

Peterson Institute for International Economics
What does it mean to be "European" today?

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[00:00:21.21] - Nicolas Véron

Good morning, good afternoon, good evening, wherever you are in the world. I'm Nicolas Véron, and we're at, uh, What Now, Europe? The series on European matters at the Peterson Institute. And the title could not be better than today because we are really discussing what it means to be European with Juliette Johnson. Juliette Johnson has a quite unique research profile because she explores deep issues of identity and belonging and things that are fundamentally non-economic. But at the same time, she's a wonderful central bank watcher, and I relate very much to that. So Juliette, you studied at— International Relations at Stanford in the 1990s, and you learned Russian. You did a number of visits for field research in the then post-communist world. You completed a PhD in politics at Princeton in 1997, and you have published a number of books. I will mention 3 of them because they give an idea of the range of interests. The first one is *A Fistful of Rubles: The Rise and Fall of the Russian Banking* I'm not sure, I'm not sure how much it has risen again since that was published in 2000. Second one, co-edited with colleagues, *Religion and Identity in Modern Russia: The Revival of Orthodoxy and Islam* in 2005.

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And one which I found particularly illuminating, *Priests of Prosperity: Transnational Central Bankers and Post-Communist Transformation* published in 2016. And this book is fascinating because On the face of it, it's about the buildup of central banks, independent central banks in the post-communist transition countries. But it's really also a very astute observation of the global central banking community, the Bank for International Settlements, other organizations, in a way that I have not found elsewhere. And I can confess, I spend a lot of time looking at that kind of literature. So we interacted on an article you wrote about the European flag. We'll come back to that. One thing that struck— caught my attention in, in your bio is that you— it mentioned how your research can, can shed light on, I quote, how the post-communist experience can inform debates over Confederate monuments in the United States. And I think this is a good indication of how you are able to build bridges between topics that people

mistakenly don't think of as being connected. With that, Juliette, why don't you give us your answer to the question what it means to be European, and we'll take it from there.

[00:03:16.29] - Juliet Johnson

Well, thanks, Nicolas, and thanks for inviting me. So this is your call, having invited a Canadian to answer the question what it means to be European. Although, although I think it can be quite useful to, in that sense, have an outsider's perspective. And I'm not going to answer the question of what it means to be European, but I can talk a little bit about my own research and my own experience here, because what I like to say, as you pointed out, my— all my initial work and my first book was on Russia and on Russian banking. And When I talk about how I became interested in Europe, the Euro-European identity, I would say that Europe came to me. The countries that I was interested in became very interested in Europe and in belonging to Europe, first in a broad intellectual way and then in a very concrete way in terms of joining the European Union, some of them joining the Eurozone. And so the question of what it means to be European became important to me as it became important to them. So you mentioned— so the place that I've engaged with this question most directly is in the paper you referenced on the European, the EU flag, which is called something grandiose like aspirational iconography, the extraterritorial use of the EU flag, something like that.

[00:04:54.00]

Anyway, the overall idea is to think about what it means to be European through how people use European symbols. And when I was thinking about having this conversation with you, I was looking at some recent news articles and I saw this piece by a Spanish journalist and a piece that was very, very pro-European. I mean, the title, the translated title is The EU is indestructible and for all sorts of wonderful reasons. So why is the EU indestructible? But embedded within that was a sense that is a bit dismissive of European identity. He wrote that America innovates, Asia manufactures, and Europe regulates. That verb is foggy and gray as Brussels, where charisma and enthusiasm have always been lacking. Who carries the dark blue EU flag like a bureaucrat's suit to a protest or a soccer final, right? Who carries it? And this is the— this is this idea Michael Billig talks about, banal nationalism, the idea that the EU flag is really just a symbol without emotion. And this has been pretty much the common view in continental Europe of these kinds of EU symbols. There, yes, there might be a European identity, but it doesn't evoke a lot of emotion, it doesn't evoke a lot of deep connection, it's kind of secondary to national identity.

[00:06:28.08]

And whenever I see that, I say, but that's not true in the post-communist world. That's not true in Central and Eastern Europe, both inside and outside the EU. And these, a lot of people, both governments and publics in these countries really use the EU symbols, they claim the EU symbols like the flag in order to claim a full membership in Europe. And they do this in a very emotional, emotional connected way. And I just wanna, you know, I'll end my introductory comments with a quote from Petro Poroshenko in 2015, after Euromaidan, when he became president of Ukraine. And it can't be— this can't be more different from the idea of the flag as banal. He says, "In winter 2013-14, Ukrainians were thinking European, and they rose up against tyranny and oppression. They opted for the European values, democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and dignity, which they shared mentally and belonged to historically. Let me remind you that the EU flag was sprinkled with Ukrainian blood. So that is visceral, that is emotional, that is an identity connection. And so one of the questions I have, you know, for myself, for you, for Europeans in general, is have Eastern Europeans like the Ukrainians, who aren't even members of the EU, actually reinvigorated the European project with these kinds of claims on European identity and emotional claims on European symbols.

[00:08:18.26] - Nicolas Véron

So much to discuss here. I connect even more with it as I spent the last weekend in Kyiv. So I saw indeed a lot of EU flags, also a lot of Ukrainian flags. And some more. Let's try to unpack this with this idea of the EU flag which is sprinkled with Ukrainian blood. Is it for you the fact that there has been tragedy in Ukraine and intense suffering in a story which is largely about joining the European Union, even though there are many other dimensions, I mean, how have you observed this? You've interviewed a number of people in Ukraine, in Eastern Europe, in Western Europe. How do you see this? I essentially return your question to you. How do you see this transformation playing out?

[00:09:19.16] - Juliet Johnson

In what sense? In how Ukrainians feel about Europe? How the war is—

[00:09:23.22] - Nicolas Véron

More the non-Ukrainians, actually. I mean, I will come back to the Ukrainians later on, but let's start with people who are currently in the European Union, both on the eastern side and on the western side of the European Union, but inside, and how you see trends over time but also differentiation over space.

[00:09:48.18] - Juliet Johnson

In terms of— well, certainly if we look at the European project and we look at trends over time, You definitely, if you look at Eurobarometer data, that kind of thing, the, the identification of people with Europe in terms of saying, yes, I feel like a European citizen, for example, which is the question the Eurobarometer asks, it steadily, it steadily goes up. So it's been over 50% for quite a while, but it steadily goes up. There's a lot of differentiation among countries. There's even a fair bit of differentiation among the, among the new member states. And in some in some fairly predictable ways. But this identification as a European citizen is increasingly there. Now, why is that the case? There's some internal factors and there's some external factors. I think, and we've discussed this, I actually think the enlargement, the 2004 and 2007 enlargements, were very powerful in terms of reinvigorating the European project, right? Because there had been, you know, there had been, I don't know, what do you call it, stagnation. It's to have a sense of belonging, to have a sense of what it means to be European, it's really not enough to have a shared money, Flags flying around, a European bureaucracy.

[00:11:30.25]

Remember how most of the discussion around Europe was around the democratic deficit, the problems of the Union, this and that. And then when the Wall falls and when countries in Central and Eastern Europe start making claims on the European Union saying, hey, look, "This is us too. We are not only European, but we should and can be members of the EU." This actually creates an opportunity for the original EU members to rethink their own project and have to think, "All right, what does it mean to be European? Do we actually mean what we say when we say that our values are our values are civic and they're ones that we will embrace anyone who is willing to share our values and to adopt the entire Akihi. But the discussion of values was always paramount. This is democracy, equality, rule of law, human rights, human dignity, free markets, central bank independence, which we both care about, even though I mean, I would argue that's an identity issue too, sure. But you have these countries in Central and Eastern Europe saying, yes, we can do this, we want this as well, we identify with you. And again, it's not just about the key, it's an emotional connection.

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And so I think, you know, you may be able to tell me this as well as I can, but certainly what I experienced at the time in Central and Eastern Europe was this intense emotional feeling that when the EU— by the EU accepting us, so we are already European, but the EU accepting us means that we are returning home. This is a homecoming. This is an acknowledgement of our belonging in Europe. And this is an acknowledgement that we belong as equals. Now, that's not something these countries have necessarily experienced in full in Europe, but once you're a member, you're technically equal. So So it was a narrative of progress.

[00:14:08.28] - Nicolas Véron

And well, you're painting this picture of progress and basically the EU getting stronger and stronger, citizens increasingly identifying with the EU project and the EU institution. And indeed, that's what we see in the Eurobarometer, which is very consistent, strong methodology data. But I mean, I read The Wall Street Journal from a European perspective, The Financial Times, which is British, Politico Europe, which is German-owned. That's not the impression I get. I mean, I look at the media coverage, it's always the EU is falling apart. It used to be cohesive, now it's fraying. We have all these nationalists, populists, they hate Brussels, they will tear it away, tear it down. I mean, how do you reconcile these two narratives and also bringing Brexit, of course, into the story?

[00:14:58.14] - Juliet Johnson

Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean, there's an argument to be made that Europe is stronger since Brexit, since the UK always had a— well, not the UK, let's be more specific, England in particular always had an issue with its membership in the European Union. It always seemed to have one foot in and one foot out, and in a way, it almost feels like since Brexit, not only has the European Union become, I'd say intellectually more and organizationally more cohesive because it doesn't have to, it doesn't have to try to deal with an extremely strong member that has this deep-rooted Euroscepticism, but I think now, A lot of people in the UK appreciate what the European Union did for them. And so certainly, if you had that referendum again today, the result would be very different.

[00:16:08.27] - Nicolas Véron

You're saying what the EU did for them, you're almost quoting the Monty Python movie, right?

[00:16:14.08] - Juliet Johnson

Absolutely. Absolutely. And I think about, you know, I was looking at the the uses of the flag, you know, on New Year's Day, Sadiq Khan in London actually, you know, put up the EU colors on the London Eye. And of course, the usual suspects in the UK denounced this. But you always see there's still, there's a lot of now, interestingly, kind of nostalgia for the period when Britain was in the EU. And yes, you see this kind of pushback, you see polarization, you see it with the, you know, with the actual flag battles now in Britain, you see it across the European Union with concerns about immigration, with the rise of the far right. And certainly, you know, the far right is is extremely suspicious of the European project by definition, right? And the far-right projects are nationalist projects, they're not integrationist projects. And so it's—

they make quite different claims about what it means to be European, and they make claims that, you know, the European identity must be absolutely subordinated to national identity and collective national missions.

[00:17:46.23] - Nicolas Véron

I want to come back to this observation of the international English-speaking media. Is it just because media are always negative? Media don't say the US is going to collapse or even—they don't say that much the UK is going to break up. They say the EU is going to collapse. Why is that?

[00:18:05.11] - Juliet Johnson

I mean, they don't treat— well, it's different in the sense that when I think when people think about the European Union, they don't actually think about it as a federation in the same way that Canada is a federation or the US is a federation. They do see it as this, still, as this group of individual states that has come together to do very specific things. Things. There's this ongoing kind of underlying deep skepticism about the European project. You see this in the media, you actually see this in a fair bit of the academic literature as well. The whole discourse about Europe, you know, failing forward. It's like, well, it's kind of a mess and there are crises all the time, but they do a little fix it after each crisis. And so the EU the EU persists. And I think a lot of it is, I mean, it's in part because, yes, the EU is a strange beast. It's always been this kind of hopeful project and this, in one way, federal project that at the same time gives such power to its constituent, its constituent states. And the whole idea of EU identity and the way the EU has pushed it is very much, well, this is a, this European identity is not something that should, you know, in which national identity should be subsumed.

[00:19:56.06]

It's something complementary. It's something on the side. So in the sense that, you know, Canada is a federation, the US is a federation, well, those countries really do a lot to try to build national identity as Canadians, as Americans, which is the terrible, terrible word for it, but it is. But it's different in Europe?

[00:20:23.16] - Nicolas Véron

One thing is that you can have two flags. You can even have three flags or four flags with your local region and town. One thing you cannot have in multiple varieties is currency. So we have one European currency, that's the euro. And but there are still six countries that don't have it, including Hungary, that is on the way. And if the European Union gets new members, there will

be new countries without the euro. I'm leaving Montenegro aside for a moment, but for example, the current policy of the Ukrainian government is that Ukraine wants to join the EU, but at this point, it doesn't want to join the euro. So tell us a little bit about the euro. How does it confirm or infirm some of your intuitions about European identity? And will we ever get to a point where all member states of the EU have adopted the euro as their currency, even, dare I say, the Poles? So what is happening there?

[00:21:23.08] - Juliet Johnson

Yeah, I mean, that's a good question. And the extent to which I often wonder whether, you know, whether the euro is something that ultimately is, you know, does and will unite or divide Europe, because clearly being inside or outside the eurozone is incredibly important for one's experience of Europe. And this was certainly And the idea of being outside the eurozone in the Czech Republic, in Poland, and most especially in Hungary, perhaps until very recently, we shall see, has been core. I mean, I like to talk about— I have a really crazy research project right now looking at central bank visitor centers and museums and the way they reflect how central banks like to talk to the public. And the most amazing one to me in many ways is the Museum of the National Bank of Hungary, which is huge, which is fascinating, and which, if you go through the entire thing, you would practically not know that the euro exists as a currency. It's hard to do, but possible.

[00:22:38.20] - Nicolas Véron

I'm curious to see how they renovate it in a few years. I was at the Central Bank of Hungary last week, as it happens, and there are many crosscurrents, I guess, may inform that story.

[00:22:51.25] - Juliet Johnson

Yeah, well, we'll see, we'll see. I mean, and changes certainly— changes to these museums certainly happen with changes in government. I mean, I think about the National Bank of Poland has a fascinating museum, again for central bank geeks who would love to go, and they had, um, uh, they had an exhibition, uh, in the original version of the museum on, um, on economic union, on currency union. And in the, again, in the initial exhibition, there was this lovely kind of curtain. You go through the curtain, "Ode to Joy" is playing. It was really this wonderful entrance into the European experience as expressed by the eurozone, which we are going to become a member of someday. Well, when the peace government took over and then you had a change in the leadership at the central bank, Ode to Joy went away. And all you would hear when you walked into that exhibit was this dun dun dun dun dun. They did tweaks. So certainly it changes to fit the feeling. The only central bank museum that really presents the euro in a, and

I'd say it's, I'd say sort of a, you know, at least of the countries that haven't joined yet in a balanced way is the Czech one, where they have a fascinating exhibit that actually talks about the pros and cons of joining the eurozone.

[00:24:27.04]

Again, in a very fair way. And then they give you the opportunity to vote with a little ping pong ball that you can put in a you can put in a container on whether you want to keep the crown or you want to adopt the euro. And every time I've gone there, and I've gone there many times because I go to Prague every year, it looks pretty even.

[00:24:50.27] - Nicolas Véron

So I need to visit that too. You mentioned, of course, naturally a lot of Central and Eastern European countries. And to be clear, I'm talking about those who are now in the European Union. Some of them have the euro, some of them have not. And it was very interesting. You mentioned the fact that in principle they are equal. They are procedurally equal in terms of European institutions, votes, etc., but they don't feel equal. You look at the leadership of the European institution, it's almost entirely Westerners. The Croatian was just appointed vice president of the European Central Bank. That's a big deal because no Central or Eastern European had ever been on the executive board of the European Central Bank. So can you give us a sense of— is it the demonstration that the EU actually doesn't work according to its principles, that Central and Eastern Europeans are equal in theory but not in practice? Or is it only a matter of time? Or is it because, yes, there are many of those Central and Eastern European countries, but they tend to be small and actually it's a bias against small countries? What do you make of all that?

[00:26:04.02] - Juliet Johnson

I mean, I think, and again, I'm coming from this perspective of spending a lot of time in these new member states, which is not even that new at this point, and going to a lot of conferences in Europe and European studies conferences. This is the fact that there is absolutely in Western Europe, a, you know, an attitude that these states— Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, even the, you know, you know, Hungary— so the ones who that have been in since 2004, the Baltic States certainly are not, are not really full members, are, are— there's this, there's still this kind of attitude of, of tutelage among many Western Europeans that I think is really offensive to people in the, again, post-communist states, but it's been post for a really long time. How long do we think about these states in this particular way, rather than, hey, at this point, quite longstanding, many of them, members of the European Union, who should be fully integrated,

full participants in the European project, both in institutional terms and in intellectual terms, or understanding of belonging. Certainly in the conferences I go to, Eastern European examples or expertise is often kind of an afterthought on the general thematic panels.

[00:27:49.23]

Has been for a long time. It's like, oh, we're going to talk about what have you, the democratic deficit, immigration, or what have you. Oh, we need one person who's an expert on that part of the European Union.

[00:28:06.09] - Nicolas Véron

Of course, I shouldn't be asking those questions because I'm French, I'm part of the problem.

[00:28:09.29] - Juliet Johnson

But— Well, I don't know that you're part of the problem.

[00:28:13.13] - Nicolas Véron

How much of that is an issue of supply and how much is demand? If I— or pull and push, or, you know, uh, you're talking, for example, about academic conferences. Um, it is also the case that many of the, uh— and this is a legacy, but it's also a fact— many of the, uh, best academic institutions are on the Western side. There, there are plenty of past dependencies here. So the reason why you have so few academics who come from that region is also because in many ways, people who have made it to that level of academic recognition tend to be overwhelmingly Western European. So, so is that going to fade away over time? Do we need quotas? What, what is, what is the, what is the way out beyond rightly blaming the French?

[00:29:04.08] - Juliet Johnson

Am I okay? I am not. I am not going to be blaming the French. But what you just said is, is, is reflective of the problem, right? It's the assumption that you don't have strong academic institutions in these countries. It's the assumption that you don't have the developed expertise in these countries, and that's actually not true. Again, I'm saying this with my own hat on, but, you know, I've been on the board of the social sciences faculty at Charles University for a long time, and look, they're doing world-class research, and that's true across universities in Central and Eastern Europe. And again, they feel that they don't get the kind of recognition they deserve, but it's not because the expertise isn't there. At the same time, you saw, and I'll give a plug here for Central European University, which sadly was forced to move to Vienna by the Orbán

regime, but hopefully now they'll be able to reestablish establish at least part of their foothold in Budapest, which did focusing on graduate education in the social sciences from a very early moment and which did amazing work. Ed, you're bringing the social sciences back.

[00:30:25.29] - Nicolas Véron

I'm happy to have been wrong and thanks for correcting me and the broader misconception on this. Let's move farther east. So Ukraine is a candidate country. It's a, it's a sizable country. It's bigger than those that joined in 2007 and 2013. Will it become an EU member? What do you see as the challenges here? I know there are many, but what are those that come immediately to your mind, and how will it transform the EU when it happens?

[00:31:00.11] - Juliet Johnson

Yeah, so many challenges. Will it become an EU member? I mean, there Mm. So many things need to happen. I mean, until Russia's full-scale invasion in February of 2022, there was no prospect for Ukraine to be an EU member at any time in the foreseeable future. It was, it was, it was really not even a conversation. Then it became a conversation when, when Russia invaded. And again, for obvious reasons. But, you know, the fact that that happened and the fact that you still have an ongoing war there also shows what some of the, you know, some of the deep problems in bringing Ukraine into the EU are. First of all, There needs to be some resolution to the war. And, you know, it's—

[00:32:05.23] - Nicolas Véron

Assume that. Let's assume that for some reason.

[00:32:08.01] - Juliet Johnson

Assume that? What are we assuming? Because that's a big thing to assume. But all right, let's assume that. Very much depends on what happens. But let's assume the lovely outcome. That, you know, that Russia actually gets pushed out, at least of Donbas. Set Crimea aside because it's more complicated. But, but Donbas, but Donbas returns to Ukraine. It's, it's whole. There are some security guarantees. And so that's no longer an obstacle to Ukraine joining. The other thing that's not an obstacle is Ukrainian public opinion itself, because— and this is actually fascinating— but if you think about it, when before, and in 2013, the surveys in Ukraine actually were not in favor of Ukraine joining the EU. I forget what the actual numbers are, but they were below 50%. And, you know, the last survey I saw, 2023, 2024, it's something like 96%. So Ukrainians are now, and for obvious reasons, all in on joining the European Union. So there's a real level of commitment. And what that means is, I guess, some of the same things that were

happening in Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s. There's a consensus across across the political divide that EU membership is something that we ought to work towards.

[00:33:54.18]

And so it's one— I mean, Ukrainian politicians can't stand each other, you know, terrible debates, and there will be continuous turnover. But at least at the moment, and again, I think for the foreseeable future, they are all going to agree on this. And that kind of agreement is a powerful thing. So because that kind of agreement that in order to, you know, in order to keep ourselves, first of all, keep ourselves safe from Russia, but also to kind of fulfill our promise as a European country, and Ukrainians very much assert that, hey, we are European, you know, we need to join the EU and these are the things we need to do and we're going to try to do it. Their fears certainly are that even if they do all of these these things, Europe, the EU, is not going to let them in. And that's a reasonable fear, right?

[00:34:54.16] - Nicolas Véron

You mentioned that the new attitude, in a way contradicting that fear, is we'll embrace anyone who's willing to share our values and adopt the acquis. Acquis is, of course, the existing body of EU law. What's the limit to this? If Russia— let's dream for a moment, I'm outside of the real world— if Russia China or whatever regime is out there is willing to share our values and adopt the Aki. Will Russia become a candidate country? How do you think about that?

[00:35:30.25] - Juliet Johnson

If Russia— so if there is a fundamental regime change, all right, I'm not even sure I can go there with this. With this assumption because there's so much— I think my question makes sense.

[00:35:47.19] - Nicolas Véron

But all right, all right, all right. But you know, the title of our session is— what does it mean to be European? So is Russia European? Let me rephrase.

[00:35:57.03] - Juliet Johnson

Yeah, because a lot of Russians, a lot of Russians in and outside the government would say, absolutely, we are European. That doesn't mean we want to have anything to do with the EU. I mean, the EU has very much has very much allied the definition of being European with the European Union. That most people in Russia, I would say, absolutely reject.

[00:36:25.19] - Nicolas Véron

Which is UK, right? I mean, we've seen UK saying, "Oh, we're European, but that has nothing to do with the EU." And we see that this doesn't lead to a very clear positioning right now. So maybe, what about Russia?

[00:36:36.17] - Juliet Johnson

Yeah, what about Russia? Well, I mean, The idea about what it means to be European and why Russians say we're more European than the EU is, they refer to traditional European values, right? And again, I'm putting those in quotation marks because values and cultural identity, these are things that evolve over time and they have evolved in different ways. And so certainly, If we think about European values as, you know, in the way that the EU does in terms of democracy, the individual, human rights, and respect for diversity, that kind of thing, you know, that's not Europe as many people in Russia and the Russian government see it. They think of it much more in civilizational terms, terms, I would suppose, and say, look, in terms of Christianity, in terms of conservative traditional values, and, you know, their, again, their view is that this is the actual European identity. This is the actual legacy of Europe. They also, you know, they'll they'll use the memory of the Great Patriotic War, which is what they call World War II.

[00:38:10.03] - Nicolas Véron

When I was in Kyiv a couple of days ago, an Ukrainian civil society activist told me— I asked a question about some historical point and he said, oh, that's the difference between the Russians and us. We both are obsessed with history, but the Russians, when they talk about history, they talk about the past. When we talk about history, we talk about the future. Let me Let's go to Turkey. We did Ukraine, we did Russia. Turkey is more complicated. Is Turkey going to ever become a member of the EU?

[00:38:42.22] - Juliet Johnson

Well, here's, here's where I think there's a limitation in the imagination of current EU members who don't see bah, it's the fly— don't see Turkey as European, in great part because of religion, even though it has been, more in the past than now, a reasonably secular state. You know, part of the reason, a big part of the reason Turkey has pulled away from Europe is because the EU has in essence rejected them. You know, after so much, after everything they tried to do, and I have, I had about 10, 15 years ago, a Turkish PhD student. I've had several, they're fabulous, fabulous, who did a dissertation on European referenda, European identity. And she, you know, she was very much representative of this generation of young Turkish scholars who were so hopeful about Turkey's European future and felt that, you know, Turkey, you know, and many

Turkish politicians and people had done absolutely everything they could to show that Turkey belonged and for, and for very much kind of cultural reasons, uh, Europe rejected them. And, and this view that Europe, even though Europe claimed that anyone who adopted the Aki adopted this set of values could be a member, that, that in practice wasn't true.

[00:40:46.02] - Nicolas Véron

We have a test case, right? Albania is a candidate country. It is a diverse country. There are variety of Islam is, uh, different from Turkey, let alone other Muslim countries. I mean, it is a country whose, uh, kind of at least plurality, I think majority, uh, traditional in terms of religion, uh, is Muslim, even though they have gone through a phase of aggressive secularism and communism, but which is now being rejected in the collective consciousness. So very complicated. But if we want to simplify a small Muslim country becoming a candidate country, what— well, if Albania, as is likely, becomes a member of the European Union in a couple of years, um, how will it transform the EU?

[00:41:32.25] - Juliet Johnson

No, you know why? Albania is very small and Europeans don't think about it at all. Um, in the conception of— in the conception of what is Europe, Albania can be tucked in there, I think. And I think the way that a lot of Western Europeans think about Eastern Europe is actually kind of beneficial for Albania in the sense that they, you know, okay, this is a small country that doesn't mean very much. We can tuck it in here. It won't matter.

[00:42:05.21] - Nicolas Véron

So, Swiss Turkey is just size, or what is the difference?

[00:42:09.02] - Juliet Johnson

I mean, I think it's not just size. I think it's perception. So this was the heart for many years of an alternative European empire, the Ottoman Empire. Turkey also has a view of itself and its own history that is different, that is substantially different from that of many West European countries. And they don't want to, They're certainly not willing to kind of give that up. They want to be embraced as members of the EU truly, truly as, you know, as equals and with their full history acknowledged. I think that's a very different kind of intellectual move for Western Europeans.

[00:43:06.18] - Nicolas Véron

I'm conscious of time, we're almost there, but, uh, I want to talk about Canada. Uh, you're Canadian, you work in Canada. Uh, without all the time to unpack it, but you know, is there a debate in Canada about Europeaness? Uh, is the EU and Europeaness, uh, are these two things connected? Um, tell us about that.

[00:43:32.13] - Juliet Johnson

Well, there's a very interesting debate going on in Canada right now about whether or not we should apply to join the EU. Frédéric Morin at University of Montreal raised this question. And it's not— I think it's not a serious question, but it's a heartfelt one because we feel like we've been abandoned by the United States for all sorts of reasons. And with President Trump claiming Canada as the 51st state, which is extremely offensive to Canadians, Karine Jean is saying, hey, maybe, you know, maybe we should think about becoming closer to the part of the world that actually seems to still share our values, that Canadian values are very much those that the European Union has espoused for a long time, and that the United States, at least its government right now, seems to be turning against.

[00:44:29.17] - Nicolas Véron

So why is it not serious?

[00:44:33.18] - Juliet Johnson

It's not, it's not serious because Europe won't take it seriously. Now, you know, simply, I think, for geographic reasons. I mean, a lot of other reasons too, but geographically, Canada is many things, it's many wonderful things, but it is not anyone's imagination Europe.

[00:44:58.10] - Nicolas Véron

You mentioned a Spanish journalist who wrote that the EU is indestructible. Very briefly, because we're at our time, but I want to ask you, the EU has gone through a lot. Its end has been predicted many times. You mentioned Brexit, the eurozone crisis, you know, all kinds of things. Is the EU destructible?

[00:45:19.08] - Juliet Johnson

Nothing is indestructible, but the EU is very, very tough. And it's tough because it's adaptable, it's flexible, it can lose a member or two and still exist, it can gain a member or two and still exist. Its conception of itself, its institutions adapt and change over time in ways that are actually

very difficult for individual countries. And so I think the future for the European Union is quite bright, quite strong, maybe not indestructible, but pretty close to it.

[00:45:51.29] - Nicolas Véron

On that uplifting note, thank you so much, Julia Johnson, for this conversation. It opened so many avenues for me to think about, and I hope for our audience. Thanks for being with us at the Peterson Institute today.

[00:46:03.11] - Juliet Johnson

Thank you.