European Identity Policy: Ways of Formation

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Abstract: The story of the unsuccessful adoption of the European Constitution from the political perspective and the latest financial crisis and namely crisis of Eurozone and the economic situation in particular countries of the European Union demonstrated a menace for the future of the European project. It turned out that the foundation of the system can be not solid enough. In this way new crucial points for the well being of the EU are emerging. Witnessing the process of the EU development and, what is even more important, its enlargement in time, we can say now that a state-like entity needs something more than institutions only. In 50s, the EEC was based on properly chosen institutions which from one hand were imposing commitments on its members but on the other hand still did not limit their freedom. Nevertheless, in comparison with that time now the European space became much more fragmentized, especially after Eastern and Central European countries joined the EU in 2004 and 2007. Moreover, the question of hypothetical acceptance of Turkey and some of Balkan states matters as well. Finally, nowadays the processes of re-nationalization in the member states become more and more intense, and in their turn they also send a challenge to the EU as a supranational entity. Therefore, considering the EU as a political community, we are claiming that a deep insight into the issue of identity is needed. Establishing collective identity is pivotal for the future of the EU as it might work out as a unifying mechanism for a multicultural and diverse space.

Key words: identity, collective identity, European identity, institutions

Introduction

The modern world so often called globalized and unified might at the same time seem paradoxically diverse and rival. We witness big markets full of identical products, similar democratic system introduced in different states but if we look closer we find out that the similarity quite often is only an illusion and in fact almost everything called universally adopted is formatted in a way to meet the requirements and needs of the society, its historical features, traditions, culture, its geopolitical characteristics, etc.

A good example a such dual nature is Europe. From one hand Europe as a name itself is by origin a collective term which supposes some common ideas which can be used towards any country which belongs to the region. European values, European standards, European lifestyle, European politics – the list of "European something" is very long indeed. On the other hand we can ask: but what is Europe? And even if we define its limits by using the name of the European Union with its 27 member states it will be anyway quite problematic to claim that such a variety of represented countries can have indeed a lot in common, especially taking into consideration some of their historic roots of being nation states, which for a long time had been rivals or even enemies and had different political systems.

That is why political elites founding and mainly developing now the European project as well as researchers and scholars have been looking for evidence that there should have existed something really connecting the different states except for obvious political institutions and economic mechanisms as, for instance, common market and currency or freedom of movement which leads to labor migration. However the well built system seems to be lacking such evidence and thus it means that the unifying element is still needed to be constructed and introduced.

The story of the unsuccessful adoption of the European Constitution from the political perspective and the latest financial crisis and namely crisis of Eurozone and the economic situation in particular countries of the European Union (so called "PI(I)GS") demonstrated a menace for the future of the European project. It turned out that the foundation of the system can be not solid enough. In this way new crucial points for the well being of the EU are emerging.

Witnessing the process of the EU development and, what is even more important, its enlargement in time, we can say now that a state-like entity needs something more than institutions only. In 50s, the EEC was based on properly chosen institutions which from one hand were imposing commitments on its members but on the other hand still did not limit their freedom. Nevertheless, in comparison with that time now the European space became much more fragmentized, especially after Eastern and Central European countries joined the EU in 2004 and 2007. Moreover, the question of hypothetical acceptance of Turkey and some of Balkan states matters as well. Finally, nowadays the processes of re-nationalization in the member states become more and more intense, and in their turn they also send a challenge to the EU as a supranational entity. Therefore, considering the EU as a political community, we are claiming that a deep insight into the issue of identity is needed.

Constructing Identity

When speaking about identity referring to the EU, it seems reasonable to speak about its political component. J.T. Checkel and P.J. Katzenstein suggest to understand identity as a shared representation of a collective self as

reflected in public debate, political symbols, collective memories, and elite competition for power[i]. Within this context we are connecting the notion of identity to the political system of the EU and mainly to its institutions. However, we look at the institutions only from that point of view where there policies are considered. Thus what is important for an identity analysis is not actors in the broad sense themselves but their activities.

Indeed collective identity is pivotal for the future of the EU as it might work out as a unifying mechanism when institutions are not enough. Unfortunately, the natural process of identity formation takes time (and in fact a lot) if to speak about democratic systems where there is no ideological control of society exercised by government. Moreover, due to exceptional status of the EU as a supranational entity, the traditional primordial for nation state theory of identity formation is not valid.

In the second half of XX century, however, a new concept of ethnicity issues was proposed in different ways by Ernest Gellner, a philosopher and social anthropologist, Benedict Anderson, a political scientist, and Eric Hobsbawm, a historian. They suggested that the state through its policies is constructing the identity of the citizens (so the identity does not develop in the natural way in time) and therefore their views on problems of ethnicity and identity were named constructivism.

Though the idea of constructing a nation had been already mentioned centuries before by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his immortal work "The Social Contract or Principles of Political Right", 1762, Book 2, ch. VII):

> He who dares to undertake the making of a people's institutions ought to feel himself capable, so to speak, of changing human nature, of transforming each individual, who is by himself a complete and solitary whole, into part of a greater whole from which he in a manner receives his life and being; of altering man's constitution for the purpose of strengthening it; and of substituting a partial and moral existence for the physical and independent existence nature has conferred on us all. He must, in a word, take away from man his own resources and give him instead new ones alien to him, and incapable of being made use of without the help of other men. The more completely these natural resources are annihilated, the greater and the more lasting are those which he acquires, and the more stable and perfect the new institutions; so that if each citizen is nothing and can do nothing without the rest[ii].

The ideas of constructivist theory may be found in the works of B. Anderson "The Imagined Communities" (1983), E. Gellner "Nations and Nationalism" (1983) and E. Hobsbawn "Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: program, myth, reality" (1991). The general idea of the constructivism suggests that the political elites create the identity of citizens by means of mass-media, education system, policies, propaganda measures, etc. Let us see how these ideas are implemented in the EU.

EU Policies

One of the most evident policies the EU used for creating identity is the symbolic policy. The EU, though not being a nation state, has a flag (a circle of 12 yellow stars on a blue background), an anthem (*Ode to Joy*), a motto (*In varietate Concordia* in Latin, also translated into every official language of the EU), an official annual celebration of peace and unity in Europe (9th of May) and an informal capital which is referred to Brussels where European Commission and European Parliament are situated (though Strasbourg with its European Parliament building and Luxembourg with European Court also matter) . These symbols may be used as means for citizens to feel their belonging to the EU, to understand that the EU is not only an idea, a project, but something real which is represented in this way. The name of Europe itself is a kind of symbol as well:

> Its very name [Europe] becomes a kind of fetish, highlighted whenever it appears, traced back from the origin of history, juxtaposing ancient myths and modern institutions, geographical areas and utopian movements. 'Europe' works as a community-creating symbol of a type that recalls Durkheim's analysis of the totem, a symbol that is itself part of the sacred it represents.[iii]

Another fundamental identity promotion tool may be found in the concept of the European citizenship. The Maastricht Treaty signed in 1992 established the Union for every person holding the nationality of a Member State, underlining that citizenship of the Union shall be additional to and not replace national citizenship. National passports were redesigned due to this novelty. The citizenship provided the citizens with several rights including right to be "directly represented at Union level in the European Parliament", and "a right to participate in the democratic life of the Union", right not to be discriminated against on grounds of nationality, right of free movement and residence throughout the Union, freedom of movement for workers, the right to vote and the right to stand in municipal and European elections in any Member State, other than the citizen's own, under the same conditions as the nationals of that state and others[iv]. Those rights were later declared in the Directive 2004/38/EC devoted to the right to move and reside freely within the EU.

The establishment of the EU citizenship and the Maastricht Treaty in general were a landmark for the EU and the European identity in particular. From that point it was obvious that the EU became a real political actor and therefore the identity issue gained the political sense. However long before the Maastricht Treaty the identity issue was discussed by the political elites of the EU.

In December 1973 the nine foreign ministers of the European Community Member States (Great Britain, Ireland and Denmark had joined six founding states by that time) published a document on The European Identity in order to achieve a better definition of their relations with other countries and of their responsibilities and the place which they occupy in world affairs, and also to define the European Identity with the dynamic nature of the

Community in mind[v].

The analysis of the document shows that initially the European identity was connected with the common values of liberal democracy: "the principles of representative democracy, of the rule of law, of social justice <…> and of respect for human rights are fundamental elements of the European Identity"[vi]. Moreover, common market and established institutions, common policies and machinery for cooperation are as well considered an essential part of the European Identity[vii]. The multicultural aspect of the community is also considered in a way that the broad framework of European civilization gives the possibility for diversity of cultures which in its turn gives the European Identity its originality and its own dynamism[viii].

In this context it might be useful to recall another example of a collective identity formation, though in completely different institutional design and political system – example of a supranational entity based on non-democratic political regimes, the USSR. This example might be taken as an antipode to the EU as it was also a collective political project born the XX century. Running ahead, as still there is a lot to mention about EU identity formation, an insight into some of the identity formation mechanisms shows that they were the same (e.g. introduction of union citizenship, opening of member states' borders, labor migration, educational projects on supranational level, use of supranational mass-media, etc.), however the most important differences (besides the regime itself which was the defining reason) turned out to be linguistic politics, role of national level authorities and development of cultural space. The USSR demonstrated the unconditional unification and centralization in every sphere of live, while the EU gives an example of multiculturalism and autonomous development of different member states.

Coming back to the issue of European identity, apart from the symbolic policy and establishment of the EU citizenship, as well as the declaration on the European Identity stressing the cultural diversity and common liberal democratic values, one of the most efficient tools of identity formation is the educational projects of the EU and the educational system in general. As long as there was a free of movement declared, not only tourists and workers got benefits from it but also students whose mobility in the world is really high, especially within European countries. The fundamental reform of the educational system known as Bologna Process launched by the European Higher Education Area increased the movement of students as it made academic degree standards more widespread and compatible throughout Europe (though it is important to consider that the area does not include only member states but is much more diverse). Bologna Process worked out a three-step educational system which includes bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees and the system of credits which allows the enrolment in other universities without significant problems and extra reappraisal of grades.

Another good educational initiative was launched by European Commission. In fact this program takes its roots in 1987 when 3244 students were enrolled into Erasmus exchange program. Nowadays there are more than 200 thousand students who spend at least one semester in some European country[ix]. Moreover some universities not only propose students to go for an exchange program but oblige them to do it. Erasmus program implies the idea of new educational experience, also promotes multicultural communication and formation of European identity among young generation. Needless to say, the program also encourages students to travel around and then to look for a job abroad as the fears of leaving their own country and home are gradually passing away after such experience of living and studying abroad.

One of the instruments which makes the exchange program efficient is the possibility to learn a foreign language. European universities always offer courses in English as well as in native language of the university's country. Learning a foreign language abroad seems a nice chance to get a well-paid job later somewhere in Europe, especially if considering EU institutions which demand knowledge of at least three languages. Nevertheless, all the documents of the EU may be found also in all the official languages of member states as no language is claimed to be a chief one.

Some changes in education took place also in the school concept of education. Mainly it is connected with teaching of history. The history of Europe is taught now not only from the national point of view considering nation states as autonomous actors but more from the integration perspective and the role of states in this process.

Coming back again to European citizenship and the declaration of freedom of movement, we can also pay attention to the issue of labor migration. From one side it might look as a tool to promote the ideas of European identity like it works with students movements. However if we look at the research made by A. Favell and his paper on Eurostars and Eurocities[x] we find out that opening borders and labor markets in Europe not necessarily leads to supranational identity formation.

A. Favell defines three main groups of labor migrants (travelers like students, consumers or tourists are not included). First group he is referring to is the group of ethnic migrants from Asia and Africa whose ethnic identity is so strong that not only they do not accept the supranational identity of the EU but neither the local identity of the state they are staying in. The second group, so called *Eurostars* from Western Europe (mainly businessmen and politicians who got this name due to the fact they travel a lot between Paris and London on the *Eurostar* train functioning in the framework of high speed train system financed by the EU) are quite open to the European identity concept. The third group, which includes the regions of Central and Eastern Europe, is considered as a group with transnational identity where European identity is associated only with a right to work in Western Europe. So in this way migration is not a definite factor of European identity development.

In the sphere of culture there are also some attempts done to create a supranational identity. For instance in 2007 there was a program "Europe for Citizens" (2007-2013) launched by European Commission. The general aims of it were the folowing:

- giving citizens the opportunity to interact and participate in constructing an ever closer Europe, which is

democratic and world-oriented, united in and enriched through its cultural diversity, thus developing citizenship of the European Union;
- developing a sense of European identity, based on common values, history and culture;
- fostering a sense of ownership of the European Union among its citizens;
- enhancing tolerance and mutual understanding between European citizens respecting
and promoting cultural and linguistic diversity, while contributing to intercultural dialogue.[xi]

The general idea is to encourage civil society sector to apply for funding and organize projects which promote the European identity and its values. However the program is not so widespread that it could influence significantly the state of identity in the EU.

One of the most efficient tools (at least in non-democratic systems) for spreading the ideas and forming a public opinion is mass media. However in the framework of the EU it is almost impossible to make some supranational level media popular. Press has a strong national affiliation and only some sections may be devoted to international affairs or European issues. In this way when the number of articles about the EU increases, paper may disseminate the ideas about supranational identity[xii]. If we look at the example of TV, a special European channel *Euronews* making reports about the EU (e.g. program "Europeans" is about social problems of European citizens, "Parlamento" is about work of European Parliament, etc.) has an audience which is much less than BBC News or CNN International have[xiii]. Maybe nowadays the New Media like social networks or blogs can play a more substantial role in the process of forming European identity. At least it might work out with young generations who have lived almost all their lives in the EU and are more opened for mobility and cosmopolitan views.

Conclusion

Having done a quick overview of some identity formation instruments, still if looking at *Eurobarometer* surveys[xiv] or even asking people around while travelling not that many Europeans consider themselves Europeans in fact. Some may specify that they are Europeans in the general cultural sense, others would say that they are Europeans at some small part. The EU citizenship does not oblige anyone to decline the national citizenship so even Europessimists and those who are highly skeptical about the EU project anyway benefit from travelling around without the restrictions. The future of European identity is tightly connected with the development of the EU institutions. The cases of the EU Constitution and later ratification of Lisbon Treaty show that citizens of the EU are not in favor of the idea that supranational institutions should gain more and more power. In this way the identity may remain as it is like now – slightly transnational, but mainly still strong in its national origins. In case of increasing Eurozone crisis there are might be some new institutions emerging and the EU might try to concentrate more power in its hands and thus promote an identity policy with some new tools, not forgetting about the old ones. The third scenario might represent the absence of any collective European identity in case the European project has serious problems in economics and then political sphere and its future as a political entity will be in danger. Needless to say that it will be too late to create a common identity if the framework itself will not be functioning.

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