European Identity the European People and the European Union

David Troitino

Department of International Relations, Tallinn University of Technology, Tallinn, Estonia

*Corresponding Author: perdices57@yahoo.es

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Abstract The European identity is a necessity in the European Union. As the organization is becoming closer to a new governmental structure, the participation of the people is more needed in the process. Traditionally the European integration has been decided by the governments of the member states plus some influence of the European institutions, without the participation of the European citizens. The main part of the sovereignty was held by the member states and hence there was no need for the participation of the people. Currently the Union is reaching a point where the sovereignty is being shared in the common forums that are the European institutions, as the European Parliament or the European Commission. Democracy is the main pillar of the political system of Europe, and any new form of government should include it. The people in order to participate in the political system needs to identify themselves with it, needs to find common roots to collaborate with each other in the society. Previously this identification was done through the concept of nation, a community of citizens who shared common values and culture. This article describes the current situation of the common European identity, basic for the proper working of the democratic system in the European level, and proposes different measures in order to increase the cohesion between the people of Europe.

Keywords European Identity, Democracy in Europe, Future of the EU, European People, European Integration

1. Introduction

Research in the area of European identity has developed in recent years in two completely different directions with little contact between them. On one side, there has been a number of theoretical approaches and standards focused in the definition of the concept of European identity, yet unproven empirically with public opinion data (Orchard , 2002) . Furthermore, there is a significant number of empirical approaches proposed by sociologists and psychologists mainly social , but they lack a suitable theoretical its tools.

Simplifying perhaps too much existing set of theories on the emergence European identity , there are three general trends in terms of integration. While it is certainly very arguable how identities "cultural" (or ethnic - cultural) can be partly constructed retrospectively by the state itself . Examples of such use can be found in articles by Llamazares and Marks (1997)and Llamazares and Reinares (1997) .

Similarly, there is an extensive literature has been drawing compatibility between identities "Territorial" different level , sub - states and state , which is sometimes considered as incompatible or conflicting . It would have been interesting to include sub - national identities, but unfortunately there is no similar data for this third level of identification. On what does exist information is on the compatibility of three types of identity. Coinciding with these other studies(Moreno , 1997; Mercadé 1989; Llamazares and Marks, 1997; LlamazaresReinares , 1997 Perez- Nieves , 2002)Eurobarometer data confirms that all three levels of identity (sub - national , national and supra - national) are supported.

The theories have labelled as "cultural", " Instrumental" and " civic " If instead of the identification sources ,take into account the development of identities, could be classified as above or after the formation of nation states (identities "cultural" would prior to the emergence of the nation state and would be a prerequisite for its occurrence , identities while " backing " and " civil " rather develop from the creation of these states and depending on how they take) Identities could also talk about " essential or primordial" (identities "cultural" be of this type) , and identities " chosen or rational " (the "instrumental" and " civic " is grouped here). In all these theories there is confusion, generated in part by methodological indicators are used, between the concepts of identity and citizenship. In many cases, respondents are asked whether because they are of different nature. National identity is more "cultural" , while European identity that is more " instrumental" . However, the data also show that there is sufficient "cultural" to the emergence of a European identity of this kind. The results seem to support the theory „civic " European identity. An interesting finding is that, because they are different in nature, the emergence and developing a European identity does not imply a transfer

of identity or loyalty from the national to the supranational level, such theories assume "instrumental" and "cultural". National identity remains high, and the link to the nation is stronger than the link with Europe. As for the factors that hinder the development. For the European identity, the existence of a strong national pride is the most important.¹

There are different theories about integration—mainly federalism, functionalism, cooperation, and neo-functionalism—and its consequences on European identity. The first of them supports the idea of a European Parliament as the central institution of the new political framework in Europe, because the new political structure can be built only by the people of Europe, and should be done at once with a federal constitution and federal institutions. Hence, the European Parliament should be elected by the Europeans in democratic elections to rule over European affairs. It means that the citizens of the member states, and hence the European citizens, should vote in European elections according to the European interest, and not according to their national interests. In order to achieve this, Europeans should have issues which are felt to be European. How to identify a European issue when people do not identify themselves as European? Why do European elections have such low participation compared with elections in the States? Why is there so much indifference about the European Parliament in Europe? Why can't a great majority of European citizens name even a single member of the Parliament? Why don't we have any European political party? Why are domestic issues still much more important in most of the countries of the EU in the political campaign for the European elections than European problems? Because there is a lack of identification between the European citizens and the European Union since their national identity is much stronger than their European identity.

According to the federal idea of subsidiarity, the problems should be solved at the best level of decision making. There are many different levels: the local level and city halls, the regional level, the national level, and above all of them, the European level. So, for example, if there is a problem that can be solved better on the local level, such as rubbish collection, city hall should deal with it. Having a problem that can be solved better on the European level, as, for example, protection of the environment—a problem widespread in Europe because environment does not know about political borders and influences all its members, the European Parliament should act. Hence, if decision making would happen on the European level, European citizens would look to the European Parliament for solutions. Once the EP is the one that rules on and solves these problems, loyalty should be transferred from the national level to the European level. If the institution that solves problems is European, loyalty gradually would change from the national level (previously the last institution to solve problems) to the European level.

Why has this not happened in Europe? Mainly it is because of confusion about the role of European Institutions, and especially confusion between the powers of the European Council and the European Parliament, and secondly because of the lack of a strong European identity.

Functionalism, based on a technocratic work, out of the political spectrum, does not need any European identity to work. The case is the same with transactionalism: the member states are the centre of decision making, so no transfer of loyalty is required, and hence no European identity is needed.

In the case of neo-functionalism, and its approach to integration in Europe with the spill-over effect, the transfer of loyalty from the national level to the European level is basic to the system. Neo-functionalism speaks about integration in areas of low politics which are important in other fields. Economy, for example, has a high potential for further integration that will lead to bigger integration that will create new necessities which can be solved just by more integration, the end of the process being the creation of a European State. The idea is clear: integration in a common trade area leads us to a common market. In order to have a common market, there should not be national barriers, so the European institutions dealt with this problem by creating European standards. So, it moved towards a single market.

But neo-functionalism has a multi-approach to integration. The spill-over effect is its central point, but not the only one. The creation of institutions to deal with common issues and push for further integration, leading the process in the right direction, is another important approach. These institutions must be independent from any member state of the organization, and its workers should forget the interest of their own national states for the European interest. In the case of the European Union, this institution is clearly the European Commission. As a consequence of the spill-over effect, more and more policies are and will be included in the area of influence of the European Union, and hence, in the area of influence of the European Commission, which becomes a centre of decision making in terms of European issues. The loyalty of the economic agents, according to neo-functionalism, will change from the previous level of decision making, the national governments, to the European level, transferring loyalty from the states to the European Union. If in any economic field the decisions are taken on the European level, providing the economic agents rules, benefits, and losses, the eyes of these agents will be focused on the European level. Whenever they have a problem, they will try to solve it in Brussels, or whenever they have a proposal, they will lobby in Brussels. According to neo-functionalism this will create a European identity in economic terms, helping to create the European identity in cultural terms.

The problem with this theory is the multifunctional approach to the European Building process and the creation of other institutions, such as the European Council, where the member states are represented, where the national interests of the member states are protected. The European

1. Antonia María Ruiz Jiménez. *Revista Española de Ciencia Política*. Núm. 12, Abril 2005, pp. 99-127

Union has four main institutions, the High Court of Justice that protects respect for the common law, the European Commission as the executive branch, the European Parliament as a representative of the European people, and the European Council as a representative of the member states. The process of legislation is started by the European Commission, but the Council and the European Parliament have the last say, and they can change the original proposal substantially. In this game of power, the Council almost always has the upper hand, becoming the central institution of the European Union and blocking the transfer of loyalty from the national level to the European level, delaying the creation of a European identity. As an example, one of the most successful lobby agencies dedicated to the car industry has declared in the Financial Times via his chief executive that their success resides in the lobbying done in the capitals of the member states before the meetings of the European Council, and not in Brussels.

2. Current Situation of the European Identity

After more than 50 years of the European Building process, common institutions, and more representation of the people of Europe via the European Parliament, have resulted in a process where the European identity is growing but is still far from unseating the national identities as the main source of identification for the European people. The European Union does not want to destroy the national identities; the European Union is just adding another level. It already exists, but is weak in comparison with national identity, the strongest in Europe at the public level. All agents working in the European Union field try to achieve the same primary goal, the end of confrontations and wars in Europe, most of them a consequence of nationalistic confrontations, via integration. So, the creation of a European identity above the national identities will integrate people, making them closer, and avoiding conflicts between them because of nationalistic feelings, fears, or ignorance.

Another important base is the creation of the European state, the main target of the so called fathers of Europe, as they declared in the Schumann declaration, the founding paper of European integration. It is unworkable in the long term without the support and identification of the citizens with the new state. How will last a European state if there is no European identity? A state is just the organization of the public and common affairs. What if there is no common interest? At the moment there are many reasons for the lack of European identity and measures working to achieve it. One of the obstacles is the fear that increasing the European identity would attack the national identities. Europe is a place with great diversity, with more than 750 million inhabitants, and nearly 500 million in the EU, more than 200

languages, more than 2,000 dialects, different ethnic groups, many different national groups, different climates from the extreme cold of the north to the warm south, different cultures, etc.

Europe, small in territory, is big in diversity, making it more difficult to create this European identity. For years the actions of the European Commission in the field of European identity have been very cautious; trying to avoid problems, the Commission has been acting according to the idea that pushing for a Unitarian identity would have meant the same as the fascist approach. That idea is wrong because the European identity is not something that destroys or dismantles national identities; it is something to be added to them. The process is similar to the one followed by the national states in Europe where there are different cultural groups a national consciousness was created over them without destroying regional differences. For example, the regional identity of Bavaria in Germany is very strong, but is not confronted with their German identity. The same can be said about Spain, where many regions, such as Andalusia, have a strong identity, but no stronger than the Spanish one.

3. Nationalism and European Integration

One problem for creating a common identity for the Europeans could be the new nationalism in many regions of Europe, like Catalonia in Spain, Corsica in France, and Scotland in the United Kingdom. Even though all these regions have a strong provincial nationalism growing, they also feel very European. Their main nationalist political parties want to be part of the European Union, outlining that their main target is just to eliminate one level of integration: the state. They support the European identity as the last level of identification of their citizens. So, a Basque from Spain who supports independence would like to have his local and regional identity, understanding the last as national identity, and eliminate the Spanish identity, making the European identity stronger. It means that it is a problem, but more for the own member states of the European Union than for European identity.

Nationalism on a state level presents a bigger problem. Centuries of building a national identity among many different people in the same state, as in the case of France, made the state a nationalist agent, against pressures from below, local nationalism, and from above, the European Union. Their support for the creation of a strong European identity is indispensable, because they are the main recipient of the loyalty of the people because of their power in terms of education, economy, or politics. They should understand that a strong European identity is good also for them, because with a stronger Union, with stronger integration, the possibilities of conflict would be minimal, and the benefits in many fields great, with minimal losses for national identity

Source: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb68/eb_68_en.pdf.

Figure 1

It is principally based on weak symbols, copying the process initiated by the states in the creation of their national identities. The European Union has its own flag, and it's supposed to be the flag of all the Europeans, something to identify with. Also there is a European anthem, which, as can be read in the webpage of the European Union, is not the anthem of just the EU, but the anthem of Europe. The melody comes from the Ninth symphony composed in 1823 by Beethoven. These are two of the most visible symbols of the European Union, but there are others, less popular among the citizens of the EU, such as European Day. It is a copy of the national days, important festivities in the member states, but on a European level: it is the 9th of May, the day of the Schumann declaration and the real beginning of the European building process. A huge part of Europeans do not know anything about Schumann, the Schumann declaration, or even when the day of the European Union is. So, this symbol is still empty.

The economic field has provided much stronger links of identification for the Europeans, mainly two facts, the creation of the Euro, the common currency, and the Schengen agreement. The first means that 16 member states

share a common currency, more than 320 million Europeans with a common symbol in their everyday life. The level of identification with the currency is important in order to achieve a strong common identity, as we can see with the British and the Pound, still an important symbol for them. But the currency should work well, be strong, and give security to the citizens. Until now the Euro has been one of the strongest vehicles to create European Identity because, despite a general rise of prices with its adoption, the Euro is surviving well during the current financial crisis. The feelings of the people related to the Euro, the common currency, are also important. The former idea in Europe of one state, one currency, makes the people get used to associate a country with a currency. The effect of having the same currency whenever the Europeans move to another country of the Euro zone, makes them feel more at home, with a currency that they know, without changing at the border.

The Schengen agreement, primarily a bilateral agreement between France and Germany, is also an important point in the creation of European identity. The free movement of people between the member states of the EU, with some

temporal restrictions for new members, security restrictions for crises, and exceptions for some countries as the United Kingdom, has practically abolished the concept of borders. Travelling from Spain to Finland without stopping at any border, or showing any passport, makes people feel that they are still in the same area, on common territory.

Finally, European citizenship is also helping to shape European identity, especially for Europeans who live in other states within the EU. The main points of European citizenship are the right to participate in local elections wherever the citizens live, despite their nationality, and also in the European elections. It means that if European citizens do not live in another member state, the benefits are not felt, so its integration effect is residual.

On the other hand, there are other symbols to create the European identity, as the Eurovision song contest, the TV channel Euro news, the Ryder Cup, a golf competition between the USA and Europe, or the football competitions on the European level, especially the last one, for its great popularity among Europeans. The judgement Bosman, related with the freedom of movement of European Union workers, allows the creation of real European teams where previously there were national ones.

4. The Future of European Identity

It faces many problems; much work is still to be done in order to increase the identification of European citizens with the European Union to achieve a minimal level of loyalty that will allow creating the European state. First of all, the ignorance of the citizens about the EU and its institutions should be eradicated via education. Secondary schools and high schools all over the territory of the EU should teach a topic related with the Union. It is clear that education is a policy in the hands of the member states, but the Council, where the states are represented, could include this topic all over Europe, with the same contents, the same structure, and the same target. It would help to close the big gap between the people and the European Institutions, and increase the turnout of European elections.

Language is another problem, originating at the beginning of the European Communities where France was clearly the leader of the process and the French language still pretended to be a worldwide vehicle of expression. Also, the UK was outside the Union promoting the European Free Trade Association, an alternative to the EC. At the moment there are 23 official languages in the EU, and 3 working languages: French, German, and English. It is an inefficient system where almost all the documents are translated to too many languages. This situation should change – the European Union should have just one official language, and the member states two²: their national tongue and the official language of the EU. The international language in the world and in Europe is English. Communication between

Europeans is mostly done using English, so if citizens already use it, a political decision should just be made to reflect in the institutions the reality of the citizens. Of course, there are nationalistic problems in many states, because German is the first language of Europe as a mother tongue, and France still pretends a leadership of the Union and actively promotes the use of the French language in the organization. Both objections are out of touch with reality, because more than 30% of Europeans can speak English, when less than 15% can speak French or 9% German, and English is the first foreign language in more than 80% of the secondary schools in Europe. A common language is needed in order for people to be able to communicate and give them a feeling of belonging. The great disparity in Europe in the educational systems gives us situations as that in Denmark where around 70% of the population can speak English, or very low rates as in Spain. Again, more effort should be made in the field of education.

In political terms, the European institutions should work faster to make European citizens feel easier about them, increasing the loyalty of them towards the EU. At the moment there is a system of balance of power between the member states, where unanimity is required in delicate issues, and between the member states and the European Parliament, with the co- decision system. It makes it inefficient and slow. A reform to increase the capacity of reaction and reduce the timing in decision making will have a positive influence in the identification of citizens as Europeans.

In International relations, a single voice is needed, because nowadays most of the member states still look after their own interest unilaterally, instead of reaching a common and stronger position for the benefit of all of them. So, a foreign affairs minister is needed to increase the influence of the EU in the external world, and make it stronger inside the community. As an example, we can see the energy policy of different states negotiating with Russia, like Germany, avoiding a common position that could bring better deal conditions to the whole community.

In the defence field, many European countries, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, feel safe from external aggressions thanks to their membership in NATO, a military organization lead by the USA. It means that they do not feel safe because of the EU, and the citizens identify themselves less with a common Europe. So, the European Union should develop its own defence policy in order to protect its members from external aggressions, even if they are hypothetical. This would without any doubt increase the European identity of the people protected. The project already exists via the Western European Union, but is developing slowly, and lately has suffered some reverses. Related with the international relations and a common position with the rest of the world, this idea is also the key to understanding the division of Europe in the war in Iraq.

Finally, religion should not be a topic in terms of European identity because of its diversity among Christians, Catholics, Lutherans, Orthodox, plus Muslims, Jews, and other minority religions. One of the most important

²In the cases of states with more than one official language, English should be added to the list.

characteristics of Europe is the laicism approach, a consequence, among others, of the French Revolution and the separation of the state and the church, which is commonly accepted all over Europe. The attempt of including in the failed European Constitution a reference to the Christian roots of Europe would have a negative influence in the creation of a stronger European identity because it would exclude citizens of other religions and the long tradition of laicism in public affairs.

As a conclusion, the creation of a European identity as the last level of identification of the citizens, above the national level, is needed in order to achieve a European state. It seems that many agents are not interested in it because of nationalistic approaches. The EU should analyse what it wants to be, and then push for it, giving up its ambiguous current approach. It is clear that there are other identities, like that of Western civilization, where democracy or human rights are shared, but for which geographic distances make future cohesion impossible.

Something has been done, especially as we have seen because of the Euro, the single market, and the Schengen agreement, all of them with an economic background, and the European identity is much stronger than it was at the beginning of last century. But globalization and the revolution in communication are forcing Europe to speed up the process in order to keep a place in the leading blocks of the world. It could be done just with reforms in other fields, as education, defence, and politics. There are still many obstacles on the way, but they could be overcome by presenting these reforms to the people of Europe via popular referendums where the outcome is shaped by the majority of the Europeans, and not from the majority of the citizens of each member state. It would also bring the Union closer to the people, lessening the gap and building a strong European identity. Of course, these referendums would need the support of the member states represented in the European Council.

The way is long, but necessity will force Europe to face the inevitable reforms to create an emotional link between its citizens and the European institutions, and not as a substitute for national identification, just as something bigger.

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