first job. She comes initially for one semester, but gets a renewed contract, and decides to stay. Once she gets a fixed contract, she decides to expand her sojourn. Maybe she meets a partner, and if they are not from the same country, there is no common "home" to move back to. Hence, they remain. They form a family, buy a house, and suddenly they have been around for a decade or two.

In sum, expatriates decide to stay in Brussels for professional opportunities or romantic relationships, which changes the "temporariness" and makes them invest more in their local relationships to Belgians, Brussels, and Belgium. It seems relatively

easy for couples of different nationalities to stay in Brussels, as a "neutral" place – a compromise – rather than moving to the country of one of the two.

6.4 Career and family

I sit at a café next to a kindergarten. It is late afternoon and parents come from work to pick up their children. As they leave, I hear parents speaking to their children in different languages. Many of these kids grow up in a truly multicultural environment. Belgium has three official languages, Dutch, French and German, and English is frequently used as well. In addition, there are all the languages of the immigrants. Arabic, Italian, Portuguese and Polish are widely spoken in the Belgian capital. The children may very well speak one or two languages at kindergarten, and another two back home. They are too young to reflect on what is "home". I ask myself how they will look at Brussels when they are teenagers and grown-ups, regardless of whether their parents stayed or returned to their home countries.

Expats living in Brussels generally are there because of work, and career is essential for many of them. In this section I investigate how staying abroad affects expatriates' family lives, and examine patterns in this regard among the expats in Brussels.

Given that expatriates in general have arrived in Brussels for professional reasons (as a result of a plan and strategy or because an opportunity arose), career naturally has a central position in many expatriates' lives. In many interactions and social gatherings, work life is the common denominator, and work does not stop once the expats leave the office. Networking, actively or not, is a core ingredient in Brussels' expat environment. Work-related topics are also key features in social gatherings among friends. The average expatriate focuses a lot on work, and usually works for long hours. The career-focused mindset is reflected in the formation of families. The percentage of singles is high, and people generally get children relatively late in life, often later than their friends back home. Some plan to go back "home" when they get children. This suggests that there is a cost of an international career in terms of family and stability.

For some expatriates it is a relief to be abroad and hence not feel the pressure from family and friends to follow certain traditions and have children at a certain age. In Brussels, it is normal to be single and without children at the age of 35-40. I ask Konstantinos on his view on how people create a family as an expatriate:

> "The reason why I think all of these people I know have jumped into relationships, is because when they come here, they are, by definition, alone. They don't have a family; they don't have anyone. They just have friends, colleagues, and then at some point they meet someone who becomes someone super close to them and in essence replaces family. If I have a girlfriend I've been seeing for two years, I will make the jump to live with her in the same apartment much faster, because I don't have parents, I don't have cousins, I don't have childhood friends here. It's not my home."

This suggests that the lack of family can be compensated by a group of friends, and that many expatriates are looking for a partner to compensate the lack of family ties, in a way to create emotional security. And many are in romantic relationships. As suggested by Konstantinos, the lack of family and old friends might make a partner even more critical than at home, to feel secure.

Several women I speak to say that if they had lived where they grew up, they would probably have children already, in the same way as their childhood friends have. Many women explained that having friends and colleagues in Brussels who do not have children makes it easy and socially acceptable not to be a parent yourself. They feel that there is less pressure in this regard in Brussels, compared to in their home countries. For instance, Carolina from Argentina argues that in Brussels, or when living abroad, it is easier to continue to have a young lifestyle for a longer time than if they had lived at home. This goes in line with what Oscar mentioned earlier. In Argentina, Carolina would be under more pressure to comply with social norms of what a woman aged 35 must do, but in Brussels the lack of family connections and strong ties prevent such pressure. Isabelle from France says that her career has a negative impact on family life and prospects:

> "People come here and stay here for work or love. Nobody comes here for Brussels. I stayed here because of my boyfriend, otherwise I would have left, most probably. I came here for an internship at the Commission. My plan was always to go back, but I never left. I will probably stay for some time. People work a lot. People are very occupied by work, there are so many career people, and hence people get kids later, if at all."

This once again suggests that the lack of pressure from society and family in this regard, and the normality of not having children amongst expatriates in Brussels, postpones this process.

Many expatriates in Brussels focus on career and want to achieve something in their domain before starting a family. However, I meet an Italian woman who tells me that she, who just got a baby, finds it easier to become a mother in Brussels than back in Italy, because of the job security. In contrast, a female expatriate from Sweden says that in Brussels, conditions for parents are worse than in Sweden, and hence she is more reluctant to become a parent in Brussel than back home. The economic implications of having a family differ across Europe, and how participants see Brussels in this regard depends on their country of origin.

Expats who moved to Brussels with their family are in another situation. Gustav from Sweden came to Brussels with his wife and two children. He feels that Brussels is a good place for his children to grow up and an excellent opportunity for them to learn English and French. However, being far away from the children's grandparents is unfortunate, both regarding strengthening the family ties and the possibility for grandparents to help out. Before the move to Brussels, Gustav was not sure how the children would react and adapt.

> "We like it very much, the entire family, especially the children that are two and four years old. In terms of work I like it, but privately as well. We found a good school, and my daughter already speaks English as well as she speaks Swedish, and started with some French as well. The son is in a French-speaking kindergarten and likes it. Having children is actually very good in terms of social life. In general, it is easier to find new friends and acquaintances here than in Stockholm, where most people are stuck in old groups of friends. [We meet] primarily expats, but also Belgians. And through the kids we meet a lot of people. At school and the kindergarten. Birthday parties. Colleagues with kids.
>
> We only speak Swedish at home, but I think it's great that the children get more languages for free. It's a gift. In particular English, but also French. What we think in the long run is that we do not want them to miss to learn to read and write in Swedish. Orally it will be fine, but if they only hear us adults speak, they will for sure speak a kind of old-fashioned Swedish. But written Swedish they will not learn properly if we are not in Sweden. And that is not a door I want to close for them, so it needs to be actively worked upon. Through distance learning or some kind of online activities. Without Swedish I am afraid they would

lose a proper feeling of where they are from, in case we continue to live abroad. Will be interesting to see how they like it and adapt when we are back in Sweden."

Expatriates with children, like Gustav, think a lot about what this international environment does to their children. After a few years in Brussels, where expatriates have a house, a job, a partner who is from a third country, and a child born in Brussels, it is complex to define "home". Expat parents say that they feel closer to Belgium and Brussels thanks to their children. They get in contact with health services, kindergartens and schools, and the social welfare system. They go to playgrounds with their children, where they meet other parents – people they would otherwise not have met. Meanwhile, some parents feel concerned that Belgium will become the "home" of their children.

Hans from Germany has a child with Sara from Spain. He says that since their son was born a year ago, they feel a greater sense of belonging to the city, but it also made them realise that they are expatriates, far from home.

"You really realise on a day-to-day basis that you live far from home. You cannot call grandparents to pick up the kids, which would be the case had you lived closer to them. There are both pros and cons of having a kid abroad."

Sara thinks that it works well to have a family as an expat in a foreign city but adds:

"With the family, with our son, it is a pity that my parents will not see him growing up. And [we miss] also the help from the parents."

Some expats I interview want to have children, but wait until they return to their home country. They want to have the security network of family and friends, and they also want their children to grow up in the environment they grew up in themselves. However, it can take time to find a good job back home. Others feel that Brussels is a good place to have children. Expats with children say that there is a relatively good social security system with good childcare, and there is a possibility to get parental leave.

Another issue for expatriate parents in Brussels to consider is choosing schools, which might be important in defining their children's identity. Hans' and Sara's one-year-old child goes to a local Belgian kindergarten close by their apartment, mostly for practical reasons. Expatriates' children can also go to an international school, or the

European schools, which are run by the EU institutions. Hans has an ambivalent view of what kind of school to choose.

> "Either you go to the local Belgian school or you go to the European school. In the European school you have different language sections, so it would be the German or Spanish one. And I think the European school is probably better in terms of resources, cultural and sports activities, and more international. But you end up being friends with people of the same background. [There are children of] Commission staff and a few diplomats, and you go around for hours in a school bus to pick up everyone, and it is a mess with the traffic. Otherwise you go to a local school, get friends in the same area, in French and Dutch. I have heard different voices about the Belgian system, positive and negative."

Language is an important issue in the choice between schools as well as parenting in general. Penelope from Greece expresses that if she had children, it would be essential for her that they learned Greek. Her partner is Belgian, and they will probably stay in Brussels, and Penelope is hence concerned that her children would not learn her mother tongue. Paul, from Germany, has a nearly two years old son with his French-speaking Belgian girlfriend. His partner understands German but does not feel comfortable to engage in conversations properly. For Paul, it is crucial that the child will learn German as well. Paul and his girlfriend speak mostly English, with French and German words. With their child, however, they speak mostly French. Paul wants to introduce him to German, but says that it is not obvious. For Sara, language is also a denominating factor in terms of choosing school.

> "Practically, although I do not know very much about the Belgian system, the best schools should be Flemish rather than French speaking. […] But I do not speak Flemish, I do not want to put him there. It is another language on top. So either a francophone school or the European one."

James from the UK also has a small daughter, and is also thinking about schools. He is hesitant about the European school, not least for practical reasons, since it is on the other side of town. However, language is an issue for him as well.

> "Our child can be at the European school's kindergarten already now. But it is on the other side of town, so it feels a bit far right now. […] It doesn't really matter where they go to school when they're three. But at some point, we really have to make a decision about which school to go to. To the European school or just an ordinary Belgian one. Belgium has a really good education system, so it probably doesn't matter. If it is not too complicated, I

have nothing against the European school, but I would not push for it. You can choose a language. We could choose French. But then also, that's like a question. I mean obviously it would make sense for her to study in English. But that means we have to resign to the fact that she's probably never really going to learn French properly. Which is kind of a shame. Basically, French is difficult to learn really well. If she doesn't do it at school, then you know she will always have French as a second language whereas if she does it the other way around it means she's going to learn English eventually anyway. So, we really talk about this quite a lot actually".

Sophie from France feels that her one-year-old daughter is not Belgian, despite that she was born in Belgium and probably will grow up there. She is hesitant about her child learning Dutch in the future.

"My daughter is French, not Belgian. And I'm not sure I would like my children to fuzz up their brains with Flemish. I rather want them to learn Spanish or something."

Greek-Italian Anastasia grew up in Brussels as her parents worked for the EU institutions. For her, this multinational environment was normal, and she liked it. Now she is pregnant, and naturally thinks extensively on what the environment she grew up in has meant to her, and what she would like to bring forward to her child. Like Sophie, she also doesn't see her child as Belgian.

"I hope she or he will be European and learn many languages. The question is of course what passport the child will get. I want it to be Greek and Italian, my boyfriend of course wants the baby to become British as well. We both agree upon that Belgian citizenship is not an option."

The comments from Anastasia and Sophie reveal that expatriate parents are careful about making their children identify with their own countries of origin, rather than feeling Belgian – a country they reside in but do not strongly identify with.

Like other parents, James also contemplates about the schools' student bodies, and believes that the European school would not expose his child to other children of different backgrounds.

"At first, I wasn't even sure that I wanted her to go to the European school at all because I was thinking it seemed like such an artificial environment. Not much diversity obviously. Such a privileged area. School is supposed to prepare you for life, right? I mean that's the

way I see it. It's not so much about what you learn it's also about socialising and stuff like that."

Many, as James, have thoughts on whether the European school is too much of an elitist project that would not be good for their children. Alice from the UK, who now has a Belgian citizenship, has no children yet, but has nevertheless thought a lot about education and schooling in Brussels.

"If I would get kids I would probably not go for the kindergarten and school of the EU institutions. It is good and there are sections for every language, but all people I know who went there are a bit strange. It is like a European indoctrination. It is like perpetuating the Eurobubble. We are not integrated, and hence we could at least use the public schools to give our kids a change to integrate. I also think there is no variety and a lot of competition. All parents working for the EU. Too Eurofocused. I went to a witty school in northern England and I did ok."

In sum, there seems to be a very ambivalent feeling towards how to raise kids. On the one hand, it is nice if they are multinational, transborder, have several citizenships and speak many languages. On the other, the expatriates typically do not want their children to be rootless, and want them to speak their own mother tongue.

While many of the expats are fine with living abroad, they often are cautious about how it affects their children, and have ambivalent feelings regarding their children growing up in Brussels without a "proper home country". If they grew up in, say, Italy, that will always be home; but if they grow up in Brussels with an Italian mother and German father, what is then home? Parenthood raises a lot of thoughts about how to educate children and not lose the culture of the parents. As indicated before, couples from the same country often consider going home when they become parents, to strengthen the ties between the child and their home country, but also with the family. In addition, they feel that in Brussels they are far from parents and other family members that can help taking care of children. For those who stay, language, citizenship and school system are issues that expatriate parents think extensively on.

To conclude, the expatriates in Brussels typically form a family later than most of their friends back home. This can be compared with other high-skilled career persons in national capitals where the average age of becoming a parent is higher than among people in the countryside. Expatriates say that the focus on career, the instability and

temporariness of living abroad, as well as decreased pressure from family, friends and society on forming a family has made it less of a priority. Furthermore, romantic relationships and families are denominating factors whether expatriates are staying in Brussels or returning to their counties of origin. Hans concludes by reflecting about having a child in an expat environment:

> "You know where you are from. But putting a person into this bubble is tricky."

7. Integration and the Eurobubble

> "Loving life is easy when you are abroad. Where no one knows you and you hold life in your hands all alone, you are more master of yourself than at any other time."
>
> Hannah Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess*, 1957.

7.1 Building up a social network in the Eurobubble

There is a not very big nor spectacular square full of bars in front of the European Parliament. Here, at Place Luxembourg – often shortened to Place Lux or simply "Plux" – young expatriates meet up to socialise. Especially Thursday evenings are mythical, and it is said that people can get jobs while mingling around here. It is popular amongst interns and trainees of the EU institutions to go to Place Luxembourg for a few drinks after work. During the warmer months of the year, the place is packed these Thursday nights. Many languages are spoken, and the atmosphere is indeed trans-European. Belgians who do not work with European affairs do not seem to be there. Although it is generally difficult to guess who is an expat in Brussels, and who is not, it is evident that they are high-skilled workers from different countries. People are dressed in suits, men wear ties and women high heels. People's ambience and looks differ greatly from what one would see at Place Saint-Gery in the centre, where the audience is more socially mixed and more Belgian.

As the large literature on immigrant adaptation and social networks shows (e.g., Lubbers & Molina 2021; Bilecen & Lubbers 2021), leaving your roots and arriving in

a new country requires you to set up a new local social network to meet your needs for socialising and social support. Whom one meets depends primarily on the opportunities afforded by the social settings in which one participates upon arrival (e.g., workplace, neighbourhood and friends' networks; cf. Ryan & Mulholland 2014; Lubbers et al. 2021). As the general literature focuses primarily on economic migrants and refugees, little is known about expats. Ryan and Mulholland (2014) suggest that high-skilled migrants may initially lack social networks at the destination in question, just like other groups of migrants, but that their cultural capital makes it easy for them to create a broad range of new ties. In this and the following section, I explore how expatriates in Brussels build up a local network and with whom they socialise. This section focuses on relationships within the Eurobubble and the next one on relationships with the Belgians.

Most expatriates I have interviewed have arrived in Brussels without having a network. Sometimes they have come with a partner, sometimes they knew someone there already, or had contacts through friends. But generally, they have been forced to build up a network privately and professionally after arriving. Since expatriates in Brussels are there for professional reasons, colleagues and workplaces are natural ways to socialise, as are business lunches, receptions, and drinks after work. I ask Vegar from Norway how he socialises in Brussels.

> "It is easier to get to know new people here than in Norway, especially fresh and newly arrived expats. [It is] more difficult in Norway, [where] relationships are different. However, after some time, you have your circle, and then it is a bit more normal. I meet people from a bit all over."

Vegar suggests that the eagerness of newly arrived people to socialise and network creates a culture of openness. As there is a constant influx of new people, it is often easy to get to know people. He finds it easier to get friends in Brussels than at home, where people already have their social groups. This openness and eagerness of getting to know new people seems to diminish over the years, but an understanding of the situation and loneliness of newly arrived people seems to remain, possibly as a recollection of one's own initial period in Brussels.

Since it is easy to get to know other newly arrived expatriates, they mainly socialise with each other and integrate into this particular community. Many of the expatriates work in the same field, have studied social sciences, speak several languages, and have a comparable experiences of living abroad. The expatriates hence undergo an acculturation process towards the Eurobubble, which becomes a key component in their support network (see Adams & Van de Vijver 2015).

The initial period seems to be critical for socialising. People are mingling at work and in private, and expats get skilful in networking. Pitching themselves, asking the right questions, and making jokes that everybody can understand are common strategies. Somehow this makes the socialising a bit superficial. Friendly and open, but still not personal. This is partly related to the fact that the expatriates do not know for how long they will stay, and there is a high turn-over of people. Hence, the expats may not invest in relationships to the same extent that they would do in their countries of origin. Nonetheless, while there is a high turnover of people, many remain in Brussels, and the ones that expats get to know during their first days in town, maybe by coincidence, can remain friends for a long time. They met in a critical period when they were new in town, which had a bonding effect, and they have been friends ever since. This can be compared with childhood friends back home. Anna refers to this aspect:

> "At least before, I got the impression that people were leaving. It was sad. But now my friends are generally stable and here to stay. I feel very settled and at ease here."

The typical young expat in Brussels meets with people from many countries of the continent not only in the context of work but also for leisure. I ask Konstantinos from Greece how he socialises in Brussels:

> "Brussels is a city where the main activity, after working hours, is restaurants. It's not a city where you have a great party scene. You might have a few parties here and there, but I think in general the culture is much more sort of sitting-down culture. It also has to do with the weather, I guess. But people don't go out as much, I think, here. I mean, there's so many times where you'd walk home from the centre at two o'clock in the morning and there's no one. So yes, people might congregate here and there, but the general ambiance is not one of life being lived outside, of people partying and before like... because, okay, there's a few things on offer.

> The city is small, people usually go for the easy option of staying in their neighbourhood or, and I'm talking about the expats, or going out for dinner and dinner becomes the only outing. And that's something you don't see in other places. I've visited friends in Hong Kong, for example, they're expats. But, I mean, you go to a restaurant, and then you might go to a bar and then... The city has a vibe that pulls you in, and you don't just say like 'okay, we have three beers and just go home'. I don't know what it is, because some of the expats here come from places where people don't live like this, but very quickly, they just adapt to it.
>
> (...) Ask any expat 'what is your favourite area in Brussels' You will hear the same three places. Four places to go out to, and they're not huge. It's four squares, basically. And I've been here for eight years, and this is the extent of my social life, which is scary to think about."

Konstantinos' story suggests that the expatriates, also the younger ones, are socialising in a "mature" way, with restaurants and possibly bars rather than huge parties. Most places I have met expatriates at have indeed been calm and cosy. People socialising outside the expatriate bubble may have another impression of Brussels, and speak about an important cultural scene, that the Eurobubble does not seem to engage in extensively. The Eurobubble can be considered slightly "bureaucratic" in its way of socialising, possibly influenced by professional networking and mingling events.

Within the expat bubble, nationalities tend to stick together to a certain degree. Groups of Italians, Germans, Greeks, and so forth, can be spotted in the European quarters. Sometimes, nationality and being an expat are the only common denominators, and many say that "we would never get to know each other at home". Speaking with your fellow countrymen is considered reassuring. For many it is an important way to keep updated about what is happening at home and ventilate thoughts about what seems "odd" in Brussels with someone with similar references. Expatriates working in a national capacity, including those working for Members of the European Parliament and their national political parties or diplomats working at the national permanent representations of the member states, for obvious reasons meet much in national contexts, and sometimes have difficulties to integrate to the "trans-European community". Hanging out with countrymen is a way to keep part of the national identity in place (cf. Repič 2010). For expat parents, as explained in Section 6.4, the children

often become a meaningful way to get to know new people – both expatriates, other foreigners and locals – as children get to know each other at kindergarten, school, at sports or cultural activities, or in the neighbourhood.

Even in a multilingual environment like Brussels, the importance of language barriers and the power of language for bonding should not be underrated (see also Shore 2000). Sophie from France says that language is a major concern regarding whom expats socialise with. She, as a French speaker, meets many other French-speaking people, also those that do not have French as their native language. This pattern seems to be even stronger for smaller languages or language groups, such as Greek or Scandinavian. Linguistic competence seems to be just as important as nationality, suggesting that language is a strong identity-building feature amongst the expatriates in Brussels. Scandinavians understand each other easily, and socialise extensively, although they sometimes communicate in English despite the proximity of their mother tongues. Irish and British people hang out together, as well as Germans and Austrians. In a continent where identity and nationality to a high degree are characterised by language, Belgium constitutes and interesting exception, having three official languages. Nevertheless, most conversations involving more than one nationality tend to be in English or French.

Even if nationalities or linguistic groups mingle, not all groups do so to the same extent. Almost 30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and more than a decade after the EU enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe, incorporating twelve new states (and Croatia in 2013) into the Union, it seems like there is still a division along the former "Iron curtain" in the socialisation patterns of expats. Harry from the UK laughs when I ask him whether he acquaints with people from all of the EU member states in Brussels:

> "I think there is still a major divide between the East and the West. Or maybe I am just unlucky not knowing people from there. However, I almost exclusively know people from Western Europe here."

Harry is not atypical. Penelope from Greece has a very international group of friends, but she does not meet many people from Eastern Europe.

> "Coming to Brussels for the first time is like Erasmus. You come here and it's easiest to connect with expats. And if you stay here for ten years, you know those that you got to know in the very beginning. That is my case. I mainly meet people I got to know quite early in my stay in Brussels. They are from all over Europe. But not so many from Eastern Europe."

The vast majority of expats originating from Western Europe countries said that they meet considerably less with people from Eastern Europe than with people from the West. Often there was a certain level of sarcasm involved as the subject was discussed. I ask Gustav from Sweden where people he is socialising with are from.

> "They are from all over, but I do not know many people from the newer member states. I do not know why. I feel that there is a clear divide somehow. I feel very European, but still feel closer to some countries than others. Funnily enough, I know more people from outside Europe than from Eastern Europe. Through the school of my children, we now have friends from Turkey, Jordan and Latin America."

Hence, there seems to be a certain social division between Eastern and Western Europeans (or people from newer and older EU member states) within the Eurobubble. Eastern European people, on the contrary, know people from the West as well as from the East. The more recent Eurosceptic and authoritarian tendencies in Eastern European countries, not least within the Visegrád Group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia), have probably widened the gap.

Furthermore, there seems to be a particular hierarchy among EU member states and their respective nationalities, based on, among other things, political influence and economic power, as well as historical and cultural capital. Political power is linked to the size and influence of the country (and hence political weight in the EU), whereas economic influence is based both on the size of the economy and the GDP per capita. Historical and cultural capital is more diffuse and difficult to define.

Lewicki (2017) shows that the hierarchies, milieu and national stereotypes among EU civil servants are characterised by postcolonial dynamics, between nationals of new and old member states. He is especially looking into the enlargements in 2004 and 2007, involving twelve new members: ten former communist countries, Cyprus, and Malta. Lewicki argues that a cultural bubble, the "EU-space", fuelled by class, "modernity"

and "Europeanness", is still centred around old member states, and the "European habitus" in Brussels entails the exclusion of "the other", i.e. nationals of new member states. This implies a division in Europe between the former East and West that still prevails. The Western "Euroclass" sets the agenda, defending their cultural superiority and hierarchy in the EU (Lewicki 2017). When Konstantinos reflects on the way people socialise in Brussels, and his own behaviour, he sees a link to a hierarchy between member states and their citizens.

> "There is a clear hierarchy between member states. Small and poor member states have not the same standing as Germany and net contributors [to the EU budget]. It is a big difference in the political impact between member states. At least the perceived influence. The Netherlands is a net contributor, which makes them feel that they are in the inner circle, although I do not think that they are so influential. But they are frugal, net surplus, efficient, it makes them an aura of virtue. This is also the case for Denmark. They market themselves as an efficient and virtuoso country, and this gives them more political influence.
>
> EU is not into geo-politics. Why? Because the countries with a strong influence do not border Turkey, Middle East, Ukraine, Russia, North Africa. Surplus countries[12] are in an area of Europe [where] they are protected from the brunt in history because they are in a good neighbourhood. There are very different experiences on the Syrian war depending on where in Europe you are situated.
>
> People project the value of the country to you. If you look at an accountant, and if you have a candidate from Greece, Italy, Denmark, Germany, it plays a role, and people might opt for the German or the Dane, no matter what. When a Bulgarian works for the anti-corruption department in the EC, you start making jokes, and ask yourself whether this is a good idea. It is difficult to avoid these stereotypes. Because most of them are true, but you extend them to situations where they should not apply.
>
> We have decided that this is an economic union. There were many mistakes set on how the medicine would be going to Greece. Assumptions [were] over-optimistic. Multipliers. There were other political things [to take into consideration, including] to save your own banks.

[12] Richer EU member states that are net contributors to the EU budget.

> What better way to murder the Greek persona, to be lazy, it is a scapegoat? Poorer countries do what they have to do, and when they are not in line with comfy rich countries. This is like migration. Greece is at a front-line for migration and get criticised by Denmark etc. although when they are not inviting anyone.
>
> A struggle between idealistic parts of Europe and the geographical or economical that have to deal with a situation, and that is not very liked."

Nationality, geography, language, and history thus play a role in expats' socialisation in Brussels. However, political distrust between countries and capitals does not seem to substantially influence interactions between expatriates in Brussels. Cultural division, such as between the East and the West, seems to affect socialisation patterns more.

To conclude, expatriates in Brussels socialise a lot with each other. Building a network is vital for professional as well as personal reasons. The high turn-over of people can be exhausting and tiring – expats in Brussels do not know how long the people they invest in will stay. Expatriates who stay in Brussels for a long time are often keeping the friends they made during their first period in town, if they are still around. Nationality and language, as well as workplace, are denominating factors in the creation of social relationships. Meanwhile, in the socialisation among expatriates, there seems to be a division between newer and older EU member states – an East-West divide.

7.2 Relationships with Belgians

The capital of Europe is also capital of Belgium, which sometimes seems to be forgotten in the Eurobubble. Squeezed between larger countries, the country has an interesting mix of influences, and can in that sense maybe be said to be more European than most other countries at the continent. The Eurobubble is a large community in Brussels, affected by the city while also having an impact on the same. Belgians however seem

to be a rare sight in this community. I think about this as I sit at a café and the waiter asks me in English what I would like. What do the Belgians actually think about the European expatriates?

The term "Eurobubble" is frequently used in Brussels, amongst expatriates as well as Belgians. Speaking about a "bubble" visualises a lack of interaction between the expatriates working with European affairs and the locals. As the Eurobubble is constituting a substantial part of Brussels, expats can build their networks without getting closer relationships outside this group. The subject of (auto-)exclusion of the host country, which privileged immigrants can afford and have the social capital to do, is relevant.

Most expatriates I interview have quite limited contacts with Belgians. They may know some Belgian colleagues also working in the field of European affairs, but they generally socialise with other expatriates. This was presented already in Zoe's story (in Section 5.4), as her acquaintance had a Belgian partner, who had made her more aware of Belgium's politics and culture. I speak to Thomas from Germany, who grew up in the Eurobubble in Brussels.

> "I only know a few Belgian people. Those I know I know from sports, tennis. I got to know them as an adult, through activities. My French is better than it used to be as a kid. It is easier now. As a kid I hanged out with German people, that I went to school with. Spoke German at home. But I feel at home in Belgium. When in Germany I realise that I have been influenced a lot by the Belgian and Brussels lifestyle. More laid-back. In Germany people are more into educating other people, checking that everybody is respecting rules etcetera. In Brussels you have a more liberal atmosphere."

Likewise, Harry from the UK feels at home in Brussels but says that his interaction with Belgians is limited.

> "I can count the Belgian friends on my hand. Like three or four. After six year in the country. Very little [interaction], apart from some social activities. I have been in theatre groups where many have been expats but some Belgians. That has been a small connection. I follow

vaguely current affairs, but not really. I would not say that I know the ins and outs of Belgian politics."

These stories are typical; it seems like most expatriates do not interact much on a meaningful level with Belgians. Probably because they are not forced to do so, given the size of the Eurobubble.

Expatriates hanging out with people not being part of the Eurobubble often have a specific reason to do so. Malin from Sweden initially socialised mostly with Swedish colleagues. Several of her colleagues arrived in Brussels simultaneously, and a number of them were around 30 years old without children, and hence had a lot in common. Eventually, however, she started to play football, which put her into contact with people of other nationalities:

"I first started in a Swedish team, but then got into a normal Belgian club playing in the ordinary football series. We are approximately 50 percent expats and 50 percent Belgians. There are people from France, Italy, Hungary, UK, Poland, Spain etcetera. Some work in the EU bubble, some do completely different things. We train twice a week and have a match almost every weekend, and on top of that many social events. So these people I spend a lot of time with. It is a very important part of my social life. Thanks to this I have got to know many Belgian people and expats from outside the EU sphere. Furthermore, I have seen all those football fields around Brussels and all over Belgium that I would never have seen otherwise."

This suggests that participating in locally embedded associations or sport clubs is a way to build relationships with Belgians. First, as the number of people with the same interest may be limited within the Eurobubble, people may join groups embedded in the local society to pursue their non-career interests; and second, having a specific interest in common, having something to talk about and to do together can encourage the formation of stronger relationships.

This is not only the case for cultural associations and sports clubs but also for other social foci (Feld 1981). Expatriates with a Belgian partner socialise with Belgians to a higher degree. Alexandra, for example, states:

"Thanks to my partner I have met more Belgians, normal people."

Those working in a Belgian company or with many Belgian colleagues also meet with more people from the host society. Parents sometimes meet Belgians through their children. Hence, there does not seem to be any deliberate choice to avoid Belgians. Expatriates socialise within the Eurobubble since it is easy and accessible, and because many of them share interests and are in a similar social situation.

Carolina from Argentina has a slightly different view on socialising in Brussels, since she is not working within the EU sphere. She does not consider herself an expatriate, and she meets with Belgians as well as foreigners.

> "When I came here I did not know the notion of expat. I feel a difference between the way I live here and many people that come here. I find a difference in how I live here, and how people that come here for a shorter period [live]. As in Argentina, there are people that are there for a year that love it, but they have not seen the real country. And get into the country. So many people do not know the system, get to know Belgians."
>
> "I am rather integrated to the system, I studied here. Two years after I came here, I had insurance, in the administration, work, friends. Many of them were Belgians. My first friend was Belgian. I did not know any Argentinians. I feel that I know Belgium and Belgians. And I have friends in different parts of the country.
>
> It is easy to integrate because Belgians are very easy going and open. It is easy to get into the place because there are so many foreigners."

Initially, when she was new in town, she met many other people who had recently arrived. Now, after almost ten years in Brussels, she rarely meets newly arrived people. That seems to be a general trend. With time, expatriates settle socially, and the eagerness to meet new people decreases, in line with what Vegar mentioned earlier.

Carolina knows many Belgians and foreigners, but many of them are in a "different crowd," and not part of the Eurobubble.

> "When I was studying, I met many French people. At work – I worked as a waitress for four years – I met many Italians, Spanish and Latin American people. I have met also people from a bit all over, but mainly Latin in some way, I guess. In my group of friends there is a high variety: Hungarian, Israeli, Turkish, Mongolian. I also meet a lot from the cultural scene. The artist is a parallel expat society. They also like Brussels, but for different reasons.

There are many dancers from all over the world. They say that it is a good city to live in for artists."

Interestingly, Carolina notes that, apart from the expat bubble and the local society, there is a "parallel expat society" formed by artists. This echoes what Marie mentioned (Section 5.5). Carolina shows how having people from the host society within one's social network can enhance the feeling of belonging (Bader & Schuster 2015). She is not working in the field of European affairs, which may be one reason why she has become more integrated.

In sum, socialising with locals happens to a lesser extent and mostly at later stages of settlement, through participating in locally embedded associations and sports clubs. Some expatriates meet a Belgian partner, which tends to introduce them to local networks and changes their perception of themselves as an expatriate. Most expats, however, interact primarily with other expats. Despite having a higher cultural capital which should allow them to create a diverse set of ties (Ryan & Mulholland 2014), they have limited contact with Belgians. This also has consequences for their integration in the host society as well as for identification.

7.3 Integration in the host society: Belgian or Bruxellois?

It is the European football championship for men. I am walking around town and see Europeans becoming more visibly nationalistic than usual. Many bars are televising the games, there are big screens all around the city. Expatriates, normally in suits and costumes, are dressed down in comfortable summer clothes in the heat, and many have accessories such as national football shirts or small flags. People from the same country gather to see their matches, often at places owned by someone from that specific country. In Saint Gilles many of the Portuguese bars show Portugal's games. On the one hand, you realise that it is a very international environment. On the other, you are more aware than ever that you are in the Belgian capital where obviously the Belgians show more nationalistic attributes than they usually do. These summer weeks,

the city's diversity is more visible than otherwise, and national pride is much more prominent than normally is the case.

In this section, I explore how the expatriates integrate in Brussels and the Belgian society, shifting the focus from interpersonal relationships to the relation they form with the city, the country, and their institutions. While speaking with expatriates, one observes that, perhaps due to the limited time horizons, they have generally a limited interested in getting to know more about the country where they live. Many display a sarcastic approach towards Belgium and Belgians. Jokes, irony and general disappointment are widely discussed. Given that expatriates sometimes stay in Belgium for many years or decades, their relationship to their host-country naturally develops over time.

The relationship between the expatriate and the local environment can be somewhat difficult, and integration is not obvious. Compared to expatriates in other hubs around the world, in Brussels one can rarely see who is an expat merely on their looks, and their economic situation does not differ as dramatically from the locals as in other places. Hence, the expat community differs significantly from expat communities in other locations, and is based on other premises. This affects the possibilities to integrate with the local society. Given that there are so many similarities between expatriates and locals, and few barriers, one would expect that it should be relatively easy to integrate.

Nonetheless, in Brussels, many expats (somewhere between a joke and a serious reflection) complain about a grey, ugly, rainy town with uncivilised people. This can be explained by the tendency to exaggerate the differences between the "in-group" and "the other" as a way to create a sense of belonging (Tajfel & Turner 1986).

At the same time, the *bruxellois* may comment that expatriates are spoiled people with high salaries who do not pay taxes and are to blame for skyrocketing real estate prices (see also Section 7.5). Nonetheless, these groups are interdependent and generally live peacefully side-by-side, although not always interacting meaningfully as the former section showed.

Konstantinos has been living in the Belgian capital for the past eight years. Still, he does not feel close to Belgium and does not think he knows the country.

> "I know very little about Belgium. Belgium is like a semi-permanent airport hotel. I never intended to make it a home. I made it a home somehow, but I treat it the same way as I treat a hotel, even after eight years here. I do not care about the hotel or its history. It is a place to stay. It is stupid, because I never invested in it, I was not very curious about its history. And even there you see the stereotypes. Why should I look into Belgian history when I come from a country that has so much more, and richer history? I read about Belgian history and I think 'cute', but not a lot of meat on the bone. It is stupid, because of course there is, always, all places are interesting, as long as people live there, although it may not be glamorous or glorious. It is a lack of interest, it is the fact that Belgium does not have a very prominent culture, it would be different in Paris or Spain, we would then have a much more prominent culture in the host society, and hence adapt more. There is not a strong identity in Belgium. It creates space to be yourself, and hence you care less about the place you are in. There is no pressure to integrate, because there is nothing to integrate with or in. A bunch of expats, a bunch of Algerians and Moroccans, a bunch of Poles and Portuguese from second generation. But Belgians are nowhere to be seen. I do not have to remind you of that the prime minister sang the wrong anthem[13], what more is there to say? The culture is not prominent, and hence easy to ignore. I do not have a lot of Belgian friends. It feels like Belgians are in minority in Brussels, and you treat them accordingly."

Konstantinos has limited interest in Belgium, despite having lived there for many years. One could argue that he, and many other expatriates, have acculturated into the expatriate community and Eurobubble, but not into the host society (Berry 2006), and he is an example of someone who "never goes local" (Cohen 1984). He can hence be considered to interact according to the separation strategy (Berry & Sam 1997). It furthermore shows that adaptability and flexibility in moving between cultures can go hand in hand with limited success (or interest) in engaging in the host society (cf. Hannerz 1990).

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[13] When the Belgian politician and soon-to-be prime minister Yves Leterme was asked to sing the Belgian national anthem "La Brabançonne" on national television in 2007, he started to sing the French anthem "La Marseillaise".

Malin from Sweden feels she did not move to Belgium, but to Brussels' Eurobubble. She compares it to when she lived in France a few years ago and tried to become integrated in the society, and somehow succeeded. She recognises that she hardly knows anything about what is happening in Belgium.

> "I feel like an ignorant expat who hardly knows when there is an election. Once I came from the airport and understood that something was happening in town. There were crush barriers all over, and something was going on. I had no idea what, and I did not even know how to find out. It shows how little I know about the place I live in. I try the culture by eating French fries, chocolate, mussels and drink beer. I do not follow media, news, politics, culture. I have tried, through books, but realised that in most cases I just buy a French novel instead of a Belgian one."

Integrating and feeling part of a society may require a certain interest in the country and its culture, which is often lacking. I speak to Harry from the UK about how he has got to know Belgian culture and to what extent he feels integrated.

> "Very rarely I watch a Belgian film or follow some Belgian issue that is going on. But I do not feel connected to the country through its culture or politics, more through general life, through living, going to supermarkets, drinking in bars, I feel a part of it this way. Not necessarily through sharing any particular Belgian events for example."

Harry is underlining the mix of loyalties towards his country of origin, the host society, and not knowing whether he will return there or not (see also Korstanje 2009). Nevertheless, he has limited knowledge about and interest in Belgian culture, which seems to be common among expats in Brussels. James from the UK also says that he has a limited view of Belgian society:

> "I don't know the culture. I don't know more about Belgian music than music from any other European country, like Spain, even if I live here. I know some Belgian people, and when I worked for a Belgian company, I got to know society a bit. Many colleagues were Flemish. But now I work for the Commission, meaning that I do not have any natural places where I meet Belgian people."

I speak to Oliver from Ireland about his relationship to Belgium and to what extent he is following Belgian current affairs. He mainly follows UK media, and like Konstantinos and Harry, he has limited knowledge and interest in Belgian politics.

> "I never see any Belgian TV, sometimes read Le Soir, but rather as a language practice. I am seeing a Belgian girl since three months, and I learn a lot about Belgium through her. She makes a lot of remarks about expats though. There is indeed a great divide between the expats and the locals.
>
> And I have a lot of stereotypes towards the Belgians. But I like them. Eccentric, relaxed, rebel, in a strange way. After living in England and in Italy I feel that this is quite liberal here. That is one of the reasons I like it.
>
> Brussels is nice. There is a lot of things happening. And there are so many in the same situation, starting from scratch, which is a good point."

Oliver is therefore ambivalent towards the host society and its inhabitants. He is curious about the country, he likes the Belgians, but has limited interest in its politics. Once again, Oliver's case fits well into Hannerz' definition of a cosmopolitan (1990).

All expatriates I interview follow the news and politics in their home countries (see, for instance, Zoe's discourse in Section 5.4), and often in their home town. Internet and smartphones make it easy to stay in touch with family, friends and your homes country's media. Several I speak to say that they follow international and national/local media. However, it is much less common that they follow Belgian news and politics. The interest in Belgian affairs and Belgian politics is generally limited among expats. Very few I speak to vote in the local elections, despite being entitled to and generally having a considerable political interest. However, they often vote in the elections to the European Parliament. To make expats follow Belgian news, something special need to happen, like the terror attacks in Brussels airport and Maelbeek metro station (amid the European quarter) in March 2016. It made expatriates interested in Belgian news and seems to have had a uniting effect between expatriates and the locals. Sophie from France said that the terror attacks at least temporarily changed her interest in Belgian affairs.

> "For some time, I was following the news like constantly. And Belgian news, for the first time. Before the attacks, I had never been reading the Belgian papers. I continued for some time, then I stopped again. But during that period at least I learned the name of the prime minister."

On the one hand, Sophie's experience shows the unifying effect that a crisis can have (at least temporarily). On the other hand, it also reveals the lack of knowledge and interest about Belgian society and politics, which can be surprising in the case of someone working within the sphere of European affairs.

Living in a culture other than one's own and trying to adapt is part of the expatriates' lives. Many features of the hosting state can be peculiar, difficult to grasp, or just strange for a foreigner. Vegar from Norway has been living intermittently in Belgium for almost ten years. Yet, compared to Norway, he thinks that many things in Belgium and Brussels just do not work, despite high income taxes, although people tend to accept it. Vegar talks a lot about what is not working in Belgium and about what he perceives to be the country's less charming characteristics. He is not an exception. Perhaps paradoxically, complaining with other foreigners about one's host country may be a way to find one's place in the city. Complaining about Brussels, Belgium, and the host society is a way of bonding with other foreigners. The jokes and discussions serve a purpose to find unity in a common "enemy" or out-group. Vegar is from a non-EU country but works within EU affairs for a Norwegian business association. He would not be in Brussels would it not be for the EU, and he does not know much about the country he resides in, nor its citizens.

> "And those [Belgians] I know are not representative to the vast majority of the country. Professionally, I have very little to do with Belgium as well. That's the problem. I just see the bad sides […]. Expats just complain because they only see the problems, they are not involved in the society. It happens everywhere. But here it is even more, because it is such a big group. It creates a negative vibe. However, Brussels as a place I like very much. And it is a brilliant place for expats. Very social. Many bars. Very easy. But as an outsider you can stay here and keep on hating the country."

Vegar's narrative again highlights that expatriates can choose not to be part of the society, and hence complain about it. There is no prestige among expatriates to integrate well; neither is it badly viewed. Expatriates can cherry-pick the things they like of the Belgian society and complain about what they dislike. Expats can choose not to integrate without risking anything, because of frustration, homesickness, or just to bond with other foreigners. This auto-exclusion is a privilege that not all migrants can afford.

If you have the economic means and can go back to another nice country whenever you want, you can afford to complain about the place where you live, otherwise not.

Making a joke about the host country is widespread. Some are serious, while most are part of a general joking jargon that helps expatriates to unite. Zoe, from Greece, explains:

> "[We discuss Belgians] a lot. We mock them. We discuss how bad they are in driving […] how unwilling they are to speak French for example. You know, this type of things. It is mostly to make a little bit fun of them, or to say something you don't expect, and it is fun and positive."

This "Belgium bashing" is widespread in the expat community in Brussels. Bad weather, bad services, high taxes, a lack of history, political disorder, boring gastronomy (primarily a critique from Latin expatriates), and poor urban planning are some of the criticisms towards Belgium and Brussels that often are mentioned amongst expats. There are a couple of widely popular sites on social media and the web making fun of Belgium. One of them is "Ugly Belgian Houses", which displays houses that, according to many, are not architectural masterpieces. Another is "Belgian solutions", a Facebook page (and later also an art exhibition and books) showing pictures of absurd and paradoxical tendencies in the Belgian urban landscape such as signs or roadblocks, mostly commented with sarcasm and irony. Both aim at ridiculing the country, its culture, and its people.

Language is an important factor affecting how much expatriates integrate in Belgium: Brussels is predominantly a French-speaking town. English is widely spoken, but it is hard to get integrated without speaking French. Those who speak French, or learn to speak it, integrate much better. Oliver, from Ireland, explains

> "I speak pretty poor French, but it is ok here to use English. I speak Italian, but I am not using it here. Not being able to understand what people say is part of being a stranger. You need to change and adapt when you come to a new place. But it also a bit a reason to not feel integrated, that I cannot have a casual informal conversation with my neighbour."

Very few expatriates learn Dutch, which might open up for more integration in Brussels and the entire Dutch-speaking Flanders. This language is, however, relatively unknown

to many expatriates. Isabelle from France does not know many Belgian people, but tries to get to know the country better, since she wants to stay here. She is therefore learning Dutch:

> "I used to work for NGOs, there were more Belgians. But in the Commission, I have also some Belgian colleagues, but it's different. I am learning Dutch, that is really opening up doors. And through the cultural life I know some people. I feel I know quite much about the country. I am voting in municipal elections."

For Isabelle, her attempts to learn Dutch have opened doors. She is an example of an expatriate who actively tries to learn more about Belgium, partly because she has an ambition to stay there. Voting in the municipal elections is also a sign of her engagement in the community and is likely to be linked to certain knowledge about the political situation in the country. Furthermore, Isabelle has a connection to the cultural scene is Brussels, which involves a community outside the Eurobubble. Thus, being part of other communities within Brussels is likely to increase the interest in and knowledge about Belgium (see Mao & Shen 2015).

Although many expatriates in Brussels have a love-hate relationship with Belgium, most (but not all) feel at home in Brussels. As Zoe from Greece says,

> "I do not follow Belgian news, popular culture or politics. I will never be Belgian, but definitely feel at home in Brussels."

Vegar, despite being highly critical of Belgium and Brussels, also feels quite at home in Brussels. As indicated before, he likes Brussels as a place very much, stating that "it's a brilliant place for expats". He explains this further:

> "It's good being an expat here. Interesting work, very social, quite easy to live, easy to travel, go around Belgium and close to Paris. All is very close. Very relaxed. No high pressure. A lot of culture, restaurants. Nice people."

Harry from the UK sees Brussels as "kind of home":

> "Belgium is not home. Very hard to say. Home is still where my parents are. But Brussels, since it is the place I live in since many years, it is where I work, and it is where my friends are, for that it is kind of a home. It has become a home. Even if that does not mean that I am

really connected with Belgium or the Belgians. But just the social space, is a home. I feel comfortable. I feel at ease."

Penelope from Greece, married with a Belgian man, also feels at home in Brussels. Despite that, her knowledge, interest and integration into the Belgian society is limited.

"Brussels is nice. It is small, cosy, you can live here for a long time. It feels like home. But Belgium, no. I don't feel Belgian. My husband is Belgian, and I believe I will stay here. When I have children, they will become Belgian. My husband is Flemish, but I only speak very poor Dutch. But still it opens up doors. I hang out a lot with Flemish people thanks to my husband. But I don't know anything about Wallonia."

While many are critical of the host country, most still feel at home in Brussels. Some expatriates, however, appreciate the country very much. Oscar from Sweden belongs to the group that highly appreciates Belgium and Brussels. He is surprised by how little interest the country and its capital attract from the expats, and finds it unfortunate that many of them joke about Belgium and its citizens.

"Brussels is a fantastic European city. Belgium has a fascinating history and Brussels is a result of that. It has a fabulous cultural scene, fascinating architecture and great food. I was listening to Belgian music and watching Belgian films already before moving here. Now I try to explore new parts of the town as much as possible. I am fairly uninterested by the expat world, but very interested in the small Belgian bars in different neighbourhood. I am also interested in the ethnic mixes here. There are people from all over Europe of course, but also Russia, Morocco etc. I like very much living in Brussels, and in Belgium. If you take the train from Bruges to Liege, it feels that you go to another country. And in the middle, you have Brussels. It is interesting."

"There are so many that just don't want to appreciate the city and explore it. It is like they see the entire place like an office, and not a place to live. I find it boring to live ´in a city within a city´."

Oscar has previously lived in Berlin and sees many similarities between the cities.

"Both places have expats living there without getting to know the culture and language. Berlin is very international in one sense, but there is also a limited mix between the expat society and German society. The expats are pushing for gentrification. I got the impression that the expats impression of what is 'real Berlin' was very different from what Germans

think. It is a bit the same here in Brussels. Belgians and expats live parallel lives rather than integrated."

Oscar thus suggests that expatriates can feel integrated into the Eurobubble, and hence into one community in Brussels, while living in parallel with the ordinary Belgians.

I meet Leo, a man in his mid-thirties with British and French citizenship who grew up in England. We sit in a bar in Saint-Gilles that he has chosen mainly because they serve gluten-free beer. He has been in Brussels for nine years. He met his wife here, and their son is born in Brussels, where they intend to stay. He is working as a journalist within European affairs but has also been covering stories on Belgium for the international press. He likes Brussels and says that it feels more like home every year. Leo shows a great interest in Belgian culture, but meanwhile confesses that he knows few Belgians and relatively little about current affairs in Belgium. This suggests that the integration in Belgium can be difficult even for people who have an interest in the host society.

Some expatriates apply for citizenship, which might signal a strong connection to the country, but that is not always the case. For instance, the British vote to leave the EU has had an implication for British expats regarding their citizenship. Although the EU institutions have stated that all EU officials from the UK will remain EU officials once Brexit is carried out, many other people living and working in Belgium have started to reflect on their situation. Many apply for Belgian citizenship in order to remain EU citizens. For example, Alice is a British citizen who has studied in Belgium and is living here for almost ten years now, having a temporary contract for the European Council. She just obtained Belgian citizenship. Only a few years ago that would have been unthinkable, but she counts on staying in Brussels, even though she thinks she will probably never feel Belgian.

"I am a Belgian now. But it doesn't feel like that. It feels strange. It's a pure Brexit thing, only for practical reasons."

I ask if there are any downsides. She laughs.

> "Yes, dignity and pride. And you have to vote. […] I never had a strong national identity, and I never cared so much. Probably because I have had two nationalities. Now I have three, so does not make too much of a difference."

Most people do not apply for Belgian citizenship, even if they have been living in Brussels for a long time due to work, and intend to stay. Harmonisation of rules and the free movement within the EU and the Schengen area makes it easy for them to live in an EU country other than their own, without obtaining citizenship. Thus, one may live for decades in Brussels without becoming Belgian. That means that there is a clique, although possibly not too big, of well-paid Belgian citizens in Brussels who have something of a "technical citizenship".

Last, and possibly most important, integration depends on relationships. The expatriates who work with Belgians, integrate with their Belgian neighbours, or whose children go to public school also get to know and appreciate Belgium more. One of the interviewees has a long-term relationship with a Belgian and therefore knows the country better. For her, it was evident that she might stay in Brussels all her life, and that her future kids would consider themselves Belgian, and hence she did not want to feel like a stranger.

Penelope from Greece says she intends to stay in Brussels. She has lived in Belgium for almost nine years, which is almost one-third of her life. She has her life in Brussels and recently married a Belgian man, with whom she bought a flat in Saint-Gilles. Hence, she has experienced a sociocultural adaptation process involving identification with the society she lives in and forming ties with certain citizens through interaction (see Ward & Kennedy 1999). Brussels has become her home. She says that dating a Belgian man was probably the definitive step in getting to know Belgium better. She is acculturated and integrated, at least to a certain degree (see Berry & Sam 1997).

Furthermore, time matters, and as expatriates have lived in Belgium for a certain time, they tend to feel more at home, and sometimes they realise that they are likely to stay there for many years to come. Several expatriates told me that when they started to buy houses and flats, and realised they were much more settled in Brussels than in

their home countries, they felt more at ease with considering Brussels, and to some extent Belgium, as their home (see also Section 6.3).

To conclude, expatriates in Europe do not integrate well within the host society. They often have a love-hate relationship to Brussels, manifested though sarcasm and jokes. They stick to themselves, live in the same areas, and do not always learn the language (very rarely they learn Dutch), just like other groups of economic migrants. This causes frustration and anger among many locals. Given the social status of the migrants at issue, the clashes between the groups are not as strong, and of another character, than could have been the case had the groups been less privileged. However, there are also similarities with other economic migrants e.g., as regards integration. A significant difference is that the expatriates in Brussels, in most cases, have a possibility to integrate rather well, although it requires a bit of will and effort. For several other migrant groups, it requires much more, including a will from the host society to welcoming them. Hence, the expatriates in Brussels could be said to be auto-excluded from the Belgian society, to a higher or lower degree. In contrast, given the number of expatriates in the city, they are a natural part of Brussels, where most of them feel at home.

7.4 Characteristics of Belgium affecting integration

I am at a live concert in central Brussels. The venue is called Ancienne Belgique and the crowd seems primarily Belgian. Most people around me speak Dutch, and it reminds me that I am in Belgium, not merely in the European capital. When spending time with European expatriates I sometimes forget that I am in a town where they constitute a minority. Furthermore, my knowledge of Belgium outside Brussels is very limited. Frequenting the Eurobubble, Brussels feels more like the capital of Europe than of Belgium. At this concert, in this setting, I feel like a foreigner, whereas in the Eurobubble, I am just another European. It is hard to grasp what is typical Belgian, possibly as a result of Belgium being a divided nation between different language

communities. Football seems to be one of few things uniting the communities. It is difficult as a stranger to relate to a country of divided identity. I ask myself whether a possible lack of mainstream culture and identity makes it easier or more difficult to integrate for strangers.

In the previous section, I have shown that many expatriates feel at home in Brussels and create ties and networks in their new home town, even though their interest in Belgium is limited. In this section, I briefly scrutinise how the peculiarities of Brussels and Belgium affect the expatriates living in Brussels and their integration.

Zoe from Greece captures this difference between feeling very much at home in Brussels and not having much to do with the country:

> "I have lived here for a few years, and do not feel as an expat, but rather as a European. There are so many foreigners in Brussels that you sometimes forget you are in Belgium. I do not follow Belgian news, popular culture or politics. I will never be Belgian, but definitely feel at home in Brussels."

As Zoe explains, one of the peculiarities of Brussels is that there are "so many foreigners" that she forgets she is in Belgium. This characteristic allows for people to live in a Eurobubble. As a consequence, people sometimes feel that the country is very foreign. I speak to James, who is from the UK but has lived in France for many years before moving to Brussels.

> "I am not part of any society, so for me it's quite simple. Brussels is really open, much more than in France. UK is very multicultural, but there are more barriers. I don't know. It is very difficult to get to know English people.
>
> I am really an expat. I am not from Brussels. I know a few areas and I like it. But I guess that people from Brussels would hate if I said that "I am from Brussels – this is my home". But I must say I feel very at home in Brussels. […] But Belgium – not at all. We go to the Ardennes every now and then, but it's like going abroad. In Gent it's like in another country, in all of Flanders."

This suggests that there is a certain identification with Brussels, but not with Belgium, for many expatriates.

The relationship to Brussels and Belgium is particular for expats who grew up here. I speak to Anastasia, who has a Greek father and an Italian mother and has lived most of her life in Brussels, as her parents worked for the EU institutions. She went to the European school, meaning that she never grew up with Belgians. She does not have many Belgian friends, and neither do her parents, and it does not seem to be a unique situation.

> "I grew up with a lot of different nationalities. Mainly Italians, and Italian is my mother tongue. But it was normal. My friends' parents also worked for the EU institutions. I feel almost a bit strange when I am in an entirely Belgian environment. Brussels is home, but Belgium, no."

This shows that the identification with Belgium can be weak even for individuals who have grown up in the country. Several expatriates living in Brussels for years insist upon that they feel at home in Brussels, but not in Belgium. An Italian formulates it nicely:

> "I am not a foreigner, but definitely not a Belgian. Even if I would stay here for decades, I would never be Belgian. I am a European, possibly a *Bruxellois*, and for sure an expat."

Belgium has not one language nor one culture, but three, corresponding to the Flemish, the French, and German part. The three communities have attachments to their larger neighbours, which makes Belgium an unusual nation in a European context. Belgium has its own identity problems. The country has internal political problems and difficulties to unite the different regions. This affects the relationship between the expats and the host society. Most likely, would the EU be situated in Paris or Madrid, the relationship between the expatriates and the hosting state and its culture would be different. This is at the same time one of Brussels' success stories, and why it is suitable to host the EU institutions.

Speaking with expatriates, many say that certain Belgian peculiarities can partly explain their lack of interest and integration in the country. This can be understood as a way to defend one´s limited interest to integrate in the host society. Sophie from

France explains that after nine years in the country, she does not know what it means to be Belgian, since there is such a big difference between Wallonia, Flanders and Brussels. Harry from the UK echoes this opinion.

> "It is partly about Belgium. In Brussels, there are huge numbers of migrants. It is not particular Belgian, and not a very strong identity of a capital. You ask Belgians about that and they would not say that Brussels is a very international city. It is not. It is a very international place where Belgium is not necessarily the main focus. I think that adds to it. Just the number of people you have. Your status, your friends, maybe you do not have the needs. I did Erasmus in Germany. There it was a completely different experience. I had lots of German friends. I was much more integrated in one year in Germany than in six years in Belgium. I am not sure whether that is a result of not trying, or if I had less opportunities, or I have been less interested in doing so. I think that my experience is very typical though. Unless people have a personal interest, such as a Belgian wife or girlfriend, or if they work in a Belgian company. Otherwise, most friends have very few, if any, Belgian friends."

Oliver from the UK also makes a comparison between his experiences of being an expat in Brussels and in Italy. He says that he integrates less with the locals in Brussels because there are so many other expatriates. He furthermore adds that "in Italy you inevitably are in an Italian context" and that in contrast, Brussels does not always offer a typically Belgian atmosphere. This may be one reason why it is difficult for expatriates to identify with Belgium, but rather feel like Brussels is their home. Alexandra from Sweden points out that Belgians are not a homogenous group. She has lived in Brussels for a long time and has a Belgian boyfriend.

> "I know what is going on in Brussels, and a bit in Wallonia. Nothing in Flanders. Not even the Belgians know. It is such a divided country; it is very striking. The political landscape is so complicated. There are so many actors. And they do not know about each other."

Belgium is, as Alexandra indicates, a divided country, the different language communities being separated also in other ways. I ask Louise, a francophone Belgian from Brussels, how she integrates with the Flemish people.

> "When I grew up, I did not know any Flemish people. Those I know I met abroad. In the north of Finland. There I realised that we have something in common. I know much more foreigners than Flemish people. I used to work for a Flemish company. All were Flemish. It

was like being in a foreign country. Foreigners do not understand the complicated situation in Belgium. We hardly understand it ourselves. EU is probably good for our complicated country."

The clear divisions within Belgium, a country squeezed in between larger countries, without strong symbols that unite the people, affect the feeling of belonging for the large expatriate community in Brussels. It is easier for the expats to identify with Brussels than with Belgium. Penelope, who is married to a Belgian and intends to stay in Brussels, concludes:

"Belgian society have a lot of issues. I say I do not feel Belgian, but maybe that is because many Flemish and Walloons also don't feel Belgian. It is a very complicated society."

7.5 Impact on the host society

I misjudge the weather and over-optimistically leave the flat in a thin pullover. It is May and the sun is finally showing up. I stroll through Saint-Gilles. During the last decade, this traditionally relatively poor working-class neighbourhood has been gentrified, and old-fashioned shops are replaced by posh and hip cafés. Bars, restaurants, and boutiques have mushroomed, and the streets are filled with European expatriates. The rents and real estate prices have allegedly substantially increased. Certain Belgians I speak to complain about the rich expatriates that makes the housing market boom. Meanwhile, many Belgians are subletting their flats to expatriates, and are in different ways, directly or indirectly, economically dependent on the Eurobubble.

The large number of expatriates in Brussels has a substantial impact on the city. In this section I analyse how the expat community affects Brussels, which also affects how the locals perceive the expats.

First of all, expatriates have a cultural impact on Brussels. The city is nowadays a very international place with people from all over Europe. Many languages are spoken.

Expatriates brought with them habits from their home countries, and services, such as bars, restaurants and shops, have been adapted for this clientele. Brussels has become Europeanised.

Second, the influx of well-paid people has had a substantial economic impact on Brussels. The city is one of the wealthiest areas in Europe, although unevenly distributed. A fair share of Brussels' economic development, and booming service sector in terms of restaurants, bars, and shops, can be linked to a demand created by the expatriates.

These processes have many positive effects for Brussels and its inhabitants. However, it should also be mentioned that the affluent European expatriates have made rents and real estate prices skyrocketing, making them less available to local Belgians, and some feel that the town lost its soul. People working for the EU institutions, other international organisations and embassies, usually do not pay income tax in Belgium, while they still use the services, which is an additional source of discontent among Belgians.

It takes two to tango, which is also the case for integration. As indicated before, many expatriates do not do much to integrate, but not all Belgians are particularly interested in getting to know the European expatriates living in the city either. Some expatriates say that the Belgians should be grateful for the expats who provide so much work, prosperity and economic activity.

I speak to Manon, who is Belgian, born and raised in Brussels. She is in her mid-thirties, and half-Spanish. She works in the food sector and has lived in different places. She recently came back to Brussels after several years in London. She grew up in a francophone community in Brussels and has always seen expats in her home town.

> "It is different to be a Belgian. Normally you are not part of the expat community. It is just in front of you. But you are not in it. I forced myself to do it, so I lived with an Italian, and then I was hanging out with Italians for two years. So it was different. There are too many foreigners, so they do not need to integrate. They do not have to speak French and Flemish. In Italy, you need to speak Italian to survive. In Brussels you don't [need to speak French or Flemish]. People are not forced to integrate at all.

We have extremely many immigrants. We have three languages, three cultures. We are embracing new cultures, by definition. We are ourselves strangers in our own country. Hence, we know about culture clashes, and it does not make any problem, maybe it even helps to get this weird country going. We are already multicultural.

There are a lot of foreigners, but it is not fancy or cool. Like Paris or London. Without the EU, the economy would collapse. There would not be the culture, the restaurants etcetera."

"We have a problem with Belgian governance, but that is our own fault. The town is very rich, but the infrastructure is dead. Electricity, transport, everything. Nothing works. It is really a catastrophe. Maybe because they are not paying tax. Maybe because they are not part of the country. There is meanwhile extremely much poverty in this town.

I feel we live in parallel. The Eurocrats are as integrated as they want. They can be, but they are not forced to."

I also speak to Louise, who grew up in the Belgian countryside. She has been living in Brussels for many years, but also abroad.

"I feel Belgian. Not really European. I have Belgian blood. I lived five years in the UK. I guess I am a francophone Belgian."

She thinks that the expats have enriched the city.

"I like the expats. I think it is very positive for the culture. There is extremely much culture and design in Brussels nowadays. I believe that would not be the case without all the people, and all the foreigners. It is also much more globalised compared to how it used to be. We did not use to have all the international chains before. We had local stuff, which is great. But it is changing. It's a pity."

However, she also has similar complaints as Manon, regarding the high prices, the lack of integration, and the foreigners having transformed Brussels to a francophone city.

"There are many groups of foreigners in Brussels. With the immigrants that have been here for decades, there is quite an integration. With the Eurocrats it is a bit different, since they do not stay. Commission people and Moroccans are different kinds of immigrants. They are integrated in different ways and do live aside the society.

> But immigrants have changed the town. Both Moroccans, Italians, Portuguese, and also all the Eurocrats have rather been speaking French than Flemish. Brussels used to be a quite Flemish town; it is not anymore. […] Nobody speaks Flemish. It is incredible. It is a very complicated thing in the end.
>
> There are negative things as well. Rents for example. I moved back from London and twice I did not get the flat that I could afford, because someone from the Commission got it, since they had better guarantee to pay. I told the landlord that it is a pity they do not give the contract to a Belgian citizen, working for a Belgian company, paying tax in Belgium, but rather to a foreigner, working for the Commission, who does not integrate in society and does not pay taxes here. We used to rent houses and flats. It is completely impossible now. It is extremely expensive to rent and buy now, since there are so many foreigners with great money that enter the market. I also have the impression that the expats are buying and investing in another way than before, they used to rent. And they are richer and can pay more. It is a shock. It makes people a bit angry."

This suggests that the large expatriate community has an effect on Brussels both on the macro and micro levels. The urban landscape and the economy have changed, and many individuals have been Europeanised, although the integration is lacking. To a certain extent, the Eurobubble could be called a "parallel society", something other migrant groups often are blamed for in different countries across Europe.

To conclude, Brussels has been affected in economic and cultural terms from hosting the EU institutions and the influx of expatriates. This large and affluent group with limited integration in the society has made the Belgian capital more international, diverse and cosmopolitan. However, the gentrification can create clashes, and it has changed the linguistic landscape of the city, something that not everyone appreciates.

8. European and national identities, the construction of Europeanness

> "Who are the Europeans? You go to Paris or you go to Portugal, you go to Poland, and you ask, who are you people?' They'll tell you, we're Portuguese, we're Spanish, we're Polish. Who are the people that are really European? The people in Brussels, in the EU bureaucracy. Europe has not been able to move to the level of patriotic identification with the concept."
>
> Zbigniew Brzezinski, interviewed in Foreign Policy, 2014 (Rothkopf 2014).

8.1 Impact on national identity

When you leave the place you call home, and go elsewhere, to a new country, something happens to you. People look at you in another way, both in your new place of residence and back home. And you look upon yourself differently. "Where I grew up" or "back home" become references that you compare your new experiences with. You become a symbol of your place of origin. You become a representative of your nationality. Every person I meet in Brussels asks me where I am from, and I somehow get more aware of my country of origin. I become, above all, a Swede, and as a consequence, I feel a special connection to other Swedes in Brussels, just because we are outside Sweden. It is Saturday morning and I stroll around the Marolles district south of the city centre. The streets are full of antiques shops, and at the Place du Jeu de Balle there is a flea market. I sit down at a café at corner of the square. It is autumn. The ambience is

continental, yet local. I hear different languages, but mainly French. I have a coffee and a speculoos biscuit. This does not feel trans-European, bureaucratic or very international. It feels Belgian – with a mix of influences from its larger neighbours. Welcoming and unpretentious. And I – a Swede in Brussels – feel at ease.

As you move abroad, you do not lose your national identity. Rather, you become more aware of it. You take notice of how the new surroundings differ from what you are used to, which sheds light on particularities of your nationality, home country, and culture. In this section, I explore how being an expat in Brussels affects the national identity and link to the country of origin for the expatriates.

A German expatriate in Brussels I speak to thinks about how living abroad has affected his identification with his home country:

> "I never feel more German as when I live in another country, and I never appreciate Germany as much as when I am abroad"
>
> "This is something very typical. You get aware of what culture has formed you, and what parts of it you like and do not like. You get critical towards the culture of your new home country, as well as towards your own. You realise that you are a product of the culture you have been growing up in, which differs from the one of your new friends. If you at home thought that Germany was too rigid and boring, you suddenly realise that you like parts of it, and that your Italian friends very much see you as a 'true German'."

It is quite common among expatriates in Brussels to identify strongly with their country of origin. Confronting other cultures makes participants more aware of their own – where they come from, what has formed them, and what they are used to. On the one hand, looking at their own country and culture from abroad can make them critical and feel more distant. On the other, they start appreciating things they previously just were taking for granted. Malin from Sweden believes that people's identification and national identity is significantly affected in different ways by moving abroad.

> "I have lived abroad before, and I have strengthened my 'Swedishness' during previous sojourns abroad, when studying in France and doing an internship in the US etcetera. Here, I think my Swedishness is strengthened through the fact that I represent Sweden at work. I

negotiate for Sweden and represent the Swedish government. That makes you aware of where you come from, and how people see you."

The expatriates in Brussels generally maintain a strong national identity. The awareness of national identity is further strengthened upon visits to their home country. The habits, the culture, the mentality, and the way things work – after some time abroad they see the things they were brought up with in a new light. They start cherry-pick parts of the culture that they appreciate and like, underlining the characteristics that they are proud of, or just find amusing. And some things they used to take for granted they suddenly start to appreciate and desire. Missing the food, the language, and the culture is common.

Some expatriates I interview have been starting to read more news from their home country and even their home town after moving abroad, as a way to compensate for the distance. Being aware of local or national current affairs is a way to maintain the connection, and also to not lose track of what family and friends back home discuss.

In other cases, expats feel more distanced to their country of origin. They lose track of the developments in their home countries and, amplified by the distance, tend to believe that things are just as they used to be when they left. Certain expatriates become, or have already for some time been, foreign to their country of origin, maybe because they have not been there in a long time, or they simply do not like it. Some expatriates feel that they lose touch with their country, and with time do not identify with it anymore. This can be a result of a Europeanisation, where national identity loses over a European one (see McLaren 2006).

8.2 Identification with Europe

As I walk around in the European quarter, I go into a night shop to buy some snacks. There are some magazines, basic food supply, tobacco and drinks. Next to the counter, there is also a rack of souvenirs. Instead of the Belgian souvenirs you would expect

with images of Belgian characteristics such as beer, Manneken Pis, French fries, chocolate and the Atomium, there are souvenirs with European symbols and the EU flag. I go out again and soon sit down at the terrace of a café. This kind of terraces are more and more common in Sweden, but a few decades ago it was something many Swedish people associated with continental Europe. A sign of Europeanisation or globalisation, I presume. As I sip on a tasty Duvel beer, I think about what Europe actually is. I start speaking to a woman next to me, from France. When I say that I am from Sweden, she asks whether Sweden is in Europe. I believe she knows where Sweden is situated, but what she is asking is whether Sweden is part of the EU. Europe and the EU are often used interchangeably in Brussels. For someone who grew up outside the EU, but in Europe, and very well remembers when Sweden joined the EU, this is a surprising notion.

Living in a new country and such an international environment as Brussels affects notions of belonging, identity, and "home". In this section, I investigate whether there is such a thing as a European identity among expatriates in Brussels and what it comprises.

In the pan-European setting of Brussels, many expatriates say that they gradually feel more European the longer they live there. For instance, this is the case of Paul, a German in his late thirties who has been working for the German Permanent Representation to the EU for three years. He has had a Belgian partner for nine years and has lived in Brussels on and off since he first came 15 years ago. We sit at a beautiful old bar at Parvis de Saint-Gilles. It is loud, and we have to speak up to hear each other. He finds Brussels very different from Germany. He has identified with Europe for a long time. He lived in France for some time, and had girlfriends from different European countries, and close friends from all over the continent. Every time he comes to Brussels, he is reminded of how European it feels. Living in Brussels makes him feel European, culturally as well as politically. Paul mentions a "European scent", since everything you see is Europe, at least for those working in the field of European affairs.

Paul's feelings to Europe could be described as a Europeanisation on the individual level (Risse 2010), as he has a European sentiment when he is in Brussels. Meanwhile, his long sojourns in Brussels have not had a de-nationalising effect (cf. Favell 2007), as his identification with Germany remains strong.

However, as Paul mentions, there is something in Brussels, especially for the expats, that make them feel more European. Oscar from Sweden, who works for the European External Action Service, explains it as follows.

> "Through my work it feels like I work for Europe. This really feels like a European capital, both in terms of the languages, the people etcetera, but also because Belgium and Brussels is such a European mix in itself. This of course makes me feel more European as well, and it is indeed very different from when I am in Stockholm. I have previously lived in Berlin, and there I felt as a Swede, and was considered as such. Here I feel more like part of the European crowd. Where I come from somehow is of less importance."

Oscar's time in Brussels has not only Europeanised him, in contrast to Paul, he has also de-nationalised to some degree. Both these processes seem to be related to the European characteristics of Brussels, as he did not have the same feeling when he lived as an expatriate in Berlin. Oscar's low identification with Sweden since he lives in Brussels exemplifies a process where the supranational European identity competes with and wins over the national one (see McLaren 2006).

Several expatriates I interview say that living abroad affected their identity and notion of belonging. On the one hand, they do not completely feel part of their new country of residence, given that they are not citizens, they cannot vote, and they might not be fully part of the culture. On the other, they are losing the relation to their home, and are in a temporariness that relates to liminality. I speak to Oliver, an Irish citizen in his thirties. He has lived in Brussels for a year, working for the European Parliament. He says that he has learned how the EU institutions work, and that he feels closer to the EU, but not to Europe. For him, an Irish citizen growing up in the UK, identifying as a European is nothing new. He grew up in an Irish community in Manchester and went to Ireland every summer to see his extended family. At the age of 18, when visiting Ireland, he felt that he was not Irish. He did not know what people of his age were

talking about and did not feel at home. Meanwhile, he felt neither English nor British, and could not vote. He stayed in Manchester to study at the university and identified with the city he lived in as well as with Europe, but not with the UK. This European identity has strengthened since he moved abroad, first to Italy, and now to Brussels. He cannot vote in national elections anywhere, and the vote to the European Parliament hence becomes more important. In this sense, he is an example of someone taking part of a European political community (Duchesne 2008). For every year he lives abroad, he feels more European, which suggests that time abroad as well as lack of national identity can enhance one's feelings for Europe. He is further an example of an expatriate with a strong European identity already before moving to Brussels.

Malin from Sweden claims that she feels more European than before she moved to Brussels, but finds it difficult to distinguish the EU and Europe in this sentiment.

> "Meanwhile, I have absolutely an increased feeling of being European since I live in Brussels. But is it the EU or Europe? Many here are so similar, I feel that I have more in common with people here than people back home. We have studied the same things, done similar things. We have the same values despite that we sometimes represent different interests. There is a very big understanding and feeling of community among people here, including with those working for the institutions and other member states. It makes you feel European."

Malin feels a certain belonging to Brussels and the Eurobubble community, based on what she has in common with the people in this community, which sparks the sentiment of feeling European. Fog Olwig (2007) argues that social relationships determine the identification with a place, which would explain that Brussels for Malin to a high degree is characterised by the identification with the Eurobubble and, as a consequence, with Europe. Like Malin, Anastasia says:

> "Maybe Brussels is home because many of my friends live here, as well as my parents. And because I met Harry here and that we now live together."

The Swedish diplomat Gustav also says that already after a few months in Brussels he felt more European. Hearing his children speaking foreign languages with other children, and working with people from different countries make him feel European,

and somehow a European identity emerges. To Gustav, national cultural features become less important as he and his family meet people from different countries. Europe is what they have in common. Alexandra from Sweden thinks that the fact that she aims at staying in Brussels influences her perspective. She says she feels somehow European, not least since she is "reminded" about Europe at work, at home (with her Belgian partner), and among her friends of different European origins. She says that this identification with Europe makes her less eager to go back to Sweden. Malin, Anastasia, Gustav, and Alexandra are thus examples of structuralist identity building, where interpersonal relations play a central role (Recchi 2014).

Many of the interviewees say that they have been Europeanised. There are different aspects of the Europeanisation on an individual level. Culturally, this implies an adaptation to a "European" lifestyle in the EU quarter and milieu in Brussels, which implies a southern-centred European melange in terms of food and dining, dressing, work hours, and socialising. There is also a political Europeanisation taking place as expatriates adopt, or at least become aware of, political ideas of deepening European integration initiatives in support to strong supranational institutions. Sara from Spain has felt more European after she moved to Brussels:

> "I have to say, that since I am in Brussels, I feel more and more European. Maybe because we are very much aware of the EU and the initiatives from the institutions. We know what is going on. And Spain is quite a Eurofriendly country to begin with. With the Brexit we were quite depressed. We woke up and said, 'what?'. And the fact that you work for the European Commission you feel much more included in going in the right direction."

In Brussels there seems to be two parallel ideas on what Europe is. First, there is the idea of the EU and EU policies. This is a more technocratic idea of the everyday functioning of the EU, policy-making, and implementation, which the expatriates work with. Second, there is a notion of Europe as a geographical area with common history, values and characteristics. The former, linked to the EU-institutions, relates to the civic dimension of European identity, while the latter is rather a cultural dimension (Bruter 2009). Wolfgang, a German whom I presented in Chapter 5, says that he always felt European, and points out that being German, the idea of a unified Europe to avoid war has been present in his upbringing and education. The identification with Europe made

him interested in European integration's more administrative, or civic, side, meaning the EU and its institutions.

Hans, from Germany says that he has become much more aware of his background, culture and context after a few years abroad. On the one hand, he feels more distant from his German origin, but on the other, he somehow appreciates parts of the typical German characteristics more now that they do not surround him. He underlines that there are different layers in Europeanness. He feels European, through his work at the Commission and by his Spanish partner and their child. However, he feels that he is still German in terms of identity.

For those who have grown up as expatriates in Brussels, the relationship to Europe and the EU can be of particular importance. I sit with Anastasia in her living room, in Forest municipality in the south of Brussels. In a sense, Anastasia is an extreme example of a European: An Italian-Greek woman living in Belgium, dating a Brit. After high school in Brussels she pursued her studies in medicine in Italy. After finalising her university degree, she returned to Brussels, where her parents, now retired, still live. Anastasia now works as a medical doctor in Brussels, hence outside the field of European affairs. Although she grew up in Brussels, she still feels like an expat.

> "I feel very European. And I feel at home in Europe. Brussels is home, or at least some kind of home. Belgium is not. Italy and Greece are also home, and maybe the UK will feel a bit like home as well at some point. (…) I feel both Italian and European, and Greek. But not Belgian."

Her boyfriend Harry has been living in Brussels for almost seven years. He came there initially for an internship, and then stayed. He is a journalist, mainly working for an information service company in the agricultural sector, covering EU policies. Harry was born and raised in England, attended private schools and studied languages at Cambridge University. During his university studies he spent a semester in Germany as an exchange student, and later he came to Brussels, which has been important for his European identity. He explains:

> "I came here over six years ago. First for an internship. Then different journalist jobs. I feed off the institutions, write about what they are doing. My pay comes from people that work

with and around the institutions. My work would not be placed here, would it not be for the EU institutions. This means that I am economically attached to this world. And that probably helps. We are all economic migrants. We are here for work and pay taxes here. We are called expats, but other economic migrants are called just migrants, such as Polish people working in construction. It's a bit strange. But living in Brussels, and in continental Europe, makes me feel European, more so than when I lived in Germany."

Anastasia and Harry met five years ago and have stayed in Brussels since then. They speak English and French between themselves. Although Anastasia has lived most of her life in Belgium, she holds no Belgian citizenship. However, she has both a Greek and Italian passport. They are now expecting their first child, who will be born in Belgium. Anastasia and Harry are examples of how partners from different European countries can strengthen the European identity, as it is the lowest common denominator (Díez Medrano 2008; Gaspar 2009).

People's inclination to feel "European" when in Brussels might to some extent depend upon where they are from. Penelope from Greece is in her early thirties and has been in Brussels for eight years. She feels Greek and misses her country a lot, her family and friends, the weather, and the Mediterranean lifestyle. She misses the vibe, to be outdoors all-year-round, and to be at "home". However, she feels that she can enjoy "the good sides of Greece" when she is there, whereas she does not have to bother about the more negative parts, such as financial aspects and the lack of career prospects. Penelope left Greece before the European financial crisis hit the country. She says that life in Athens was a constant "eureka" as the economy was booming. However, what seemed to be a never-ending party finally stopped, and the hangover that followed was severe and long-lasting. The painkillers given by the EU and the troika did not cure the headache, and instead the spiral went vicious. Penelope says that Greece today is different from the country she left. It used to be very EU-friendly, and embraced the euro and the Europeanisation. When back home, Penelope feels that the EU nowadays represents economic austerity. As a result, both she and other Greeks working in Brussels with European affairs are sometimes seen with suspicion. Penelope is a corporate lawyer, working for an American law firm in Brussels specialised in European competition law. She has a good salary, many times the wage the ordinary

Greek has. Returning to Greece is currently not an option. Her situation has hence similarities with what Zoe described in Section 5.4. Penelope goes to Greece at least three times a year. It also feels like home, but less and less every time. Not living there creates a gap somehow. Every time she goes back it takes longer to feel at home, and now Greece does not feel like her base anymore. Penelope feels Greek, but also European, and living in Brussels has enhanced her identification with Europe. The Greek identity seems to become more of a "souvenir" to use at certain occasions, but nowadays she identifies primarily with Europe.

Still, most people arriving in Brussels from different countries feel that their country of origin is "home". How pronounced this feeling is depends not only upon the individuals but also upon the country in question. When Sophie grew up in southern France the EU was considered as something distant. But, living in Brussels, where most of her friends work with EU affairs somehow, the European idea has become much more prominent and present. She has lived in Brussels for six years and came there for a job at a law firm directly after finished her studies within European law. She says that the EU institutions felt fairly distant from southern France, and although she always liked Europe, she felt much more French when she lived in France. In Brussels, European policies are very present, and the European identity becomes more obvious. Sophie still works for a law firm with European competition law, and lives with her partner, with whom she has a young child. At home they speak French and English, and for her multilingualism enhanced a supranational identity.

> "If someone asks me where I come from, it's Marseille. It will be like that for all my life. I don't regret that I left, it is not that I miss France, but I see all the good things about France that I did not see before, at least in another way. When you leave you have a critical regard, but with time you start valuing the good things with a country. Culturally, Belgium is very uninteresting. I really think so, but maybe it's France that is strong in that aspect in fact. I start liking things in France more and more. But in general, of course I feel much more European now than I did in France. I always liked it, but it felt a bit distant in Marseille."

Sophie hence identifies with different places simultaneously, and in different layers. After many years abroad, most of them in Brussels, she does not feel Belgian. She still considers herself as coming from Marseille, where she was born. Furthermore, she

identifies with France, and with Europe, and these two layers do not contradict one another but can be explained by the nested model (Twist 2006; Risse 2005). While her identification with Europe has grown during the years Sophie has lived in Brussels, her identification with France has not decreased. Thus, she is a good example of coexisting local, national and supranational levels of identity.

James has lived 15 years in France. Originally from the UK he has lived in Belgium for six years, currently working as a civil servant at the Commission. Having spent so long time away from his home country, he now feels like he has adapted well. He says that he feels European, not least since it is the label that suits him least badly. He does neither feel really English nor British, and despite his long history in France, he does not consider himself French, nor Belgian. However, he does consider himself open-minded towards new places and cultures, and he adapts easily. Hence, the European label suits him well. His identification has developed in unexpected ways during his six years in Belgium. In France, he felt more French every year he lived there, but now his identity with France is slowly diminishing. Instead, he feels that his English identity is slowly growing again. He says he used to have a strong feeling against England and the UK, but now he starts consuming more British media and news. Living in Brussels has, at the time, made him feel more European and more English. James' story and identification with different places is hence characterised by de-nationalisation, Europeanisation, and re-nationalisation (on a distance; see Favell 2007).

Once in Brussels, many "EU newcomers" are reminded about "Europe" in a way one does not find elsewhere. They work with European affairs, they – professionally and privately – meet individuals of different European nationalities on a daily basis, they see the EU machinery behind the scenes, and they discuss European policies. Furthermore, they personify European integration. There is somehow a "European identity" evolving with time. The expatriates in Brussels are gradually becoming part of a "European body", enhancing their Europeanness and being Europeanised. Many of the expatriates can hence be seen to exemplify or represent several dimensions of social groups in a European context, both having a European identity, strong trans-European ties, and being linked to a European political mobilisation (Díez Medrano 2008).

I have the impression that cosmopolitanism is well viewed among expatriates. The more countries you have lived in, the more languages you speak, the better. Having family worldwide is a sign of status, mainly because it is linked to mobility and being international. Hence, saying that you are "European more than something else", has a positive notion. Expatriates in Brussels live, act and breathe Europe. The expatriates generally identify with the Eurobubble, which involves a common identification with Europe (Melucci 1995) and hence is an example of horizontal relations that translate into collective European identity formation (Westle 2003).

While being cosmopolitan and transnational is well viewed, expats are at the same time afraid of being rootless. Many expat parents are concerned about their children getting a sense of rootlessness (see Section 6.4). The parents know where they come from, but have mixed feelings of whether their children should consider Brussels as "home" and identify as Belgians, without identification with the country (or countries) of origin of their parents. The delicate balance between letting the children becoming European, multilingual, and borderless, on the one hand (high status), while not making them rootless and lost, on the other (low status), is a particularity of parenthood of expatriates in Brussels.

Thus, in general, expatriates feel European – they already did before they came but their international social relationships in Brussels and work for the EU often strengthened this feeling. Meanwhile, they stay connected to their homelands and fellow countrymen, keeping part of their native identity. They have mixed and parallel European and national identities, as well as loyalties.

8.3 Social identity and stereotypes

When in Brussels, I am several times a day asked where I come from. It is one of the first things people ask, both expatriates and Belgians. With time you learn a few standard phrases related to your own as well as others' nationalities. It seems to work

as an icebreaker. As a Swede, I constantly hear things related to weather, and that given my origin I should be used to even worse weather than in Brussels. I sit at a café at Rond Point Schuman with an Italian man whom I meet for the first time. In less than 30 minutes, we have been mentioning stereotypes at several times, commenting on our own behaviour (I was on time, he was not; I ordered a large coffee, while he ordered an espresso, and he talked a lot), as well as others. In Brussels, people frequently refer to stereotypes, such as rude French, lazy Greeks, macho Italians, party-minded Spaniards, Catholic Poles, and humourless Germans.

"How do you tell an extrovert Finn? It's your shoes he's looking at, not his". This joke, pointing out Finns' shyness, is a typical example of the stereotypical jokes on European nationalities that are frequently being told in Brussels. In this section, I examine how social identities and stereotypes of nationalities are used among expatriates in Brussels. In the European setting, the use of stereotypes is widespread. Stereotypes are "essentialised representations of national cultures" (Lewicki 2016:116), and can be a sign of perceptions and prejudice, and reveal hierarchies among EU member states (Lewicki 2016; 2017). Generally, stereotypes have targeted neighbouring countries and (former) enemy states.

Among expats in Brussels, there is much guessing and discussing where in Europe people are from. Looks, style, fashion, accent and behaviour are all bases of (more or less sober) jokes and prejudices that are widely used and discussed in Brussels. Malin from Sweden confirms this.

> "Many like to use stereotypes and joke about themselves. But it depends on where you come from. Finns often joke about themselves, that they are silent. They are proud of it. Germans say that they are 'to the point' and respect the time. Stereotypes is a very easy way to bond with people, and everybody loves to confirm them."

In Brussels, a melting pot of European cultures, the characteristics of the different nationalities and cultures naturally converge. Meanwhile, people become more aware of their own culture and behaviour and how it differs from others. Expats I interview underline that the typical cultural characteristics can be something people either hide

or underline, or both, depending on the situation. In a multicultural setting, where someone is the only one from their country, (s)he might tone down some behaviour that is part of their culture and adapt to a pan-European average or the ambiance produced in that specific setting. However, at a gathering of fellow countrymen, the cultural characteristics may be highlighted and pronounced even stronger than would be the case back home. A potential explanation is that what people have in common is merely, or predominantly, their nationality, rather than common interests. National belonging can be shown in many ways: listening to national music, eating traditional dishes, and discussing common cultural references. It can also imply strengthening the typical cultural characteristics more than one would usually do. Italians may speak louder than otherwise; Spaniards can sing and dance, and so on. Hans from Germany reflects on stereotypes as a sign of dual identities and multiculturalism as we sit having dinner.

> "I work in a very multicultural environment. There are advantages and disadvantages. It can be quite messy when there are 28 nationalities having to compromise at work. At meetings, the Flemish and Germans are there two minutes before it starts, and then people arrive later. Of course, we say that the Italians tend to be late. Stereotypes are actually quite often true. On a general level, I would see myself as very European, and I understand the differences. That is a big difference between me and my friends from school in Germany, where EU and Europe still are quite distant. The fact of speaking a foreign language most of your time, being exposed to all those nationalities, is quite a different world. But you are still influenced by your home countries, the traditions, the political views. Maybe it is a German thing, but quite often you would tend to compare your system with the others, and generally we would say that Germans do better. Which in many cases definitely is not true by the way. I guess that if you end up working here and living here, you are by definition already quite open to other cultures. But if it is purely only European, I don't know. Eastern European, you can still see that there is a divide. Maybe it is also from school, culturally we are closer to people from the West."

This suggests that the stereotypes are frequently used, privately as well as professionally, and that it is a way to reflect on people's country of origin as well.

Gustav, a Swedish diplomat, often comes across stereotypes in professional contexts.

> "I don't know if it is used so in everyday life, when I meet people privately etcetera, just a bit. But it is widely used at work, for example when negotiating with other EU countries. Mostly with people that use stereotypes about themselves. An Italian is blaming an impossible instruction from Rome, or a German who is absolutely rabid in a certain process, then they might excuse themselves for being Germans. And Swedes can say that we need things to be in a certain order. I think one can use stereotypes quite much to your advantage, and at work in the EU bubble it is widely used. But almost only the classic example, like Germans, Italians, Spanish. One doesn't have too many stereotypes about Romanians."

Hence, in the negotiations within the EU and between EU member states, the stereotypes are part of the language. Hans from Germany agrees, saying that stereotypes are part of his everyday work environment:

> "In the European Commission you use stereotypes quite a lot. It is like a jargon. It can also be a way to mitigate frustration. If I speak to a friend about a problem I have with a colleague, the first question would be 'where was he from?' We tend to ask about the nationalities. You are aware, I think, and very attentive to nationalities."

National stereotypes are also discussed and frequently used among expatriates to socialise. Stereotypes serve as an icebreaker, a metaphor, or an excuse. The Germans "being punctual", the Italians "being *bon vivants*", and the Finnish "being silent" are some examples. North, South, East, West. Catholic and Protestant. However, it is mostly the widely accepted stereotypes that are used (at least openly). People do not use stereotypes such as the stingy Scotsman or the corrupt Romanian. To a certain extent, stereotypes also work as a shield, but it is also a sign that people do not get to know many of their peers beyond that surface.

The national identity may be used as a social tool in expat communities to promote yourself, especially if you are originally from a "popular" place of high cultural and historical status, especially in Western Europe. Hence, there is a paradox of both using and reproducing stereotypes of yourself and your nationality while often identifying less with the same national characteristic behaviour. Also, stereotypes are used as in contrast to other nationalities, with more or less serious or ironic undertones. Konstantinos from Greece underlines that stereotypes can be a sign of negative aspects of socialising in Brussels:

“If I am invited to a party with Italians. I do not know them, but I make an idea of what I might encounter, what kind of visions of life, their attitudes etc. 70 percent of what I think will be correct. But that means that I generalise for the rest.

I hang out with people from all over Europe, it does not play any part. I do not know many from Eastern Europe. It is not that I do not want to, not a conscious decision, it is all kind of people, it is true that central Europeans, I do not know, do they keep to themselves? I do not know.

Stereotypes, I see them everywhere. I see more in Brussels than anywhere else in Europe. Because here you are confronted by them all the time. In a way, you become less prejudiced, because your friends come from everywhere. You start realising that they are just like you or me. But you are also much more exposed to the differences. It does not mean that you don’t accept them, but that you are in the same melting point means that you are aware of each other’s differences, and that you accept them. If I lived in Greece, I do not know, would I have any stereotypes about Finnish people, I would never see them, and they would not see me. Brussels exposes you to the diversity. We all like to put people into boxes. The more people you meet the more little boxes you have. You are more accepting and liberal in your views, but the stereotypes are evermore present. Even as a joke. We play on each other’s stereotypes all the time. With some friends we would lose a big part of our discussions if we were from the same country. In a way that is what makes relationships in Brussels kind of superficial. We spend a lot of time on the superficial differences between them. You eat the pasta this way or so. Becomes a cute icebreaker in a party. You spend time just discussing stereotype. It becomes a prominent feature in the relationship to certain persons whereas in other cases you are from the same place it plays zero role. A tool in icebreaking. You hang out with people just because you are from the same country, eating typical food. You would never do that at home, and you might not even like it. Everyone bring home cookies from their home countries, and it is like a competition. It is a nice gesture, but we would never do it at home. We play on differences, in a good way, but they take up a lot of space in relationships and conversations. It prevents us from focusing on other things. This is what we have.

With my German friend, I never just say, when annoyed, ‘you are such a pain in the ass right now, can we just solve this?’ Instead, I say ‘you are so German right now’ and then we cannot go any further. I stay on the superficial level, due to this”.

Many expatriates speak about how the stereotypes are integrated in their identity in Brussels and the role they play in interacting with people. The major Western European states are subject to many stereotypes, while smaller countries in Central and Eastern Europe are connected to stereotypes to a much lower extent, possibly due to a lack of knowledge about their cultures. Many Europeans do not know Estonia or Malta well enough to make stereotypes of them, and some expatriates said that they mostly know negative stereotypes about Central and Eastern Europe, and hence they do not use these extensively.

Nevertheless, expatriates I interview are frustrated about being forced into a box of stereotypes related to their nationality that they do not identify with. Maybe it was these characteristics that made them want to leave their countries in the first place? Sara from Spain says that among expats in Brussels, there is not much truth in the stereotypes:

> "These stereotypes, sometimes there are little things that really apply, and sometimes it is really not the case. ´The lazy southern European´ and then you have super hard-working Spanish, Greek, Italian etc. in the Commission. But still, they are used a lot, often as jokes though."

To conclude, the stereotypes are omnipresent in Brussels, professionally as well as privately. Using them can be a way to show trust, but on the contrary also to be mean subtly, and they can affect how individuals interact with people from other nationalities or think about countries, and the use of them can reveal a certain hierarchy among EU member states. The stereotypes are versatile, fluid and sometimes contradictory, and are used strategically at times. These stereotypes, regarding oneself or others, are particularised according to the context. It can be a social gathering, a political negotiation, or a professional interaction.

9. European integration in an era of nationalism and Euroscepticism

> "I don't want to belong to any club that will accept people like me as a member".
>
> Groucho Marx, *Groucho and me,* 1959.

9.1 An ideological calling?

In the European quarter, the House of European history museum opened in 2017 on an initiative from the European Parliament. As I walk through the impressive exhibition, the European integration project is starting to make sense. After centuries of wars, cooperation seems logic. On the other hand, Brussels is maybe the only European city that does not need yet another symbol of European integration, since the entire town is a European microcosm. The visitors of the museum are already convinced; the EU is a peace project. Criticism towards the EU administration's current functioning, the democratic deficit, and the austerity measures are rarely discussed in Brussels. And when they are, people have their counter arguments well prepared. The museum's story about the EU's "founding fathers" of the EU feels rather polished.

When exploring Europe, Europeanness, European integration, and Europeanisation, it is crucial to separate the geographical area of Europe, with its culture and history, from the European Union, as a political project. Especially Norwegians, Swiss, Serbs, and other Europeans from non-EU countries are eager to point this out. Nevertheless, at a

closer look, it is not as simple as that. In Brussels this is very evident, and the concepts of "EU" and "Europe" are mixed. In this section, I analyse the Eurobubble's ideology related to the EU integration.

As indicated before, for expatriates living in Brussels, Europe and the EU are always present, especially when working within European affairs. The European integration project and "an ever-closer union" has a special meaning for Eurocrats working for the EU institutions, since most are personally and financially linked to the integration and cooperation. This does not mean that all expatriates are uncritical towards the EU in its current state. I ask Harry from the UK on his opinion:

> "As a Brit, coming from one of the most Eurosceptic countries, I was probably quite pro-EU before I came. I was always interested, and that was also one of the reasons why I moved to Brussels. I was interested in the institutions, how the EU worked. So, I was pro-EU before I came. And since I have been here, I am still pro EU, but probably I am more aware of the faults of the system, than I knew before. I used to be more idealistic. I went to an Erasmus, thought 'let's work together'. I was impressed by the social side of it. That you could learn from other cultures. Meeting people of different background. Whereas being here, I think I have been more aware of how institutions can become a bit stale and everything takes long, the bureaucracy. But it does not mean that I am not in favour of the European project as a whole."

Harry is hence an example of a person with a strong European vision before arriving in Brussels. My interviews suggested that there is in many cases a belief that the European integration project plays a role, although often only a minor role, in one´s decision to move to Brussels. When in Brussels, a more general interest in Europe, European integration, and the EU becomes more practical, focusing on the every-day functioning of it. This can spur interest, but it can in some cases also generate cynicism.

As is the case with identification, it may sometimes be hard to distinguish between Europe and the EU when looking at ideology. Many people, like Harry, have sentiments regarding the social sides of European integration, and regarding the dismantling of intra-EU borders and the free movement of people. They are often strongly convinced of the general need of cooperation between European countries. However, among young people coming to Brussels, the knowledge of the functioning of the EU

institutions does not always seem to be overwhelming and a general pro-Europe approach is more common than a more specific pro-EU attitude. This can generate a partly sceptical reaction when confronting or taking part in the policy-making machinery in Brussels. To some extent, especially within the EU institutions, the expatriates in Brussels work for an idea. Thus, EU civil servants often believe in the general ideas behind the European Union and defend its *raison d'être*. They were more interested in international affairs than the general European before coming to Brussels, but did not generally come mainly for ideological reasons. They instead had a personal interest in living and working in an international environment that they found exciting. Furthermore, job security with excellent conditions and high salaries almost exempted from tax are other motives to work for the EU.

9.2 Ever closer union: Promotion of further integration

Many expatriates I speak to and hear of in Brussels are to a certain degree defending the EU and favouring a pro-European agenda and some people I speak to would like the EU to have more power in Brussels, deeper integration, more transnationalism, and stronger supranational institutions. The massive machinery is like a self-playing piano. If you work with European integration and are financially dependent on these institutions, directly or indirectly, how keen are you on criticising them? Meanwhile, many of the interviewees are critical, pointing out weaknesses and paradoxes in the European integration project, as what could be labelled as "critical friends".

Given that expatriates in the Eurobubble in Brussels are examples of European integration and work with European affairs, this section will explore their opinions on the EU institutions and the European integration project in general.

As discussed, many expatriates are relatively EU-friendly already upon arrival. Malin from Sweden says that she was pro-EU before coming to Brussels, and probably

would not be very interested in living in Brussels otherwise, and that she now, a year and a half later, still is pro-EU, but not more than before. Penelope from Greece thinks that she is more pro-EU and more pro-Europe after many years in Brussels than she was before coming here.

> "I feel European. Living in Brussels helps you understand how many things we have in common. At the same time, seeing all the mishandling of so many ideas make me more sceptical to the EU.
>
> Working on EU law, seeing that we are so dependent on EU and subject to it every day, makes me understand the importance of it. Most people do not understand that, or at least not think about it. From travelling without ID and common anti-trust rules. All this is evidence of our similarities, and it affects us constantly.
>
> In Greece, there is much criticism, but there are people of all opinions. Many problems are actually Greek, many understand it. But the political parties tend to blame Europe for the shortcomings. Greece has been between East and West. We feel European, but also different. Very Bulgarian and Turkish in our culture. We are very different from the Brits and the French."

Many of the expatriates I interview have a generally positive view on the EU, but recognise its flaws and understand why Euroscepticism has risen. Paul from Germany points out that the EU sphere in Brussels indeed is a bubble. When outside Brussels, he often realises how little other people know and care about the EU. He says that the Eurobubble is a very small world that people outside know almost nothing about, even among the civil servants in his own ministry in Germany. In Germany he feels that the EU is mainly discussed in negative terms, and that the positive aspects of the EU very rarely are underlined or make it to the headlines. He feels that the lack of knowledge of the EU's functioning and its administration is a significant problem. This is a widespread opinion among expatriates – a kind of balance between praising European integration, recognising the challenges within the functioning of the EU institutions, and still defending the status quo.

Gustav from Sweden says that the EU feels much closer when you live in Brussels, especially when working as a member state diplomat, which also has changed his view on the EU.

> "You feel more European when you live here. I have just been here for less than a year and I already feel more European compared to when I live in Stockholm. And of course, it makes you change your view on the EU somehow when you work and live with it. […] I feel European, but also very closely connected to certain other European countries and cultures. The Nordics of course, and Germany; UK to a certain extent."

> "Europe is much more accessible; I reflect upon how absent Europe and the EU is in Sweden compared how it is in many other EU countries. Since I am here, I understand that EU is a big thing in many countries. In Sweden it does not feel like that. You care much less about the EU and what is happening in Brussels, but you are also much further away from continental Europe, and maybe not as dependent. We don't care that much. That's a difference."

Gustav feels that the EU is omnipresent in Brussels, which is not at all the case in Sweden, and the closeness to the EU and its policy-making has affected identification with Europe as well as his opinion on the EU. He mainly speaks about it in positive terms. The socialisation with other expatriates has been an important driver in the Europeanisation process, which goes in line with the neo-functionalist approach on EU integration (Haas 1958). Furthermore, by living in Brussels, Gustav has become more aware of which European countries he feels connected to. Interesting to note, the countries he mentions (Nordic countries, Germany, UK) are generally regarded as like-minded in terms of EU politics (in the case of UK not anymore). Gustav is representing Sweden in EU negotiations, and the political difference and horse-trading are therefore part of his everyday life. This suggests that there is a link between like-minded countries in terms of EU policies and the ones Gustav connects to on a personal level. This could be explained by the link between culture and polity in EU policies. The lack of a united European people has been identified as a reason of EU's lack of legitimacy, and a democratic deficit (Colliot-Thélène 2016, Shore 2006a). Among expatriates in Brussels, many identify with Europe, and there is a certain belonging, which is yet another reason why the European supranational institutions make sense from this perspective.

If expatriates in Brussels are "pioneers of European integration" (Recchi & Favell 2009) and they personify the borderless Europe both privately and professionally, it is

easy to be pro-EU, at least in principle. Increasing your influence and territory is an ambition for most organisations, and the EU is not an exception. The expatriates working in European affairs in Brussels, especially those working for the EU institutions, are in different ways pushing for further integration, enhancing the European agenda, and strengthening the supranational level. It would be contradictory if they would support closed borders, increased power at the national level, anti-globalisation and protectionism. They work for Europe and live a life that is facilitated by "more Europe". This EU enthusiasm is nowadays somewhat unusual in the rest of Europe, and these pioneers form therefore an exception.

However, not all expatriates in Brussels are pro-EU without reservations. Although most seem to agree upon the general idea behind European integration as a peace project and economic tool to generate prosperity, many have concerns about the functioning of the EU in practice. They are not Eurosceptic, but realist. They see the machinery on a daily basis. They see the horse-trading, the inefficiency, private lobbyists' power, and the well-payed bureaucrats, while people around Europe are suffering from poverty, unemployment and low pensions. They see the European Parliament's monthly move back and forth to Strasbourg. The expatriates are hence well aware of the less glorious parts of the EU integration. This creates a conflict of interests among and within certain expatriates, which highlights the fine line between the private and professional sphere in the Eurobubble.

9.3 Euroscepticism: A clash of identities and loyalties

While hanging out in the expat community in Brussels it seems like everybody is very interested in political affairs. Expatriates in Brussels are probably more politically oriented than the general European, especially, they are much more oriented as regards European affairs and EU legislation. Who in the streets of Madrid or Stockholm can even name five members of the European Commission? I have the impression that the general Swede knows more about the political system in the US

than about the functioning of the EU. And many Europeans do not feel connected to the policy-making machinery in Brussels.

Almost everyone I speak to have strong opinions about Euroscepticism. In this section, I explore how the identification with Europe and loyalties towards the EU as well as to the countries of origin among expatriates in Brussels are affected by Eurosceptic tendencies across Europe.

Alexandra from Sweden has lived in Brussels for many years. She explains that in Brussels it is sometimes difficult to grasp and understand Euroscepticism since almost everyone is pro-EU. However, when back in Sweden, she can feel both scepticism and a lack of interest in the EU. She believes that the EU has been working more to address Euroscepticism in recent years. Sophie from France has developed a slightly more negative view of the EU while living in Brussels. She started to study European law in France because she found it important. She was idealistic about the necessity of the EU and European cooperation in general. Now, seeing the EU from within, she has understood and gotten aware of its more dysfunctional sides as well. She still believes in the EU, but is becoming more pessimistic every day. She says that in Marseille people are very far away from the EU, and the interest and knowledge in European affairs hence are limited. Sophie feels that people in her home town now are more pessimistic than they used to be, and she does not blame them.

This suggests that expats are well aware that Euroscepticism is more common outside Brussels than in the European capital. Konstantinos, who is from Greece, identifies strong Euroscepticism in his home country – something that he thinks has developed during the period he has been staying in Brussels. This has affected him, living in Brussels working with European affairs.

> "I do not feel very nationalistic, because I do not have strong ties to a place. It does not really define me very strongly. I do not feel that nationalism is good for the EU. The European project is still good, and nationalism endangers it, which is not a good idea. I find it dangerous that these attacks [are directed] against the umbrella identities, and it comes from rich and poor countries. It becomes very difficult to defend the EU.

> As a Greek in Brussels, when the crisis went on, I got impacted by all people speaking about 'these Greeks should leave, be kicked out'. For a few months they spoke about Greeks all the time. It felt weird. But also, it bothered me less because I had a certain detachment from the country and could identify that they in some aspects were correct.
>
> If you are British in Brussels now, there is not one day that someone is not speaking about Brexit. At the end of the day, it becomes tiring, regardless of what you think about Brexit, because you hear the jokes, and the ridicule, it becomes annoying in the end. It does not help, and make people go back to nationalism. I would have done so during the Euro crisis, would I have a bit stronger ties to my Greek heritage."

Konstantinos has an interesting view on Greece, the EU and the financial crisis. He is detached from his country of origin, although being very interested in what is happening. Still, he could feel a certain level of anger, frustration and sentiment of injustice, both from Greeks towards the EU and from EU institutions and member states towards Greece, because of mismanagement. He understands how sentiments of nationalism can arise in such situations. Despite his detachment, he felt how he as a Greek embodied the "crisis country" in the Eurobubble. This once again underlines that expatriates in Brussels, no matter how detached they are from their countries of origin, remain representatives of their nationalities.

Meanwhile, the crisis has also made people aware of the EU and the importance of supranational institutions and international cooperation. Sara give examples from Spain.

> "I think that in Spain, people are realising how important Europe is becoming, how important is our presence in Europe. More and more politicians have an experience from the EU institutions. It is more part of the debate now than previously."

Speaking about Euroscepticism with expatriates in Brussels I often see that certain defence mechanisms (more or less hidden) get triggered. Sara's mentioning about the importance of European politics being recognised across Spain may be a normal analysis, but it is also a narrative that suits the Eurobubble well and defends their *raison d'être*. The most prominent of these narratives is probably the foundation of European integration as a peace project. I speak to Hans from Germany. He thinks a lot about what the European integration project and the EU institutions are based on:

"Other federal structures, such as US, Australia, Brazil, Mexico, they all have pretty strong states, and a federal layer on top. But they share history, language etcetera. Although big differences [exist] between somebody from California, Michigan or Texas, but at least they have this common pride, [and] national anthem. But in Europe you would still have more of a national view, or in some cases a regional view. Not only Catalonia, also in other countries. So, the European is always another layer on top, which unfortunately for a big part of the population it is there, not tangible. For the generation of our parents this is still the peace project, after the World War II, which is not the case for people in our generation."

He then contemplates the future of Europe.

"I feel like the coming years will be quite tricky but crucial for what will happen in Europe for the decades to come. I believe the whole migration debate, the whole Brexit... A big part of the population has the impression that migration is a key issue. And if we cannot show that there is a common border management and asylum system, if things continue as they do in Italy and Greece, and you have debate about refugees raping, like one case in Germany, where they managed to go, or were sent, back to Iraq. A general sentiment of that we are losing control. That combined with a massive economic crisis, debt struggle. […] Then we are in big problem. I find it always very interesting and frustrating in Spain, because I see the differences in employment and opportunities. The Eurostat press release on employment rates in regions. Always a few regions in Greece and Spain are highest, and then there are southern Germany, Austria, and northern Italy. The differences are massive. In Madrid, people that have good jobs still cannot buy a home. If we lose this generation, the peace project can be lost, since peace is taken for granted, then we can be in trouble.

Europe and the institutions are struggling tremendously to get their message to the citizens. The massive bureaucracy in Brussels, overpaid people, trying to regulate their daily life."

This shows that Hans and other expatriates in the Eurobubble get reminded of the legitimacy problems of the EU (see Vries 2018) as they go outside Brussels, to their countries of origin or other places. While recognising challenges, they often mention the EU as a peace project right afterwards. This is a narrative that Thomas from Germany, who grew up in Brussels, has heard as long as he can remember. Thomas studied at university in Germany but has back in Brussels for a few years.

"[My] grandfather worked for the EU in the very early days. My father works for the institutions. This has shaped my view about the EU. My father grew up here and became a

Eurocrat. All was much smaller back then, and less important. Now it is much more present in the news, more political, and touches upon much more policies.

The European thought, it was different when I lived in Germany. In Brussels you do not have to convince people about the advantages about EU and the European thought. Although people might have different ideas on whether it is working well or not, most people agree on that it is a good thing. Working in Hamburg, I constantly had to defend EU policies and the EU integration process. People were much more connected to Germany and their cities.

In Belgium, being a small country, people are much less patriotic, than those living in big European countries such as UK, France and Germany. Coming from a small country you appreciate open borders much more, the internal market, it is obvious that it helps. Belgians always have a large ratio of people speaking several languages. The European idea comes much more naturally."

Growing up in the Eurobubble in Brussels and working in the field of European affairs (although not for the EU institutions themselves), Thomas could be said to be an example of a "homo communautaurus" (Georgakakis 2013), although he lived in several European countries. Growing up in an EU-friendly environment, it was when he started to study in Germany that he first got a notion of scepticism towards Brussels, and he felt a need to defend the EU. Many expatriates seem to feel an urge to defend the EU in times of Euroscepticism, partly as a result of ideology, but also since they feel somewhat personally attacked, especially Thomas and other "homo communautaurus" that have been part of the Eurobubble their entire lives.

Brexit has made Europeanism and the future of the EU more fragile. Expatriates in Brussels frequently discuss the relationship between the EU the UK. This, naturally, affects particularly the Brits in Brussels. James from the UK says that it has become quite complicated for him. In the UK he reads and hears many negative things regarding the EU, and it somehow affects him, although his pro-EU sentiment remains. He continues by saying that he might have been much more affected would he not have been living in Brussels.

Euroscepticism has been growing within the European Union, and there is a widespread notion that unelected bureaucrats in Brussels are setting the agenda. This is not correct, but there are certainly technocratic tendencies within the EU institutions,

and influential bureaucrats tend to be more in favour of a federal Europe than the general European. The European Parliament now includes several parties working against the EU, and Eurosceptic parties are on the rise in almost all EU member states. The expatriates in Brussels are in a difficult position as scepticism towards the EU and the "elite in Brussels" is growing in their home countries. Many expatriates are critical to how the EU has been dealing with the financial crisis, the migration crisis, and so on.

In sum, the expatriates in the Eurobubble are loyal to their employer and keep a transnational perspective, but are at the same time affected by the situation in their home countries and the political tendencies there, and dislike when other nationalities in Brussels complain or blame their country for something. They have loyalties to their home countries as well as to Europe and the EU institutions. They still defend the EU, in line with its motto "United in diversity", but they do so with a bit of cautiousness.

9.4 A European elite

It is a lovely spring day in Brussels, and I am waiting for someone to pick me up in the middle of the European quarter. As I am standing at the sidewalk, I hear sirens from police cars. A motorcade is approaching at Rue de la Loi, stopping the traffic. This is a common view in this area, as the EU and member state leaders, as well as other foreign dignitaries, are making their way to the EU institutions. Suddenly a shiny Audi stops in front of me. I open the door and step into the car, joining my new Italian friend. We are invited to a barbecue at the house of a Spanish man working for the EU institutions. He lives in a beautiful flat in Ixelles, with a large terrace. Upon arrival we cheer in champagne, and I start speaking to the other guests. It is warm and cosy at the terrace, and the vibe is international. There are ten people in total, and all except me work for the EU institutions. During the barbecue, we discuss Brussels, Brexit and the current state of the EU. I assume that most of the participants have high salaries from the EU and do not pay income taxes in Belgium. They come from different countries,

and their salaries are possibly several times higher than equivalent jobs in their national administrations. Given this background, it is interesting to hear them complain about Belgium, Brussels, and even the EU institutions. At the same time, they believe that people outside Brussels do not understand the EU, and that more power should be transferred from the national to the supranational level. An interesting mix of cynicism, idealism, distance and realism.

The expatriates in Brussels' Eurobubble form a privileged group of economic migrants. They are migrants as a result of an active choice and can travel extensively back home and across Europe and beyond. They often have good salaries and comfortable living conditions. The experience is described as an "Erasmus with money", as one interviewee put it. In this section, I explore how forming part of a "European elite" in Brussels affects individuals' relation with "ordinary" European citizens.

As mentioned, many expatriates are critical towards the EU and its policies. Such feelings have developed particularly in the wake of the financial crisis. Nevertheless, there is a widespread feeling among expatriates in Brussels that the general European does not understand the benefits of the EU, and that the Union ultimately is a good thing for Europe, its member states and their citizens. Although some people self-critically identify certain elitism among the people in the EU institutions and a lack of understanding of ordinary Europeans' situation, many expats defend the system in different ways. I speak about this with Hans from Germany, working for the European Commission:

> "I think there is a European elite in Brussels. Part of it is the high salaries within the EU institutions. Once you start here and get used to the privileges you have, many colleagues soon lose touch with reality, if you look at some of the secretaries and assistants, complaining that they do not get extra holiday for Christmas, and we come back from Spain where we have met engineers who earn 1,000 euros working six days a week, then something is weird. But to defend a bit, I believe that our generation is different. It is more widespread in the old generation, who started in the 80s and the 90s, when there was very limited competition, and you get a promotion every three years, and end up with salaries that were not foreseen for that kind of jobs. Meanwhile, you have often completely over-

qualified people in these posts, among the young. One of our assistants had a PhD, which shows to what extent the competition has sharpened, and how popular these jobs are."

The expatriates are, naturally, aware of that they are part of a privileged group. However, while many refer to "colleagues" or "acquaintances" who do not realise how privileged their position is, very few I have spoken to claim that they themselves have lost touch with the reality that their fellow countrymen are facing. It seems like a subject many expatriates in Brussels are used to discuss, or receive questions on.

Both the elitism and the gap between the bureaucrats in the EU bubble and the general European seems to have grown in recent years. The economic crisis put focus on a disconnect between Brussels and the reality in many member states. Konstantinos believes that the democratic deficit is the main problem:

"The elitism is an inevitable by-product of the structures we've created. We are representing people we do not know anything about, and we have nothing in common with. We know the structures but are detached from the Europeans. And we hardly know what is happening in our countries. So very far away. The more detached, the easier to blame people as well.

Elitism in terms of good salaries is not very interesting. But the problem here is that nobody voted for the Brussels machinery in Brussels, and hence there is distance and detachment. Thus, there is an elite, and the second level of separation makes it more difficult than on the national arena.

If you are a Juncker[14] or Ursula[15], you are not going to say that 'let's go back to nation states'. Then you shoot yourself in the foot. Europeanists work for the EU, which is expected. Of course, there are exceptions, but in general that is the case. If you work at a high level for the EU, you are likely to push for attire more power to you.

Too many people take work too seriously here. You are wasting your time. The EU institutions provide a job security and safety that make people less 'hungry' and interested.

[14] Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the European Commission 2014-2019 and former prime minister of Luxembourg.

[15] Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission since December 2019.

You get comfortable and focus on your house, and your kids. It is because it is so bureaucratic, and so intangible. And so far from reality in most places in Europe."

During the economic crisis in Europe, many young and highly educated people left the most affected countries searching for jobs, in particular those who spoke foreign languages and had certain financial stability to take the step to go abroad. Some ended up in Brussels. Those who could afford to did unpaid or low-paid internships. As such, they did not represent the average European. Vegar from Norway thinks that elitism is blatant in Brussels, especially during the crisis.

"There is a layer of people in Brussels, as in national capitals, that are completely disconnected from ordinary people. Someone having a fixed job here, especially in the institutions, your salary is twice or three times every average person in the streets. Your reality is strange. You cannot imagine how it is to live on a third or fourth of what you are living on. Their understanding is different. They might know it, but they do not fully understand it. Greece is an example. The impact on the Greek people that have to cut pensions by 20 percent. None of them could themselves live of 400 euros. At the end of the day, people need to eat and live somewhere. There is an immense distance. Meanwhile, a lot of the work here is just empty words. Some important things, but a lot of fog and discussions leading absolutely nowhere, just to show that you are there somehow. Why is it worked on? Many people know that. But many defend what they do, to justify yourself, your reason to be here, and your job. And not least your high salary."

Many of the expatriates in Brussels come from middle-class backgrounds. It should be noted however that many younger expats are doing one or several internships, working for free or having low salaries. Brussels is a rich city, which makes the difference in economic standards or income gap between expatriates and their host countrymen limited. Nevertheless, the general expat, out of the current limited sample, seems to have a high income, and a fairly good economic background.

Many I speak to recognise that they are privileged, but almost none would consider themselves as part of an economic elite. They would possibly say that they are an "enlightened elite" understanding the value of European integration within European affairs. It is worth noting that the same people also benefit from this system and status quo. Instead of a "creative class", they could be referred to as a "bureaucratic class".

This suggests that the "socialisation of the elites" is spurring a European agenda on the individual level, which later, on a macro level, transcends to political integration, in line with the neo-functionalist theory on EU integration (Haas 1958).

In sum, there are several aspects of the elitism within the expat society in Brussels. First, expats generally have promising careers and high salaries, and in many cases, they have relatively privileged backgrounds. Second, they are aware of the political developments of the EU, and are to a certain extent partaking in shaping them. Such elitism, including the economic one, does not differ much from the elitism found in national contexts in other European capitals, particularly among privileged groups of people working in finance, politics, lobbyism, or legal affairs. Nevertheless, both this elitism and the distance between Eurocrats and their fellow countrymen imply that they lose touch with the everyday realities of the people they represent.

10. Conclusions and future research

> "It's culture, not war, that cements European identity"
>
> Umberto Eco, interviewed in La Stampa/The Guardian, 2012 (Riotta 2012).

10.1 The ambivalent European

This thesis has explored the identity, life and culture of expatriates in Brussels and their relationship to the EU and Europe from an anthropological perspective. As expatriates in Brussels can be regarded as pioneers of European integration (Recchi & Favell 2009), it is of interest to study their identity formation in more detail. Analysis of this group provides a picture of highly mobile, self-reliant, and cosmopolitan people having different backgrounds, but much in common. It is not surprising that they often feel European, as a complement to their national identity. Maybe more revealing is that many have an ambivalent relationship towards the EU and the Eurobubble which they are part of themselves.

This last chapter aims at presenting the conclusions of the study, discussing the implications of these results, examining strengths and limitations, and suggesting areas of future research.

10.2 Research conclusions

During the years I have been investigating this subject, I have spoken to many expatriates in Brussels working in the field of European affairs. A general observation is that they hold a high degree of reflexiveness regarding their situation, leading to interviews that were particularly rich in information. They think a lot about what it means to be an expatriate, a European, and about loyalties towards their countries of origin. I will now return to and answer the research questions posed in Section 3.4.

10.2.1 Characteristics of the Brussels expatriate

The first research question was: ***What makes expatriates working within EU affairs settle and stay in Brussels?*** I started by describing the expatriates in Brussels, who they are, how they arrived in Brussels, and how being an expat has affected their lives.

The study suggests that expatriates in Brussels are cosmopolitan pioneers of modernity, transnationalism and globalisation. They are mobile and independent polyglots and form a privileged sub-culture community of economic migrants – a "bureaucratic class" – that has been embracing and gaining from globalisation. They travel extensively, and keep contact with their countries of origin, forming an individualistic and "glocal" culture that allows for both global, European and local perspectives.

Many of the expatriates come to Brussels because of work or studies, and stay for professional, and in some cases relational, reasons. They tend to have secure jobs and a better economic situation than they would in their home countries. They are generally well-educated, multilingual and have a pro-EU attitude already before arriving in Brussels. Often the expatriates like the international environment, and living abroad makes is possible to stay "young" and live independently, far from the pressure from family and society back home. The expats have a strong cultural capital, generally come from a middle-class environment, and embody Europeanness. All this makes them atypical for their respective country of origin. A general interest in international affairs,

including EU policy, is common from the onset. A large share of the expatriates has studied social science, notably political science, law or economics, and Brussels provides them with specific professional opportunities that are rare elsewhere.

Expatriates have often been used to socialise with fellow Europeans before arriving in Brussels, and in many cases, they have been studying abroad, for example through the Erasmus exchange programme. They are curious about discovering new places, and some expatriates rather "left" their home country than moved to Brussels, in search for something international. It is not unusual that they come from an international background. Some have parents of different nationalities, and some have been living abroad with their parents who themselves pursued international careers.

The expatriates often come for a short period of time and stay longer than expected. This can create a kind of long-term temporariness, where they do not know how long they will stay, and hence do not invest substantially in the place of residence physically, emotionally or economically, which hampers their sense of belonging and creation of a "home". The younger they are when they come to Brussels, the more likely it is that they will stay. In formative years between 25 and 35, many find a job within European affairs, a field of work in which they will not easily find a job in their home countries, which is an argument to stay in Brussels. Many expatriates refer to Brussels as what we can call a "good compromise", which they maybe do not love, but where they stay out of a comfort they cannot find elsewhere.

The expatriates arrive in Brussels mainly for professional reasons. The focus on career, the instability and temporariness of living abroad, as well as decreased pressure from family, friends and society has an impact on family formation. Generally, it seems that expatriates have children at a relatively high age. Furthermore, romantic relationships and families are denominating factors whether expatriates are staying in Brussels or returning to their counties of origin. Couples from the same country of origin often go back "home" when they get children. The main reason is that they want to strengthen the ties between the child and their home country as well as their families, and the practical help such closeness can imply. In addition, they miss being close to family and friends.

10.2.2 Brussels as a "home away from home"

In the next step I examined how the expatriates integrate in Belgium and their relationship to Brussels, in comparison with their home countries. The second research question was: ***How do expatriates integrate into their host society, and to what degree do they consider Brussels to be "home"?***

In Brussels it is generally difficult to know from the appearance who is an expatriate in the Eurobubble and who is a local. The research suggests that expats are creating a sense of belonging to Brussels, which most consider home. However, despite high social and cultural capital within the group, integration seems difficult. Expatriates often take part only in limited and selected parts of Brussels, and can be considered a privileged and multinational "enclave". This implies that the tolerant, cosmopolitan, and pan-European expatriates promoting European integration have difficulties integrating in Brussels and Belgium, much like other migrant communities. This non-integration can be a result of (mutual) disinterest, but also a certain level of auto-exclusion, which can be linked to a level of elitism, and the view on Belgium and its citizens is often characterised by stereotypes.

Expats' integration in Brussels is to a high degree related to the extent to which they form informal personal relationships with locals. Even though many Eurocrats are Belgians, expatriates in Brussels mainly socialise with each other and integrate within this particular community. A "bubble effect" emerges, where expatriates who work in European affairs socialise with other expatriates in the same area of work, who they have a lot in common with. Interestingly, the Eurobubble is separated from other highly educated transnational communities, such as the community of transnational artists. Moreover, the Eurobubble is not a homogeneous community. Within the Eurobubble, nationalities and linguistic groups tend to stick together, and many respondents mentioned a divide between people from Eastern and Western Europe. Despite this internal heterogeneity, the Eurobubble constitutes a substantial part of Brussels, and even though it is characterised by a high turnover, expats can live for decades in Brussels without getting closer relationships outside this group. The Eurobubble can hence be said to constitute a community on its own, a "city within the city", or an

"imagined community". There are furthermore examples of expatriates that use Brussels as a "non-place" of supermodernity – a transit hotel that offers work rather than life.

The research shows that expatriates quickly acculturate to the Eurobubble, but not to the host society, and hence seldom "go local". This strengthens the hypothesis of cosmopolitans being skilled in moving between cultures but have less success, or interest, in engaging deeply in a host society. Meanwhile, having Belgians in one's social network can enhance the feeling of belonging to the host society, which above all is spurred through romantic relationships and family ties. Those who form a Belgian family are an exception – naturally, they are at heart much closer to Belgium.

While expats feel at home in Brussels and have established ties and networks in their new home town, at the same time they do not feel Belgian, do not follow Belgian news or politics, nor are interested in Belgian culture. The sense of belonging to Brussels as opposed to Belgium may in part be explained by the country's relatively weak national identity, being torn between different political and linguistic communities, and squeezed between larger nations that have historically culturally influenced the country. Would the EU be situated in Paris or Madrid, the relationship between the expatriates and the hosting state and its culture may have been different.

Since Brussels became seat of several EU institutions, the Belgian capital has become an international and multicultural city. Hence, Brussels is not only affecting the expatriates, but also evolving as a result of hosting them. Brussels has become Europeanised and cosmopolitan. The affluent Eurobubble has gentrified large areas of Brussels as expatriates buy houses and ask for restaurants, bars and shops. The Belgian inhabitants in Brussels have ambivalent feelings towards this development. In general, the Belgians seem to have modest interest in paving the way for proper integration. Many expatriates speak or learn French, whereas few learn Dutch, implying that the integration is stronger with the French-speaking Belgian community.

To conclude, Brussels, rather than Belgium, becomes a "home away from home", and the relationship to the host country for expatriates is a balance between integration in the Eurobubble and (auto-)exclusion from local networks.

10.2.3 Two layers of identities and loyalties

The stories of expatriates ending up in Brussels led to exploring how they identify with their home countries and Europe, respectively. The third research question was: ***In what way, and to what extent, do expatriates in Brussels identify with Europe, and how do their European identities relate to their national identities?***

The study shows that the expatriates in Brussels often identify with the Eurobubble, embedding a shared identification with Europe, which is an example of collective European identity formation as a result of horizontal social relations. The importance of social relationships in determining the identification with Europe suggests that the social milieu – the Eurobubble – strengthens the European identity. This is hence a strong example of structuralist identity building.

Furthermore, expatriates in Brussels generally identify both with the nation state of their origin and with Europe, and have loyalties to both entities. The expatriates are Europeanised and develop a belonging to a "European habitus". Their identification with Europe encompasses both civic and cultural dimensions. The way these two layers of identification coexist, and which of them dominates, differs between individuals, and can in certain cases be explained through the "nested model" or the "marble cake model" (Risse 2005). In the majority of cases, however, these models are not applicable to expatriates in Brussels. Expats have a complex mix of identification with different geographical places, and it would need more than two kinds of "cake batter" to visualise it. Regarding the nested model, the research suggests that it often fails to be applicable on mobile people. A French person living in Paris may feel Parisian, French and European, in different layers, as a Russian matryoshka doll. However, to explain the territorial identification for a Dane who has been growing up in France, studying in Germany, and working in Brussels, a much more complex model is needed. Furthermore, the study shows that identification tends to develop over time, and in certain cases, living in the Eurobubble in Brussels generates a Europeanisation process where the identification with the nation state diminishes as a European identity is formed.

The identification with Europe does however not necessarily increase over time. The identification with Europe seems to be stronger if there is a weak identification on the national level, which hence suggests a negative relationship between nationalism and Europeanism.

The expatriates' attachment to the home country depends on several factors, including the time spent there, the active contacts with people living there, and the linguistic identification. Having a partner from their own country enhances the links to this country of origin, and hence the loyalties as well. In a similar way, the study shows that romantic relationships between expatriates of different nationalities can strengthen the European identity, as a lowest common denominator.

In certain cases, the expatriates in Brussels have lost identification with the country of origin or, in other words, they have de-nationalised. However, being abroad increases the awareness of one's own country of origin, and can sometimes enhance the identification with it, and spur national pride (not necessarily meaning nationalism). This can be linked to the fact that expatriates are often considered, or perceived, as ambassadors and representatives of their countries of origin.

The increasing populism, Euroscepticism and nationalism in Europe have made it more complicated for the EU expatriates to combine the double loyalties towards the EU and their country of origin. This is particularly the case in times when there is much criticism and even anger towards the EU in their home countries, such as in Greece due to the austerity measures the EU imposed on the country during the European sovereign debt crisis.

Stereotypes regarding nationalities is part of daily life for expatriates in Brussels. These national stereotypes are used and reproduced in both formal spaces and informal gatherings of private and professional nature alike, including in the negotiations of the EU policy-making procedures. The stereotypes are versatile, fluid and sometimes contradictory, depending on the social context. Furthermore, the use of stereotypes reveals a hierarchy among EU member states that has implications on the individual level. The hierarchy is based on both political and economic power as well as historical and cultural capital. On the one hand there is one Europe, but on the other there is

tension and ambivalence between member states; notably between newer and older member states (that simplified can be called an East-West divide), but also between richer and poorer countries (that simplified can be called a North-South division). The East-West divide did not only show up in stereotypes, but also in social relationships, suggesting that what the Europe with which individuals identify is not necessarily a homogenous concept.

10.2.4 EU advocate in theory, but sceptical in practice

Lastly, based on the findings related to how expatriates identify with Europe, I investigated their relationship to the EU institutions and their views on European integration. The EU is to a high degree part of the everyday lives of expatriates in Brussels, and furthermore something which they often are economically dependent upon. The fourth research question was: ***To what extent do expatriates in Brussels advocate European integration within the framework of the EU, and how do Eurosceptic tendencies across Europe affect the attitude of the expatriates towards the EU as well as their identification with Europe?***

Expatriates in Brussels are exposed to the EU in their everyday lives, probably more than anyone else. They are pioneers of European integration and generally pro-EU already before arriving in Brussels, although it can be difficult to discern whether it is actually the EU or rather Europe in general terms that they are favouring, or a system that they personally benefit from.

Meanwhile, these EU experts also see all the downsides and negative aspects of the EU machinery. Almost all respondents are somehow critical to the functioning of the European integration in practice, including the bureaucracy, the systemic flaws, the political horse-trading and the inefficiency. Hence, most are more positive towards the European idea per se and the EU in theory than in practice. This ambivalent feeling towards the EU was an unexpected finding. Furthermore, many expatriates highlight the technocratic and bureaucratic nature of the EU institutions, mainly in negative terms. Nevertheless, in practice, they push the European agenda forward for further integration and a shift of power to the supranational level. This “European body”, where

people identify themselves as Europeans and favour enhanced power to the EU institutions, is relatively widespread amongst expatriates in Brussels, but rather atypical for Europeans in general. The expatriates however mainly stay in Brussels for personal rather than ideological reasons.

Many expatriates are aware of the notion of a "European elite" but would not consider themselves as such. However, there is a major divide between the expatriates in Brussels and the ordinary Europeans they represent, both in economic terms and regarding their respective identification with Europe. Moreover, many have not been living in their countries of origin for many years. They are, to put it short, representing people they are very distant from. Nevertheless, they recognise their privileged position, which has been more obvious and sensitive during the economic crisis.

The expatriates are economically dependent on EU integration and some of their positive views towards the EU institutions can be explained by the observation that they are defending their *raison d'être.* The balance between the pros and cons of the EU has become more critical and difficult for the expatriates in Brussels as Euroscepticism has risen across the EU. They defend the notion of "United in diversity", based on a mix of ideology and a need to defend what they do for a living.

10.3 Strengths and limitations

This study has its strengths as well as limitations. The research project took many years to finalise, during which the political landscape has slightly changed, as the EU has been experiencing several crises, and Euroscepticism has grown. Since I have a background in political science, I have had a cross-disciplinary perspective on the study objective, hence being able to include political aspects and consequences. This has been beneficial given the multidisciplinary nature of European studies. The qualitative research method that has been used in the study, in contrast to a quantitative approach that frequently has been used in this area of research, has led to interesting results.

My experience from being an expatriate and working within international affairs has provided me with a particular positionality as an "insider". This has been an advantage in the research, since it has facilitated the process of forming relationships with informants (and hence no particular need to "study up"). Furthermore, I have had access to areas and situations related to the EU bureaucracy that have provided me with an understanding of the context the expatriates in Brussels are living in.

There are several aspects I have not focused enough on. It would be relevant to apply a gender perspective, exploring differences between female and male expatriates as regards the identification with Europe, the attitudes towards the EU, as well as how they live and integrate in Brussels. Some observations suggest that there are certain gender differences in relation to how expatriates are affected by living abroad, for example related to family perspectives, and why they chose to go abroad in the first place.

An important observation in the study is the East-West divide that can be discerned in social relationships among expatriates. In this regard, it is unfortunate that the sample of respondents includes only two persons from the Central and Eastern European countries that joined the EU in 2004-2013. More respondents from these countries could have shed more light on this issue.

10.4 Implications of results, areas of future research

The results of this thesis strengthen the view that the EU is indeed Brussels-centred, and that those working for the EU institutions in many aspects live a life which is far from that of the ordinary European. Yet many expatriates are ambivalent concerning the EU as it is functioning today. If the EU cannot convince those working with and living off the EU institutions, it could possibly be even more difficult to convince the ordinary European in the future.

The expatriates in Brussels working with European affairs constitute an interesting research subject for different reasons, and the study opens up for several new questions. The subject of elitism and the shaping of European politics is worthy of further study, not least in times of nationalism and Euroscepticism. Besides, the European Union's political crises related to the financial situation and the Euro, refugees and migration, Brexit, and COVID-19, and its implications on expatriates in Brussels and their identification with Europe could be further scrutinised. It would furthermore be interesting to investigate to what extent these expatriates serve as EU ambassadors when in their home countries.

In general, Brexit constitutes a source of relevant research topics. Some Brits have acquired Belgian citizenship as a result of Brexit, and their identification with Europe, UK and Belgium would be interesting to explore. Furthermore, it would be relevant to study whether Brexit has any effects on the expat community in Brussels and their identification with Europe as a new balance within the EU recalibrates, and how the EU-UK relationship in Brussels will evolve.

The expatriates' identification with Europe and perception of the EU has been affected by the political challenges mentioned above that have been difficult for the EU to handle. Larger geopolitical changes with consequences for Europe, and hence the EU, may affect the identification with Europe and loyalty towards the EU institutions among Europeans, including expatriates in Brussels, in the years to come. It would be interesting to investigate if, and how, the nationalities of the expatriates in Brussels affect their work, for example in policy-making, given these double loyalties.

Expatriates in Brussels could also be compared with other expat destinations to discover similarities and differences between different transnational high-skilled workers in different places. For example, Geneva hosts many international expatriates, but they are not mainly working in the field of European affairs. Hence, a study on this group, and their identification with Europe, could be carried out, and compared with expatriates in Brussels. A similar study could be carried out in Addis Ababa – hosting the African Union headquarters – focusing on African expatriates and African integration.

Another observation is that European expatriates in Brussels do generally not integrate much in Belgium. From this perspective, Brussels could be argued to constitute a dormitory city or non-place for many of them. A comparison could be drawn as regards social interaction of expatriates in other cosmopolitan centres in Europe and globally.

An interesting finding that would be worth looking further into is the patterns of socialisation among expatriates in Brussels and the hierarchies amongst nationalities in the Eurobubble, as well as their political consequences. With time, as new member states integrate in the EU, the hierarchy could be expected to change. This however depends on the economic developments in the member states, with implications on their relative weight within the EU, as well as the political development both in the EU and the member states.

Expatriates constitute one of several migration groups in Brussels. As discussed in this thesis, this group has the privilege of, to a certain degree, being able to choose their level of integration in the society, and they can afford to stay within their group deliberately. This auto-exclusion option may be a privilege other migration groups in Brussels do not have. A comparison between different migration groups in Brussels, between expatriates and less affluent groups, as regards identification with Europe, opinions on the EU, and integration in the host society, would be revealing. Such a comparison could also focus on citizenship, rights and duties, considering class and ethnic dimensions.

Looking deeper into how the mobile, fluid and changing lifestyle of long-term expatriates that settle in Brussels changes over time would be interesting.

The expatriates in Brussels are returning to their countries of origin on a frequent basis. It would hence be possible, through a multi-sited fieldwork, to explore how they live and act when they are in their old habitat, where they are not foreigners. This would raise questions on how much of their lifestyle, and identification with Europe, is linked to the geographical place of Brussels. These aspects could also be compared with other migrant groups in Brussels. Furthermore, it would be worth investigating the imaginary

among the expatriates, and possibly their children, regarding a possible future return to their home countries, that may be romanticised.

Since the conclusion of my fieldwork, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the expatriates in Brussels, like everybody else. Many of them have been stuck in Brussels without being able to go back to their home countries. They have not been able to go to the office. Their mobility and social habits have drastically changed. As mentioned in this thesis, a crisis, like the terror attacks in Brussels, can increase the interest in Belgian current affairs. During the pandemic, expatriates have possibly been following Belgian news on in a new way, since the pandemic and the restrictions are affecting them personally. It would be interesting to see how this new paradigm has affected their integration in and identification with Belgium.

Theoretically, it is also necessary to revisit the different models proposed for the formation of supranational identities. As has been shown in this thesis, the empirical value of models such as the nested model and the marble cake model is limited for the description of highly mobile people, especially if individuals' countries of origin are Eurosceptic. But the models may be equally limited for explaining the formation of supranational identities of people living in secessionist areas such as Ireland, Catalonia, or any of the language communities in Belgium, where supranational identities may replace or prevail the national ones. Therefore, revisiting these models and creating more complex models for the interaction between different geographical levels of identity would help understand Europeanisation "from below".

To conclude, the particularities of the Eurobubble in Brussels will remain relevant to investigate through different perspectives. The identification with Europe and the attitude towards the EU among Europeans remain relevant themes also because of their implications for the EU's democratic legitimacy. A lack of interest in and identification with Europe and the EU and the absence of a European "demos" are critical concerns for the EU institutions. Limited EU enthusiasm may hamper future transfer of power to the supranational level (although the EU throughout history has increased its power despite limited public support), reduce European integration, or even lead to additional

countries leaving the EU. Hence, the identification with Europe among EU citizens may have political consequences on the national as well as European level.

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Annex 1: Interview guide

Personal data:

- Age, sex, nationality, profession/occupation, civil status, family situation, language knowledge.

Life in Brussels:

- Arrival in Brussels: when, reasons, background, for how long time.
- The notion of the word "expat"
- Pros and cons of being an expat.
- Living abroad, being an expat – differences compared to live in the home country.
- Intent to stay in Brussels, go home, or elsewhere. When and why?
- Socialising: how to build a network, how and where to meet people, with whom (which nationalities).
- The notion of "European elite" – elaborate.
- Family situation, school, spouse and their professional status, career, work-life balance.
- The notion of "mobility", mobility history (growing up, studying, working - where, why, when?).
- Travel habits (home, elsewhere). Destination and frequency.

European and national identities:

- The notion of identity.
- Identification with home country, and how has this developed since moving abroad (why, how, examples?).
- Identification with Europe and how has this developed since living in Brussels (why, how, examples?).
- When applicable: possibility of having multiple identities: clash or interaction?
- Identification with other European countries.
- (The use of stereotypes in Brussels)

EU and European integration:

- Perception of European integration and the EU. Challenges?
- Positive or negative towards the EU (why?) and how (and why) this has developed over time.
- Positive and negative aspects of the EU.
- Opinion on more or less European integration (supernationalism, federalism) and further enlargement.

- Perception of and opinion on Brexit and Euroscepticism across Europe, and personal impact.

Integration in Brussels and Belgium:

- Whether Brussels and Belgium are considered home, and why.
- Identification with Belgium.
- Positive and negative aspects with living in Brussels and Belgium.
- Socialisation with Belgians (how, with whom).
- Knowledge of and interest in Belgian society (reading news, following politics, sports, culture, consumption of media, books, films).
- Belonging towards the Belgian society (why, and how this has developed over time).