

Is there a European Identity? National Attitudes and Social Identification toward the European Union

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Abstract. This paper shows that the variety of national attitudes toward the EU could account for the continuous difficulties in fostering integration. European citizens have competing normative views and do not agree on the nature, the purpose and the priorities of the EU project. Not only do they differ in their attitudes toward enlargement and the opportunity to foster a political union, but the reasons of their divergence are also distinct. While national belonging does matter at the aggregated micro-level, there are also strong attitudinal differences linked with sociological variables within each country. Yet, in identity terms, processes of social identifications remain closely linked with the national level. The EU integration is a process of “*distanciation*” which transfers individuals’ traditional unity of survival from the national to the supranational level. While people keep their affective identifications at the national level, political power is increasingly exercised at the EU level. In turn, it causes a “retarding effect” and could explain a great deal of the social resistances to EU integration.

Keywords: *Public Attitudes, EU support, European Identity*

1. Introduction

The sense of belonging to a given social community and to pertinent political structures can define citizens’ political identity. The emergence of a particular political identity can be considered as the principal source of legitimacy to the self-organization of a given community. Without identity, a robust legitimacy cannot be attached to a specific political entity. Conventionally, political science has primarily focused on measuring citizens’ degree of support for European integration, more than on explaining the reasons of emergence or non-emergence

of a sense of European identity.⁴ Such an identity could be approached in two different ways. It can be considered from a “top-down” standpoint, through the definition of the subjective limits of the European community. This perspective tries to define who can be considered as European? What can define the European culture and what are the boundaries of its political community? Yet, the European identity can also be apprehended from a “bottom-up” outlook, by asking who feel European and who does not? Hence, this paper aims to contribute to the understanding of the process of European identity formation using systematic comparisons of national attitudes toward the EU. While many social scientists have taken for granted the existence of a European identity, studying it as an *object* more than as a *process*, we try to use a somewhat different perspective, asking why, until now, it is empirically doubtful to say that a European identity does exist? To some extent, it is true that citizens do identify themselves with the EU. Yet, in the short term, national identities are highly predominant and will remain so for a long time. Thus, rather than trying to grasp *what* does not yet exists, it seems scientifically more appropriate to focus on *why* a European sense of identity is so weak.

The Existence of Multiple Normative Views on the European Union

To begin with, it seems meaningful to delineate what kind of project do citizens associate with the EU. While the views of political leaders on the aim of the integration project are regularly acknowledged, few works emphasize that the variety of perceptions which national citizens attach to the EU could account for the great difficulties in fostering integration.⁵ It is generally believed that the EU integration will lead to a long-term convergence of national attitudes.

⁴ See for instance Gabel, M. & Whitten, G. D. (1997), “Economic Conditions, Economic Perceptions and Public Support for European Integration”, *Political Behavior*, 19(1), pp. 81-96; Gabel, M. (1998), Public Support for European Integration: An Empirical Test of Five Theories”, *The Journal of Politics*, 60(2), pp. 333-54; Anderson, C. J. (1998), “When in doubt use proxies. Attitudes toward domestic politics and support for European Integration”, *Comparative Political Studies*, 31(5), pp. 569-601.

⁵ On that point, see for instance the work of Eichenberg and Dalton which argue that “national traditions” can explain a great deal of citizens’ attitudes toward the EU: Eichenberg, C. G. & Dalton, R. J. (1993), “Europeans and the European Community: The Dynamics of Public Support for European Integration”, *International Organization*, 47(2), pp. 507-34. On the growing literature on the sociology of European integration, see Deflem, M. & Pampel, F. C. (1996), “The Myth of Postnational Identity: Popular Support for European Identification”, *Social Forces*, 75(1), pp. 119-43; Menéndez-Alarcón, A. V. (1995), “National Identities Confronting European Integration”, *International Journal of Politics, Culture & Society*, 8(3), pp. 543-62; Menéndez-Alarcón, A. V. (2002), *The Cultural*

Different countries will gradually become more similar in terms of prosperity and social attitudes. Nevertheless, it seems that national attitudes toward the EU are compound, and they are likely to continuously diverge in the forthcoming future. European citizens do not agree on the purpose of the EU project and on what it should entail for the future. For testing these strong national differences over the meaning of European integration, we compare citizens' attitudes on the two dimensions of (1) *enlargement* and (2) *political union*.

These two features are considered as indicators of the support toward the *widening* and the *deepening* of the EU, which are two main contentious issues of the EU project. For decades now, the European community has witnessed over lasting dissensions between people preferring intergovernmental options, and others privileging federal evolutions.⁶

In autumn 2006, 58% of the Europeans were in favor of a European political union. While 52% of the citizens of the "old Europe" support this idea, the proportion attains 64% in the "new Europe".⁷ While 77% of the population in Slovakia and Slovenia support the promotion of a political union, the proportions are slightly lower in the Netherlands (50%), in France and in Luxembourg (49%). The support is even lower in countries which are traditionally reluctant to EU integration: 42% in Sweden and Denmark, 40% in Austria, 36% in Finland and 31% in the UK. These findings tend to suggest that there is indeed an important attitudinal divide between the "two Europe". While people in the old EU member states are becoming more skeptical, central and Eastern European citizens are much more enthusiastic. While the former fear that the original political project will become less and less feasible, the latter only begin to enjoy the benefits of membership after the imposition of EU conditionality.

Moreover, only 46% of EU citizens agree that the process of enlargement should continue while 42% are opposed and 12% do not know.⁸ Those results can be partly

Realm of European Integration. Social Representations in France, Spain and the United Kingdom, Westport: Praeger, pp. 543-62.

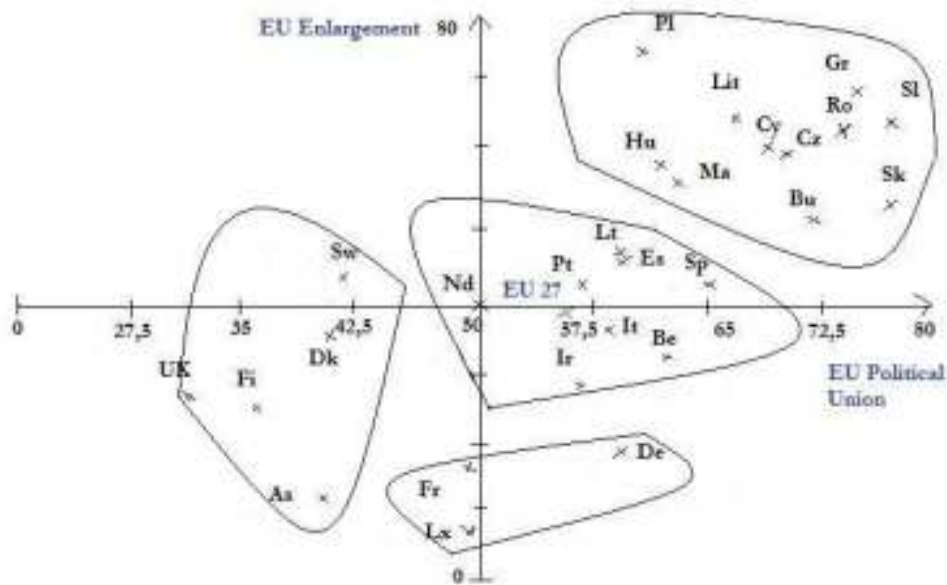
⁶ For the main works on the intergovernmental theory, Cf. Moravcsik, A. (1993), "Preferences and Power in the European Community: A Liberal Intergovernmentalist Approach", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 31(2), pp. 473-524; Moravcsik, A. (1998), *The Choice for Europe. Social Purpose and State from Messina to Maastricht*, New York: Cornell University Press.

⁷ Eurobarometer 66.1, QA11: "Are you, yourself, for or against the development towards a European political union?" – For.

⁸ Eurobarometer 66.1., QA 25.4: "What is your opinion on each of the following statements? Please tell me for each statement, whether you are for it or against it" – Further enlargement of the EU to include other countries in future years – For.

biased and could reflect the divide between Western and Eastern Europe. Considering that old member states are more numerous than the new members, the average attitude of European citizens on the enlargement could over-represent the attitude of Western Europeans. Indeed, while in Poland, the support for EU enlargement reaches 76%, 74% in Slovenia and 68% in Romania, favorable opinions are much more moderate in countries like Italy (47%) or Belgium (46%). Old member states are also the more reluctant to EU enlargement which is only supported by 34% of French citizens, 32% in Luxembourg and 30% in Germany. The figure 1 below presents the findings of a comparison between national attitudes toward the *EU political union* and the *EU enlargement*. It clearly appears that there are various normative views associated with the EU project. The countries which became members in 2004 and 2007 are the most supportive of both the enlargement and the construction of a political union. The first circle is composed of eight of the ten countries which entered the EU in 2004 (Poland, Lithuania, Slovenia, Hungary, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Malta) and the last two members (Bulgaria and Romania). Greek citizens are the only relatively old members which are both in favor of the enlargement (71%) and supportive of the achievement of a political union (73%).

Figure 1. National Attitudes towards Enlargement and Political Union - EU 27 (%)



Personal elaboration from (1) Eurobarometer 67.1, QA 27.4: "What is your opinion on each of the following statements? Please tell me for each statement, whether you are for it or against it", positive answer, for EU enlargement in future years; (2) Eurobarometer 66, QA11: "Are you, yourself for or against the development towards a European Political Union?", positive answer, for EU political union.

The second circle is composed of more moderate countries which are generally in favor of a political union but remain much more divided on the perspective of the enlargement. It includes the recent members of Latvia and Estonia, but in general, all the other countries are from Western Europe (Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Ireland, Italy and Belgium). France, Luxembourg and Germany, all founding fathers of the EU, seem to share a specific position primarily characterised by their strong reluctance toward the enlargement which is supported by less than 35% of their respective populations. Finally, the promotion of a political union is favored by a minority of citizens in the Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Denmark and Finland), in the UK and in Austria. A short majority of Swedish citizens are in favor of EU enlargement (53%), but all the others are quite opposed to this perspective (48% in Denmark, 43% in Finland) or strongly reluctant (36% in the UK and 30% in Austria).

Consequently, it is clear that citizens in the EU 27 are more than ever divided on the future of the EU integration project. There are still strong national and even “regional” divisions between the west, the east and the northern part of the EU. Not only do citizens differ in their general attitudes toward enlargement and the opportunity to foster a political union, but the reasons of their divergences are also distinct.⁹ Scandinavian citizens tend to resist European integration because they perceive that their national institutions would provide higher social standards and more inclusive and participatory political systems than the EU could do.¹⁰ Differently, the new central and Eastern European members are generally associating the EU project with peace and socioeconomic prosperity. EU membership is an indirect way for going beyond a shameful past of Communist occupation and for becoming “mainstream Europeans”.¹¹ In contrast, Western

⁹ A similar argument is made by Breakwell which states that “the EU has poor definition as a superordinate category and that, without an agreed-on “portrait” for this identity element derived from EU categorisation, there will be great diversity in the ways it is characterised by different people in different countries”. Cf. Breakwell, G. M. (2004), “Identity Change in the Context of the Growing Influence of European Union Institutions”, in Herrmann, R. K., Risse, T. & Brewer, M. B. (eds.), *Transnational Identities. Becoming European in the EU*, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 8.

¹⁰ On the differences in terms of redistributive policies and welfare states between Western Europe and Scandinavian political systems, see the insightful book by Esping-Andersen, G. (1990), *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

¹¹ The expression has been used to describe the paths followed by Portugal and Spain in their accession to the EU. See Royo, S. & Manuel, C. (2003), “Some lessons from the Fifteenth Anniversary of the Accession of Portugal and Spain to the European Union”, in Royo, S. & Manuel, C. (eds.), *Spain and Portugal in the European Union. The First Fifteen Years*, London, Franck Cass, p. 19.

Europeans tend to fear a dilution of the original EU project. The moderation of pro-European attitudes in recent years seems to be a side effect of the consecutive enlargements and the consequent losses of powers for themselves. Thus, the difficulties to foster EU integration could thus be explained by the fact that there is no such thing as *an EU integration project*, but in fact, there are *several competing EU integration projects*.

2. A Persistent Social Divide in the Support for EU Integration

When social scientists deal with the support for EU integration, they generally focus exclusively on national attitudes. Even though the national variable appears highly relevant, it would nevertheless be scientifically insufficient to limit our analysis to national determinants. Hence, if one has to consider the support toward European integration, a pertinent model has to follow a two-level explanation. In other words, while at the aggregated micro level, citizens differ in their attitudes toward the EU in function of their national belonging, there are also strong differences between citizens within each country, depending on their level of education, social status or degree of ethnocentrism. A theory explaining the support toward EU integration has to be a social theory because in a given country, the attitudes of citizens from lower social classes can be closer with that of citizens of the same social status in another country than with their fellow nationals from upper classes. To assess more comprehensively this sociological divide, three countries rather different in terms of national attitudes toward the EU have been selected (Great-Britain, France and Belgium). National attitudes have been decomposed in function of several socio-economic variables. The results of this analysis are presented below (Figure 2).

In coherence with our first demonstration, it can be said that for all the independent variables considered, the British have always a less positive perception of the EU, the French have a moderately positive image and the Belgians share a very good image of the EU. The figure 2 shows that for all the independent variables, there is a double effect of the national context and of the considered variable in itself. The factor of cognitive mobilization seems to play an important role in the differentiation of attitudes.¹² Indeed, for the three countries

¹² Ronald Inglehart has argued that the shift from industrial to postindustrial societies would lead individuals to experience higher degrees of social mobility while the general level of life and education would tend to increase. On the political plan, this social change would have

Figure 2. Positive Perception of the EU in Great-Britain, France and Belgium (%)

	Great-Britain	France	Belgium
Country	50	66	76
Level of Education			
Less than 20 years	42	55	68
More than 20 years	73 +31	80 +25	84 +16
Age			
15-39	64	71	85
more than 40	43 -21	63 -8	72 -13
Social Class			
Upper Class	59	68	80
Middle Class	48	68	75
Working Class	46 -13	61 -7	73 -7
Ideological Position			
Left	68	68	85
Centre	45	68	79
Right	36 -32	69 1	77 -8
Knowledge of the EU			
Good	58	80	89
Bad	47 -11	62 -18	70 -19
Place of Residence			
Countryside	39	58	79
Big Town	55 +16	78 +20	84 +17
Subjective Religion			
Christian	45	65	75
Atheist/non believer	63 +18	69 +4	76 +1
Costs and Benefits			
Fear	33	57	69
No fear	75 +42	93 +36	94 +25
Cultural Threat			
Fear	31	44	57
No Fear	79 +48	81 +37	83 +26

Indicator constructed by merging together two variables of the Eurobarometer 63.4: (1) "Can you tell me what image do you have of the EU?" and (2) "In general, do you think your country has benefited from EU membership?"

considered, the positive perception of the EU increases with a higher level of education, a higher knowledge of the EU and it tends to decline with the augmentation of the age. While a positive perception of the EU is shared by 42% of British citizens which have studied less than 20 years, 55% of French and 68% of Belgians, the proportions rise for attaining respectively 73%, 80% and 83% for those which have accomplished more than 20 years of study. In the same way, 64% of the 15-39 years-old in Great-Britain, 71% in France and 85% in Belgium

two major consequences: on the one hand, it would foster citizens' average levels of political competence or "cognitive mobilization", and in the other hand, the progression of "post-materialist" values would influence an evolution of societal priorities, from "materialist" values like economic and physical security to "post-materialist" values like individual liberty, personal autonomy and political participation. Cf. Boy, D. & Mayer, N. (1997), "Les Formes de la Participation", in Boy, D. & Mayer, N. (1997), *L'Electeur a ses Raisons*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, pp. 55. See also, Inglehart, R. (1990), *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*, Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press.

have positive perceptions of the EU, while the proportions only reach 43%, 63% and 72% for those who have more than 40 years-old.

Furthermore, in the three countries considered, the social status seems to determine the perceptions of the EU. Citizens from upper classes are always more positive than those of the middle and working classes. The differentiation between social classes seems relatively more moderate as expected in France (from 61% to 68%) and in Belgium (from 73% to 80%), even though it is more clear-cut in Great-Britain (from 46% to 59%). Even if the effect is quite temperate, it follows the same trend as other existing studies.¹³ When we look at the ideological variable, apart from the French case, it seems that EU support is higher on the left than on the right of the political spectrum. The effect is quite clear in Great-Britain. While 68% of left voters have a good image of the EU, they are only 36% on the right side of the political spectrum. In general, it has been considered that left voters are more in favor of European integration than right sympathisers, and that people from the “classic right” are less homogeneous on the support for the EU than people on the left.¹⁴ However, further empirical research is needed in order to define whether this tendency might apply to all the EU 27. What has been demonstrated in the literature is that people who support political parties situated in the center of the political spectrum have a higher probability to be positive about the EU than people who support peripheral parties. Hence, for Hooghe and Marks, there is a general “inverted U curve” which can be drawn on the support for EU integration.¹⁵

¹³ Certainly, the moderate differentiation results from the difficulty to regroup the original eighteen social classes given by the Eurobarometer survey into three different social classes without losing the substance of the analysis. For the evolution of the social class as an explanatory variable, consult Boy, D. & Mayer, N. (1997), “Que reste-t-il des variables lourdes?”, in Boy, D. & Mayer, N. (ed.), *L'Electeur a ses Raisons*, Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, pp. 101-38. See also Vilchez-Silva, B. (2006), “Les classes populaires et l’Union Européenne”, in Reynié, D. (ed.), *L’Opinion Européenne en 2006*, Paris: Editions de la Table Ronde, pp. 68.

¹⁴ Belot, C. & Cautrès, B. (2004), “L’Europe, Invisible mais Omniprésente”, in Cautrès, B. & Mayer, N. (ed.), *Le Nouveau Désordre Electoral. Les Leçons de 21 Avril 2002*, Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, pp. 131.

¹⁵ Hooghe, L., Marks, G. & Wilson, C. J. (2004), “Does left/right structure party positions on European integration?”, in Marks, G. & Steenbergen, M. R. (ed.), *European Integration and Political Conflict*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 235-60.

Various other effects can be observed by looking at other independent variables. To live in a big town rather than in the countryside systematically favor more positive images. On that point, the proportions are situated between 58% and 78% in France, 79% and 84% in Belgium and between 39% and 55% in Great-Britain. In addition, people who fear that the EU project will engender high individual costs for them, or who think that the process of integration represents a cultural threat have always a less positive image of the EU. The differences of attitudes can even bypass 45%. Indeed, it seems that the “subjective vulnerability”, that is to say, the fear of a degradation of life conditions can be understood in parallel with the “objective vulnerability” to pertain to lower social classes.¹⁶ The inequalities of cultural and political competences seem themselves linked with inequalities in the socioeconomic order as the social position or the belonging to the working class.¹⁷

In the end, if we consider the overall independent variables, it is possible to differentiate two types of sub-populations for the three countries considered. On the one hand, the young individuals, with a higher level of education, a good knowledge of the EU and which identify with the left tend to have a good image of the EU. This type of individuals which are usually in favor of the EU are also generally from urban background, open to other cultures and in a favorable socioeconomic situation which led them not to fear a loss of benefits which would result from EU integration. On the other hand, old people, with a low level of education, which tend to identify with the right side of the political spectrum and which have a bad knowledge of the EU have a higher probability to share a negative image of the EU. To live in the countryside, to declare oneself Christian, to fear a loss of national identity or a loss of socioeconomic benefits resulting from EU integration also reinforce the probability to have a negative image of the EU. In the end, the conjunction of the factors of cultural and political competence, social position, partisan preference and degree of ethnocentrism seems to distinguish two-subtypes of populations with diverging attitudes toward the EU within all the countries considered. Alongside national determinants, socio-economic factors play a great role in the differentiation of individual attitudes.

¹⁶ Cf. Gabel, M. J. (1998), *Interests and Integration: Market Liberalization, Public Opinion and European Union*, Ann Arbor, Michigan University Press, pp. 26.

¹⁷ Belot, C. & Cautrès, B. (2004), *op. cit.*, pp. 129.

3. The Illusion of an Effect of Socialization

Since the early beginnings, European policy-makers have argued that EU popular legitimacy would be derived from its capacity to promote future-oriented policies and to solve complex problems at the EU level. The EU system of governance has been presented as a new type of political system which includes features of intergovernmental cooperation and supranational decision-making. Given its “specific” characteristics, many social science theorists have defended that it is useless to compare the EU with other political systems as it is not an international organization, nor is it a state. This tendency to consider the EU apart from theoretical reflections has two major consequences.

First, in terms of popular legitimacy, many have argued that the traditional “bottom-up” popular legitimacy which prevails within nation-states cannot be applied to the EU. At the national level, there is a *government* “of the people, by the people and for the people”. The foundations of national institutions and the legitimacy of political actors are dependent on popular support. If people have to elect representatives, it is only because they cannot exercised directly and constantly their shared sovereignty. Thus, they delegate their powers to elected political representatives which are given a defined mandate for taking decisions. Hence, national democracies are “*input democracies*” in the sense that political decisions cannot be exercised without people’s prior support.

In contrast, many have argued that this type of legitimacy is inapplicable at the EU level. The specific requirements of European policy-making, complex problem-solving mechanisms and negotiations between member states would not permit European MPs or Commissioners to be as accountable as their national counterparts. In fact, even though a given member of the European Parliament could have some commitment with his electorate, the pressures for consensus and the necessary negotiations with other “Euro-parties” would lead the final political outcome to be far from different from the original project. Consequently, European political actors have promoted the idea that the EU is an “*output-oriented democracy*”.¹⁸

Its legitimacy would not have to be assessed in reference with its popular assets, but with its effectiveness in terms of political outcomes.

Secondly, in terms of popular identity, many politicians have believed that if the EU would be judged in relation with its political outcomes, in the long term, its

¹⁸ Schmidt, V. (2005), “Democracy in Europe: The Impact of European Integration”, *Perspectives on Politics*, 3(4), pp. 768-71.

positive actions would necessarily lead to the development of a European sense of identity among EU citizens. While in the short term national identities will remain dominant, it is believed that the concrete benefits enjoyed by EU citizens in terms of peace, security and prosperity would gradually lead them to develop positive views on their European identity. Nevertheless, it is far from clear that it is actually the case. Not only do national identities remain the first objects of popular identification, but it does not seem that an effect of socialisation exists.¹⁹ The following argumentation will address these two aspects in more details.

The social scientists which have defended the existence of a “socialisation effect”, stating that more and more people would “feel” European over time, tend to over-emphasise the agency of European institutions in the process of identity formation.²⁰ In other words, the process of European identity formation is generally considered from a “top-down” perspective. European elites would foster European integration, and in response to it, ordinary citizens would gradually identify themselves with the EU. For instance, Michael Bruter defends that supranational institution building has a strong influence on the development of a sense of European identity for individual citizens. He argues that the continuous exposition to EU symbols and the continual institutionalisation of the EU system of governance would stimulate the process of European identity formation.²¹ He believes that “the emergence of a European identity in a given country is closely linked with the date of EU membership”, an implicit way of saying that national identification with the EU would necessarily progress over time.²²

Nowadays, it is true that a huge majority of European citizens know the emblematic symbol of the European flag. 95% of European citizens in the EU 27 declare that they have already seen it.²³ Moreover, 78% of them declare that the EU flag “stands for something good”, which would seem to show that not only do they know

¹⁹ As Soledad Garcia puts it, “A European identity cannot in any case be constructed exclusively from above. Europe will exist as an unquestionable political community only when European identity permeates people’s lives and daily existence”. Cf. Garcia, S. (1993), “Europe’s fragmented Identities and the frontiers of citizenship”, in Garcia, S. (ed.), *European Identity and the search for legitimacy*, London & New York: Pinter Publishers, pp. 15.

²⁰ For an example of such argument, Cf. Laffan, B. (2004), “The European Union and its Institutions as “Identity Builders”, in Herrmann, R. K., Risse, T. & Brewer, M. B. (eds.), *Transnational Identities. Becoming European in the EU*, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 75-97.

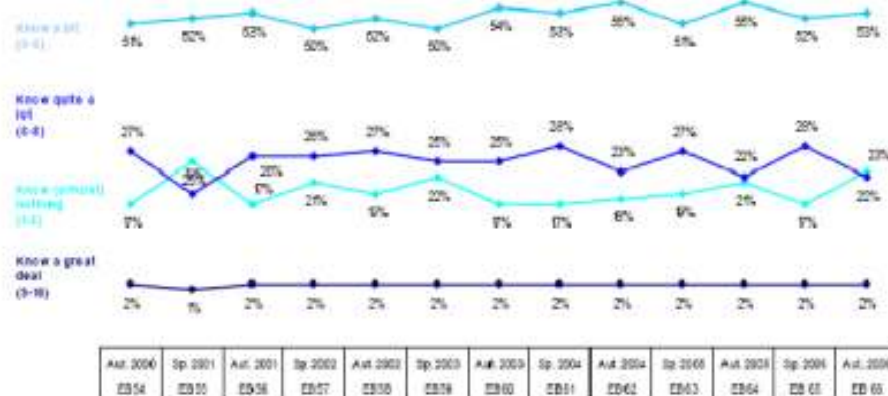
²¹ Bruter, M. (2005), *Citizens of Europe?*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 30-36.

²² Bruter, M. (2005), *Ibid.*, pp. 38.

²³ Eurobarometer 67, QA 42: “Have you ever seen this symbol?” - *The European flag*.

this symbol, but they also attach a positive judgment to it.²⁴ Though, refuting Michael Bruter's approach, we defend that it is not because people value European symbols that they would ultimately develop a sense of European identity. The question of European identity is primarily linked with how people *feel* attached to the EU, and not only with how they *perceive* it. Moreover, even if one looks at how people perceive the EU, it is far from clear that a "top-down" socialisation effect exists. The deepening of the EU integration does not seem to be correlated with a greater popular consciousness of the EU. Since the 1980s, the proportion of EU citizens which are aware of how the EU works has not really progressed. For instance, in autumn 2006, only a minority of EU citizens (43%) affirmed that they understood "how the EU works".²⁵ The figure 3 below shows that between 2000 and 2005 there is only 2% of EU citizens who constantly assert that they "know a great deal" about the EU, its institutions, its policies. 22% defend that they "know quite a lot" and 23% declare that they "know almost nothing" while 53% state that they "know a bit". If a "top-down" process of identity formation from elites to ordinary citizens would exist, it seems that it has not been really effective up to now. The large majority of EU citizens still ignore the way the EU works.

Figure 3. "How much do you know about the European Union, its institutions, its policies?"



Source Eurobarometer 66.1. QA14: "Using this scale, how much do you feel you know about the European Union, its policies, its institutions?", p. 147.

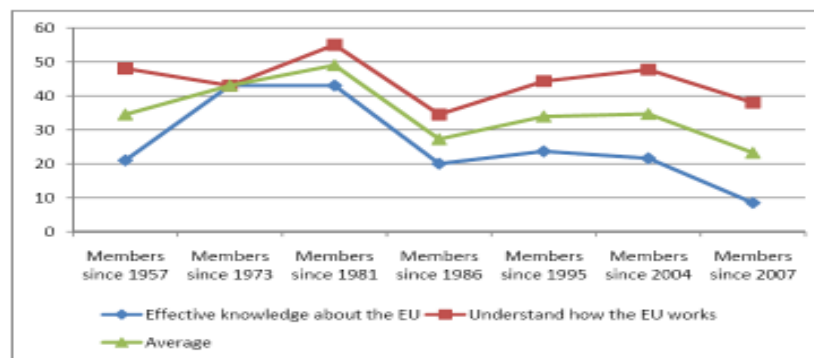
²⁴ Eurobarometer 67, QA 43.2: "This symbol is the European flag. I have a list of statements concerning it. I would like to have your opinion on each of these. For each of them, could you please tell me if you tend to agree or tend to disagree" - This flag stand for something good.

²⁵ Eurobarometer 66, QA 12.2: "Please tell me for each statement, whether you tend to agree or tend to disagree" - I understand how the EU works - Tend to agree.

In addition, it seems worthless to compare this first indicator with a second one which deals with the effective knowledge of the EU. This second indicator is composed of three correct answers to three statements related to EU institutions.²⁶ The figure 4 presents a comparison of these two indicators. European countries have been grouped together depending on the date of their EU admission. Seven different groups of countries have been delineated: (1) the six founding members (Germany, France, Italy, The Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg), (2) UK, Denmark and Ireland which became members in 1973, (3) Greece in 1981, (4) Spain and Portugal in 1986, (5) Sweden, Austria and Portugal in 1995, (6) Poland, Cyprus, Slovenia, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Hungary, Slovakia, Malta and the Czech Republic in 2004, and finally, (7) Romania and Bulgaria in 2007. If an effect of socialization would exist, we should find that citizens' knowledge of the EU progresses over time. It should be observed that citizens in old EU member states would know better the EU, its institutions and its policies than citizens in new member states.

Nonetheless, the figure shows that in practice, things seem more complicated. If one exclusively compares the attitudes of the countries which have joined the EU in 1995 with those who did it in 2005, the figure tends to suggest the existence of an effect of socialisation. There is a gradual decrease of the effective knowledge of the EU: while 23.66 % of Swedish, Austrian and Finnish people are considered to have an effective knowledge of the EU, the proportions decrease to 21.6 % for eastern European citizens and to 8.5% in Romania and Bulgaria.

Figure 4. Citizens Knowledge of the EU in Function of the Date of Membership - EU 27 (%)



Personal elaboration from Eurobarometer 66.1, QA14 & QA 20.

²⁶ Eurobarometer 66.1, QA 20: "For each of the following statements about the EU could you please tell me whether you think it is true or false?" (1) The EU currently consists of 15 Member states (false); (2) Members of the EU Parliament are elected directly by EU citizens (true); (3) Every six months a different Member State takes the EU Presidency (true). Those people who give three correct answers are considered to have an effective knowledge of the EU.

Yet, the figure highlights that it is far from being a clear cut dynamic. Indeed, Spain and Portugal are members of the EU since 1986 but only 20% of their respective citizens have a good knowledge of the EU, a similar proportion with that of countries which are only members since 2004. On the understanding of the EU, those southern European countries even show lower percentages than the new 1995, 2004 and 2007 members. The same pattern seems to be true for the founding fathers of the EU: 47.7% of their citizens declare to understand how the EU works while only 21.6% could be considered to have an effective knowledge of the EU. These proportions are quite similar with those countries which became EU members in 1995 and in 2004. The fact that France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg have been EU members for fifteen years does not seem to make the difference. Of course, only a broad longitudinal approach could sustain robust results. Yet, our analysis seems to show that it is difficult to defend empirically that an effect of socialisation does exist.

4. Preexisting National Identities and European Identity Formation

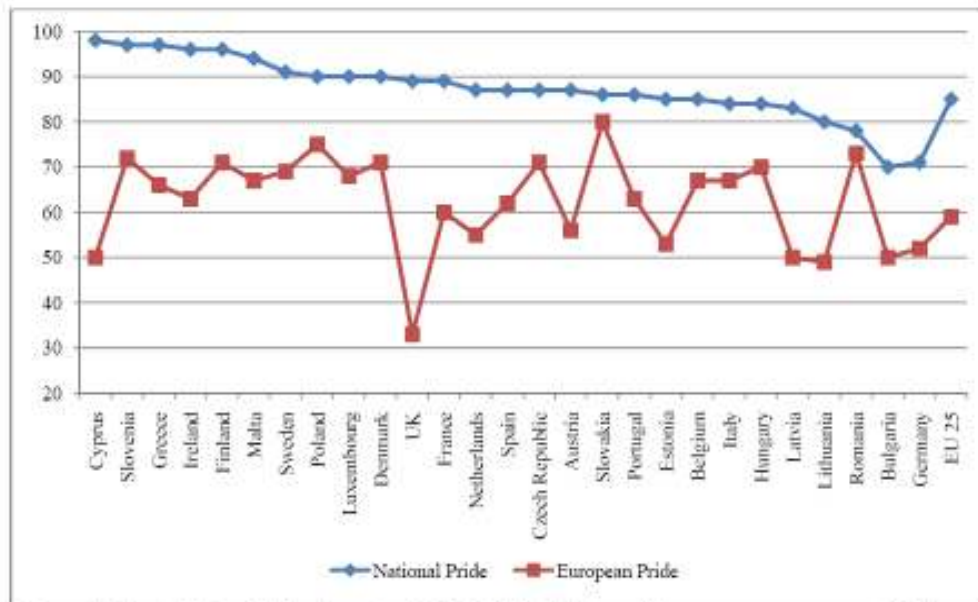
If there is no effect of socialisation as it has often been argued, then, how could a European identity emerge? It seems misleading to conceive the European identity as something out there which could be observed and objectified. Rather, there is a crucial need to focus on the *process* of European identity formation and on its main determinants. A European identity will necessarily have to be based on preexisting national identities. Indeed, many social scientists have showed that it is worthless to speak of exclusive identities. In a global world in which processes of social integration at a higher level are widespread, identities are becoming more multiple.²⁷ Contrary to what postmodern or cosmopolitan theorists would say, it seems rather improbable that people would dismiss their national identities to identify with the EU from one day to another. Thus, the development of a European identity could only be possible through a reconstruction, an enrichment of national identities by including a European component.

The figure 5 below presents a comparison between national and European prides. It shows that national pride is always higher than European pride in all countries considered. While the sense of national pride vary from 98% in Cyprus and 70% in Germany, the sense of European pride vary from 80% in Slovakia to 33%

²⁷ Herrman, R. & Brewer, M. B. (2004), "Identities and Institutions: Becoming European in the EU", in Herrmann, R. K., Risse, T. & Brewer, M. B. (eds.), *Transnational Identities. Becoming European in the EU*, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 8.

in the UK. On average, in the EU 27, the national pride attains 86% while the European pride only reaches 59%. In all the countries, a clear majority of citizens feel proud of their nationality. Yet, it does not seem to be the case for the attachment to Europe: 19% do not feel proud to be European and 17% do not feel European at all. As we have previously demonstrated, the probability to feel European and to be proud of it is always higher for people with a high social status, as well as good levels of education and degrees of knowledge of the EU.

Figure 5. Comparison between National and European Prides - EU 27 (%)



Personal elaboration from (1) Eurobarometer 66.1, QA 21: "And what would you say, you are very proud, fairly proud, not very proud, not at all proud to be (nationality)", answer proud (very proud and fairly proud); (2) Eurobarometer 66, QA 32: "And what would you say, you are very proud, fairly proud, not very proud, not at all proud to be European", answer proud (very proud and fairly proud).

The sense of European pride is also highly correlated with positive images of the EU and positive assessment of the benefits of EU membership. Among those who have a positive image of the EU, 79% feel proud to be European, while the proportion decreases to 51% for people with a neutral image. It only reaches 26% for people with a negative image. In the same way, for those who consider that their country has benefited from EU membership, 73% feel proud to be European while the percentage decreases to 40% when the benefits of membership are assessed to be negative. Consequently, it seems that even if a sense of attachment to Europe can theoretically progress in the forthcoming years, it would have to be built in complement and not

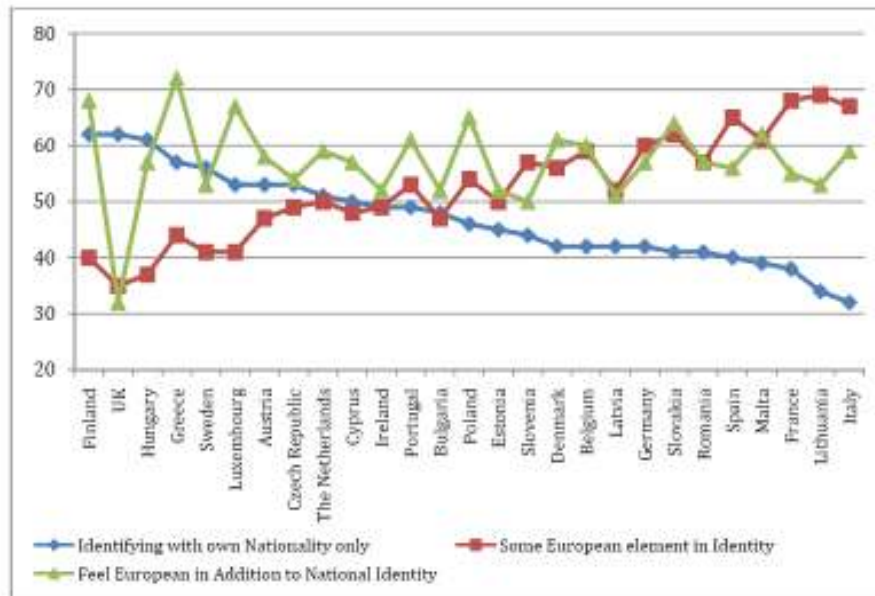
against preexisting national identities. Otherwise, the promotion of a European identity is doomed to failure.

The figure 6 below seems to reinforce our argumentation. Two different questions have been asked. The first one presents national and European identities as contradictory. People can exclusively choose to declare themselves as “national only” or with “some European element in identity”. The second question is not exclusive and asks if people feel European in addition with their national identity.

For the first question, when we compare the blue (nationality only) and the red lines (some European element in identity), it seems that national and European identities could be understood in terms of a zero-sum game. The comparison between the two lines tends to give the impression that there are countries with high levels of attachment to their own nationality and a very low sense of European identity (Finland, UK, Hungary, Greece...), while others have more mixed attitudes and a third group presents a high sense of European identity and a very low sense of national identity (Italy, Spain, Germany...).

However, those results seem to over-simplify the social reality. This possible misconception could indeed be an artifact of the question itself which presents European and national identities in an “either-or” option. In contrast, the second question (green line) asks people whether they “feel European in addition to national identity. A large majority of European citizens declare that they feel national *and* European as well. Apart for the specific case of the UK (only 32%), for all other EU countries, answers are always situated between 50% and 73%. 72% of the Greeks, 67% of people in Luxembourg and 65% in Poland feel both national and European. In general, 16% of the citizens of the EU27 declare that they often feel “European in addition to their national identity”, 38% that they sometimes do and 44% declare that it is never the case.

Figure 6. Patterns of Identification with National and European Identities (%)



This figure has been constructed with two different question. While the first one gave two exclusionary alternatives (1), the second one asked whether people feel European in addition to their national identity (2). (1) Eurobarometer 61, QA 38: 'In the near future, do you see yourself as...?' - Nationality only - or - some European element in identity. One answer only. (2) Eurobarometer 66.1: QA30. Do you think of yourself as only (NATIONALITY), but also European? Does this happen often, sometimes or never?

In fact, if one looks more closely, all the main sociological factors outlined above can be found again. 24% of those which are still studying declare that they “often” think of themselves as European in addition to their national identity, and 46% prefer to say that they only “sometimes” do. At the other extreme, the percentage of people who answer “often” decreases to 12%, and 32% for the “sometimes” option for those who did less than 15 years of studies. While 24% of the managers would “often” feel a sense of multiple identities, only 12% of manual workers would do so (47% and 34% respectively for the answer “sometimes”). Thus, a number of elements can be deduced from our analysis. First, until now, national identities are still the dominant and the overarching elements which give ground for the self-identification of individual EU citizens. Processes of social identifications remains closely linked with the national level. Even if a sense of European pride and of gradual attachment to the EU exists and could theoretically progress, it will have to deal with the resistance of national identities. Secondly, some utopists and elitists would believe that one day, people, might stop to think of themselves as national and directly identify with the European level. Yet, as a

specific European language, public sphere, proper history, culture and way of life have not been “imagined” for the moment, it seems intellectually misleading to think that with higher levels of education, people would progressively dismiss their national cultures. The tendency might even be the contrary.

A national identity is linked with a specific social *habitus* to which individuals have learned to adapt their own structure of personality. If one wants to understand the resistances toward the emergence of a European identity, it is worthless to remember the dual characteristic of a given identity: it has both an outward-looking part as it is inherently linked with the historical and social environment, but it has also an inward-looking stance, as it informs the background of an individual personal identity. National identity has to be differentiated from nationalism. While the former is an elusive link between people and nation, an object of social and personal identification, the latter characterizes the political project to defend and sponsor the interests of a given nation.²⁸ An identity has also a social function, as it enables the individual to imagine his self-embodiment within a given community. It partly explains why identities are constantly evolving, as a given social group can decide to “exit” or “voice” its specific national character within a predefined community.²⁹ National identity is conceived here not as an objective fixed entity but as the subjective representation of allegiance toward one’s country.³⁰ But for this process to succeed, it has to be sufficiently grounded on a distinctive feeling of belonging which remains very weak in the case of the EU. This is why it is essential to understand how members of developed nations consider their *de facto* belonging to a country, and how they juggle that identity with their multiple other allegiances. As Katharine Throssell puts it, identity is increasingly “*just a part of who we are*”, a hazard of chance that made us born like this, socialized like this, with no greater claim on the person than gender, politics or religion.³¹

In order to precise more concretely our perspective, it is worthless to conceptualise the EU project in the light of the theory of Norbert Elias. He has

²⁸ Anderson, B. (2002), *L’imaginaire national. Réflexions sur l’origine et l’essor du nationalisme*, Paris: La Découverte.

²⁹ The concepts of “exit” and “voice” come from the famous book written by Hirschman, A. O. (1970), *Exit, Voice and Loyalty. Responses to Decline in Firms, Organisations and States*, Harvard: Harvard University Press.

³⁰ Macdonald, S. (1993), “Identity Complexes in Western Europe”, in Macdonald, S. (ed.), *Inside European Identities: Ethnography in Western Europe*, London: Berg, pp. 1-26.

³¹ Throssell, K. (2007), “Learning to be French: A study of national identity and primary socialization”, paper presented to the *Annual Cronem Conference*, University of Surrey.

defended that we are witnessing a gradual process of social integration to superior levels and that this process entails progressive transfers of powers. Traditionally, individuals have subjectively defined their “unity of survival”, once the tribe, then the community and finally their state and nation. However, in progressively transferring their allegiances to upper levels, they have lost security and capacities of involvement in the short term.³² The most important point here is that for each gradual shift from one unity of survival to another situated at a higher level of integration, the original equilibrium between the individual and its society evolves.³³ While the previous form of social organization could foster a sense of security and of belonging for the individual, the new stage of integration does not in the short term. In that light, we can understand why the EU integration project so often tends to create important resistances: before being fully integrated in the new European society in the making, individuals have to lose the sense of security they have acquired at the national level, even though the EU is not yet able to replace the national level in terms of affective attachment. The main implication for the study of European identity is that as long as we will not invent new ways and materialise in practice a “sense of belonging” with Europe, individuals will have no incentive to identify themselves as Europeans. If we want a European identity to emerge progressively, then, the next generations will have to learn the European history, know better their fellow European and be socialised within a European environment.

For the majority of European citizens, the EU is nothing but an abstract concept. Many people do not feel that the EU system of governance is part of their daily life even though the arenas of interventions and political competences of the EU are constantly increasing. For people to feel European, EU institutions would have to become more meaningful and inclusive for ordinary EU citizens. People cannot sincerely participate in a system in which they do not feel to belong. Following a recent Eurobarometer survey, 59% of Europeans in the 27 member states think their voices do not count in the EU and 75% do not feel involved in the EU.³⁴ The figure 7 below highlights that apart from Luxembourg, Belgium, The

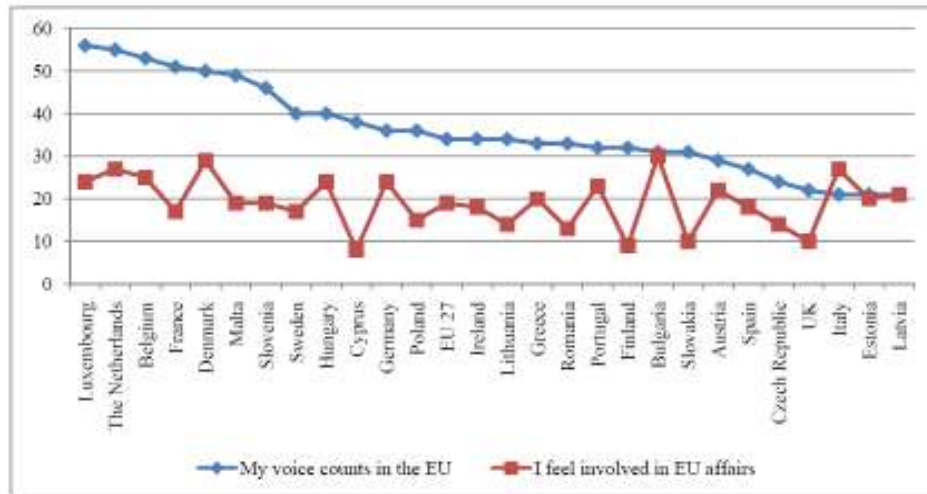
³² Elias, N. (1991), *La Société des Individus*, Paris, Fayard, pp. 219.

³³ Elias, N. (1991), *Ibid.*, pp. 219.

³⁴ Eurobarometer 66.1, QA12.1. *Please tell me for each statement, whether you tend to agree or tend to disagree? “My voice counts in the European Union”*. AS it could have been expected, people’s general attitude towards the European Union correlates with how they feel about whether their voice counts in the EU. People with positive views regarding the

Netherlands and France, citizens in all the others EU countries share the feeling that their actions are not decisive within the EU. The high costs of entry for understanding and apprehending how the EU actually works tend to limit the possible feeling of involvement within the system.

Figure 7. National Attitudes towards Involvement and Influence in EU affairs - EU 27 (%)



Eurobarometer 66.1: (1) QA12.1. Please tell me for each statement, whether you tend to agree or tend to disagree?, "My voice counts in the European Union", tend to agree; (2) QA 12.3. Please tell me for each statement, whether you tend to agree or tend to disagree?, "I feel involved in EU affairs", tend to agree.

In a European system which they do not understand completely, which does not fully represent them and gives few opportunities of participation, people prefer to "exit". To the national resistances for integration at a higher level evoked by Elias, has to be summed the lack of appealing, of *inclusiveness* of the EU system of governance in itself. In that sense, the major misunderstandings linked with European identity are certainly linked to the fact that most of the existing works dealing with the concept have been concerned with static approaches trying to objectify something which does not yet exist in the real world. Rather, it seems more interesting to approach the European identity from the viewpoint of a theory of social evolution, as a process in the making.³⁵ EU

European Union are significantly more likely to feel that their voice counts than are citizens with a negative stance towards to European Union.

³⁵ Duchesne, S. & Frogner, A. P. (2002), "Sur les dynamiques sociologiques et politiques de l'identification à l'Europe", *Revue Française de Science Politique*, 52(4), pp. 355-73. See also Duchesne, S. & Frogner, A-P. (1995), "Is There a European Identity", in Niedermayer,

integration is a “*process of distancing*” which transfers individuals’ traditional unity of survival from their national state to a new supranational level of decision-making. Yet, because the former (national level) still plays a dominant affective role while more and more political power is exercised by the latter (EU level), there is a growing “*retarding effect*” between people’s social *habitus* and the logic of the political system in which they live.³⁶ The major difficulty for the potential emergence of a European identity is thus constituted by the fact that “there are strong differences in the national *habitus*” of Europeans, and those national identities “are associated with a high level of affectivity which cannot be eliminated through compromises”.³⁷

Conclusion

This paper has tried to delineate the main reasons which could explain why it seems so difficult for a European sense of identity to emerge. First, it seems that there are different normative views associated with the EU project. The national context plays a great role in fostering specific representations of the EU and contributes to differentiate political attitudes. With the eastern European enlargements, the diversity of EU member states is becoming more important than ever before. In the forthcoming future, it is likely that Europeans will still diverge on the priorities and the nature of the EU project. Secondly, the attitudinal comparisons between Great-Britain, France and Belgium tend to show that there is a deep social divide within European countries between two types of subpopulations.

While the most educated, the youngest, the less ethnocentric and the most socio-economically favored have a high probability to support EU integration and define themselves as Europeans, it is rather the contrary for all the people in opposed sociological positions. A theory which aims to explain the support for EU integration has necessarily to take into account these two levels of analysis, the national and the sociological dimensions. Finally, we have seen that there is still a long way for a European identity to emerge. Few people do understand how the EU works and share a good knowledge of the EU. National identities are still the dominant “locus” of social identification and they are likely to remain so for a long

O. & Sinnott, R. (ed.), *Public Opinion and Internationalized Governance*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 193-226.

³⁶ Elias, N. (1991), *Ibid.*, pp. 238 & p. 263.

³⁷ Elias, N. (1991), *Ibid.*, pp. 285.

time. Norbert Elias' theory of social evolution provides insightful elements for understanding the resistances toward popular identification at the EU level. There is a growing incongruence between the transfer of power to European institutions and the resilience of personal attachments at the national level. Even though things might evolve in the future, up to now, the concept of European identity remains a theoretical construction and not a sociological reality.