

Why Do We Feel European? Social Mechanisms of European Identity

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Abstract: This article examines variables from social sciences influencing European identity in Western Europe. The study shows that several social variables can be used to predict the level of European identity, which can lead to a stronger European integration of citizens. Eurobarometer data from European Union countries show that specific social variables have a higher relevance for predicting European identity. In particular, the perceived importance of the EU, European pride and whether the EU is perceived as a good or a bad thing are used to predict one's European identity. Also, over time, there is a change in the social variables which are salient for determining one's European identity. European pride has become a stronger determinant of European identity compared to the perceived importance of the EU.

Keywords: Europeanisation, European identity, pride, EU importance, European Union countries, Eurobarometer data

Introducing European Identity

At an international party in Florence, Italy, my friend Daniel tells me he feels very European. His father is German, his mother is French, he was born in the UK and was raised partly in Spain and partly in Italy. He cannot identify with just one nationality and considers himself to be European. His European identity is very strong. However, what exactly does it mean to feel European? The mere statement that one "feels European" could convey a European identity, but what are the underlying mechanisms of a European identity? To feel European, is it really necessary to have a similar background to that of my friend, Daniel? This study seeks to investigate the underlying social variables that influence European identity and, therefore, to which extent one feels European. In particular, it considers political and psychological variables that are the underlying mechanisms of European identity.

For many people, their national identity becomes explicit when they go on



vacation abroad or live in a foreign country. This is when one becomes more aware of his or her cultural background. On the other hand, people may find that they also share a supra-national identity. For example, when an Italian and a Dutch person meet, they also share a European identity, which they would not have in common with a South African person. These social encounters leave us with particular questions concerning the analysis of social identities from a social science perspective. To what extent can social variables predict European identity? Which social variables are strongly related to European identity? Does the salience of these variables change over time? This article aims to provide insight into these questions.

European identity can be defined as the expression of being and feeling like a European citizen. The European Union promotes European citizenship as a means of European integration. Ever since the start of the European Union as the European Coal and Steel Community in 1950, several European countries collaborated with the aim of bringing Europeans closer together (Lazowski, 2008). In the beginning, the European Union developed important economic measures aimed at bringing European Union member states closer to a uniform or coordinated European economic policy (Bhabha, 1999; Dehejia & Samy, 2008; Alhorr, H.S., Moore, C. B. & Payne, G.T., 2008). Economic integration within the European Union was involved with the creation of a common currency, the elimination of specific tariffs, reducing gaps and developing a common market, whereby entrepreneurs were motivated to increase their businesses (Bosma, Jones, Autio, & Levie, 2008; Thacker-Kumar & Campbell, 1999). The aim of the European Union to create a free single economic market can also be considered as an aim of economic and social integration (Bhabha, 1999; Hamm, 1992). Thus, it seemed that the one of the main drivers behind the European Union was had an economic base. However, over time the European Union started to get more involved in creating more social cohesion among European member citizens (Graham & Hart, 1999). For example, in 1993 a cohesion project was launched to mainly economically develop regions and to develop social cohesion that would be higher than the European average (Graham & Hart, 1999). Thus, it seemed needed that after an economic integration of European Union citizens, a need started to exist to achieve social cohesion among European Union citizens. In fact, not economic drivers were the main mechanisms in influencing European identity but more and more social drivers were starting to be the main mechanisms for



influencing European identity. Furthermore, the European Union set up the Maastricht Treaty in 1993. In this Treaty the European Union citizenship is established. This Treaty stated that a citizen of any of the European Union member states, also has citizenship of the European Union: Art. 8 of the European Union Treaty mentions that 'Every person holding the nationality of a member State shall be a citizen of the Union.' However, European Union citizenship did not replace national citizenship: rather, it is complementary. The European Union citizenship also meant the creation of a European identity (Bhabha, 1999). By bringing Europeans together, the European Union has been promoting the development of a European integration and European identity over the years. They have been promoting European identity mainly because Europeans did not want to be in war with each other anymore. And European identity seemed to be not any more driven by economic mechanisms but by social mechanisms. Also, a way of promoting European integration is by developing European identity (Leonard, 1998). Looking at the history of the European Union, it seems they wanted to increase European identity, but is this really taking place? Are we indeed creating an international civil society based on similar values shared by various groups of peoples with different backgrounds, cultures and languages? The latter is a question that has been asked by several social science academics, some who tried to give an answer to it (Mayor, 1998; Keane, 1994; Aron, 1974; Hamm, 1992; Risse, 2001; Smith, 1992). The referenda held in the Netherlands and France about establishing a constitution for Europe in 2005 resulted in a clear "No". This might make some Europeans believe that Dutch and French citizens have a weak European identity. It might give an indication of a weak social cohesion among European Union citizens and a weak integration of European Union citizens within the European Union, which is actually an aim of the European Union. In order to fulfill this aim, it would be very interesting to find out how a strong European Union citizenship can be build. In this way, a stronger integration on a social level within the European Union can be achieved. In order to find out how to achieve this, one would need to distinguish the main social mechanisms that drive European identity. This question is at the heart of our main question, which we could formulate as follows: What are the underlying social mechanisms that drive European identity and which social variables can we use to predict the level of European identification? As many growing problems in Europe, this is also a question that should use a social-science approach (André, 1993).



Relevant variables from social sciences

Tajfel – a social psychologist, who has been very influential in the development of social psychology – and colleagues (Taifel, 1970; Taifel and Turner, 1979) developed the Social Identity Theory (SIT). This theory is essential to the discussion of social identities such as European identity. It is based on the following four tenets: individuals strive to achieve or to maintain a positive social identity; group membership contributes to an individual's social identity; the evaluation of an individual's own group is based on social comparison with other groups; a positive social identity is based on favourable comparisons. A social identity gives meaning to who we are in relation to other groups of people. It says something about us. As mentioned in the introduction, a person has several social identities, i.e. a person can be a teacher, a driver, or a customer at particular moments in time. All these identities are social identities, as they exist in relation to other people and the identities can be shared with others. The relationship between SIT and European identity as a social identity can be made when considering Europeans as human beings who identify with other Europeans, the European Union, and Europe as a superordinate-group (Florack & Piontkowski, 2000).

A considerable body of empirical research concerning European identity or attitudes to the European Union exists (Mayhew, 1980; Hewstone, 1986; Inglehart, 1977; Inglehart & Rabier, 1980; Deflem & Pampel, 1996; McCrone & Surridge, 1998; Eichenberg & Dalton, 1993; Florack & Piontkowski, 2000). Mayhew (1980) carried out research on European political culture, i.e. Europeanism. He wanted to investigate attitudes and ideas of European people towards the European political culture. In his framework Mayhew included a variable for utilitarian support, operationalised through the statement whether it is good or bad to be an EU member.

Furthermore, Mayhew (1980) constructed a European integration support index including the latter statement. This European integration support index was constructed to predict support or opposition for European integration. Also, he used questions related to cognitive mobilization in the European integration support index. These questions included statements concerning how often the discussion of political matters takes place and to what extent you can persuade friends in political matters. Cognitive mobilization has been found to indicate European integration on an individual level in other studies (Inglehart, 1977; Janssen, 1991).

Duchesne & Frognier (1995) used data from Eurobarometers, a European



Union survey which is carried out twice every year, to study European identity. They also found that cognitive mobilization seems to be correlated with European identity. Inglehart & Rabier (1980) also used these questions in their studies on European integration.

According to Mayhew (1980), people first develop utilitarian support, and later on perceive the benefits resulting from successful performance, leading to the development of affective support: "The continuous satisfaction of utilitarian interests leads to the stimulation of affective links which become independent from the effects of daily performance" (p. 110). Mayhew (1980) reported that in France, Germany and Italy affective support levels tended to be higher than utilitarian support levels, while the contrary was true in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. He found that the majority opinion in the six founder states, where utilitarian and affective support were relatively high, was that it would have been better to be inside than outside the European Union, and that without the Common Market member states would be worse off.

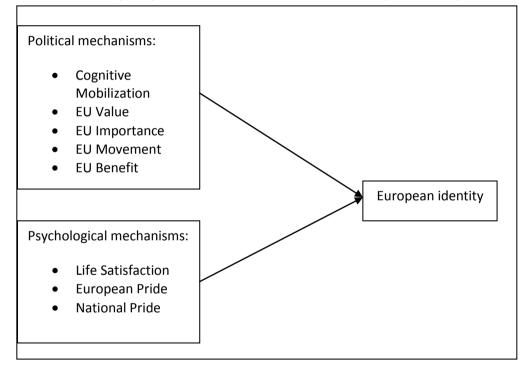
Green (1999) studied European identity making specific use of a selection of Eurobarometers from 1976 – 1992. He tested with ordered probit analyses multiple surveys including the questions related to the benefit that people experience from EU membership, and societal wealth, which he links to life satisfaction. Life satisfaction can be influenced by work conditions, living conditions, job satisfaction and nonwork satisfaction (i.e., all domains of satisfaction other than work), where the influence of these indicators has been shown to vary between various European countries (Near & Rechner, 1992). Life satisfaction can also be influenced by dispositional variables, like personality characteristics (Diener & Lucas, 1999), social factors like marriage and social class (Argyle, 1999) and culture (Diener & Suh, 2000), satisfaction with esteem needs (i.e., self-esteem and freedom) (Oishi et al.,1999) and self-esteem (Benet-Martinez & Aygün, 2003).

McCrone & Surridge (1998) used the *International Social Survey Programme* (ISSP) to examine national identity and national pride in the U.K., Western Germany, Sweden and Spain. They found that national pride is related to attachment to one's country and one could assume that pride could be relevant for European identity. Müller-Peters (1998) finds that European patriotism is strongly related to having a positive attitude towards the Euro. She defines European patriotism as a third dimension next to nationalism and national patriotism, which are independent dimensions for national identity. However, she clearly outlines a link between



European patriotism and European identity, where an attachment to Europe and Europeans is likely to exist.

To conclude, the literature indicates that a number of social variables are relevant for influencing European identity. The variable measuring whether it is good or bad to be an EU member seems to be a relevant factor. Second, cognitive mobilization perceptions are relevant as factors influencing European identity. Third, the perception of the importance, the benefit and the movement of the EU are relevant variables for influencing European identity. Fourth, the amount of life satisfaction a European experiences could influence European identity. Lastly, national and European pride could be a relevant factor for European identity.



Therefore, we propose a model in which cognitive mobilization, EU value, EU importance, EU benefit, EU movement, life satisfaction and pride are the main influencing mechanisms of European Identity. The four variables of cognitive mobilization, EU value, EU importance and EU movement are referring to political elements of how European identity can be influenced. The three variables of life satisfaction, national pride and European pride are referring to psychological elements and psychological elements are of relevance for predicting European identity. This model



also implies that even though the European identity of European citizens began as an economic alliance, European identity is nowadays more driven by political and even psychological motives. Thus, currently several social mechanisms can be found to influence European identity. The model that is proposed is based on two groups of mechanisms that predict European identity: namely psychological and political mechanisms. The literature clearly showed that these mechanisms seemed to be the most relevant ones to understand European identity. Consequently, these variables were included in this study on European identity. An existing data set that actually contains measurements for these variables is the Eurobarometer.

Eurobarometer variables

As European databases could help us with the understanding of European identity or European integration (Sinnott, 1994), a selection of Eurobarometer surveys was used to measure the relevant variables. The Eurobarometer surveys¹ are conducted approximately every six months in several European countries since 1973. The Eurobarometer surveys are commissioned by the European Union to monitor the social and political attitudes of European Union citizens. Representative national samples throughout the European Union, formerly European Community, member states are simultaneously interviewed each spring and autumn. Only the countries that were included in all datasets the Eurobarometers are included in the analyses. This means that late joiners or early leavers were deleted from the dataset so that these countries could not have any influence on the results.

European identity was measured by asking respondents to what extent they considered themselves as Europeans. It was decided to use all Eurobarometers from 1982-2002 in which this question appeared, as otherwise no measurement of European identity was available.

These Eurobarometers were chosen on the basis of practicality and expert judgment: since 1982, the European identification question has been included in the Eurobarometer, and at the time of investigation only Eurobarometers until 2002 were available. The items that were chosen for each separate Eurobarometer were based on the variables of the European identity model. The five political variables are the following: Cognitive Mobilization, EU Value, EU Importance, EU

¹ See for more information www.gesis.org/en/data_service/eurobarometer



Movement, and EU Benefit. To measure cognitive mobilization two questions were included: one concerned the persuasion of friends when taking about politics and one question concerned the discussion of political matters. EU Value was measured with an item concerning whether the EU is a good thing or a bad thing. To measure EU importance two items were used concerning the perceived EU importance and the desired EU importance. EU movement has been measured by two items concerning the perceived movement of the EU and the desired movement of the EU. EU benefit was measured by which benefit they believed to have by being an EU member. The psychological variables are the following: Life Satisfaction, European Pride and National Pride. Life satisfaction was measured by asking respondents how satisfied they were with their lives. European pride and national pride was measured by asking respondents how proud they were of Europe and their nation, respectively.

These social variables were analysed to see whether these could be used as predicting European identity. Before doing the regression analyses, optimal scaling was performed with the variables.

Optimal Scaling

The original data in the Eurobarometer surveys was based on codes on a nominal scale or ordinal scale. However, an important assumption for doing regressions or other relatively advanced statistical tests is that variables were scaled on an interval or ratio scale. The optimal scaling technique can recode variables on a higher level of scaling, namely interval scaling. This method is very useful for this study as it includes various categorical variables. Optimal scaling was carried out with the variables to obtain an improved differentiation between the scores for the variables (Velden, 2004; Van Rosmalen, Koning & Groenen, 2009). Optimal scaling (Gifi, 2000; Linting, Meulman, Groenen, & Van der Kooij, 2007; Young, 1981) results in centroid coordinates that are assigned to categories of the variables. In this way, the method results in optimal quantifications for the variables so that these variables can be considered as interval variables. The optimal scaling technique generates centroid coordinates that are used to compute new optimally scaled variables. Centroid coordinates are used as new codes for the computed variables.

After optimally scaling the variables a regression was carried out with the



optimally scaled variables for all Eurobarometers (i.e., the 15 Eurobarometers from 1982 to 2002). Bivariate correlations were done with all variables to discover if a large amount of overlap existed between any of the variables. The results pointed out that there were two cases of high correlations (i.e. r>.90) were present between the variables of the dataset (see table 1): the second dataset of 1991 and the dataset of 1993. These variables have been deleted for analyses. The other variables did not show any high correlations between variables in any of the other datasets.

Regression Results

The variance of European identity on the basis of the analyses with the optimally scaled independent variables varies from 11% to 21% (see Table I). It seems that the amount of variance shows about a 100% increase over the period 1982-2002. The peak variance is in the 2002 Eurobarometer (R2= 21%), while the lowest variance explained by the social variables is in Eurobarometer 19 (1983) (R2= 11%). In table I one can find significant beta's that are sometimes as high as .21 and sometimes as low as .02. Of relevance, is however, that these variables do have a significance level of lower than .05 whereby these betas are still of relevance to report. The significant betas do contribute and influence to some part European identity.

In general the significant betas reported for the following variables are among the highest, maximal betas: "Perceived importance of EU" (from .03 to .22), "European Pride" (from .16 to .22), and "Good/Bad thing EU" (from .04 to .18). Consequently, on the basis of these findings "Perceived importance of EU", "European Pride", and "Good/Bad thing EU" are the variables that predict European identity best, while the variables "National pride", "Life satisfaction", and "Benefit from the EU" influence European identity expression to a lesser extent compared to all other social variables.



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Table I: Regression results of regression on European Identity with optimally scaled Social Psychological variables (Betas and

Variances)															
Social	EB 17-	EB 19-	EB 33-	EB	EB 36-	EB 37-	EB 40-	EB	Eb	EB	EB	EB 53	EB	EB	EB
psychological variables	1982	1983	1990	35- 1991	1991	1992	1993	43.1- 1995	44.1- 1995	50.0- 1998	52.0- 1999	- 2000	54.1- 2000	56.2- 2001	57.1- 2002
Perceived importance of EU	.21	.19	.17	.22	.19	.19	.18	.15	.08	.08	.04	.03	.06	NS	.12
Desired importance of EU	-	-	.11	-	-	-	-	.09	.12	.08	.08	.06	.10	.05	-
National Pride	.05	NS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.02	.06	11	12	02
European Pride	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.16	.19	.22
Life satisfaction	.02	02	NS	.04	02	.04	.05	.06	-	-	.04	.04	.03	.04	.02
Benefit from the EU	-	NS	.04	NS	NI	NS	.02	02	.06	.07	.08	.10	.05	.07	.03
Good/ Bad thing EU	.06	.10	.04	.10	.14	.12	.12	.15	.18	.16	.18	.16	.14	.14	.11
Cognitive mobilization	.12	.16	.12	.08	.11	.07	.13	.11	NS	.09	.09	05	.08	.13	.10
Persuade friends	.10	.07	.07	.09	.09	.08	.12	.05	.09	.06	.09	.10	.03	.05	.07
Perceived movement of EU	.10	.06	.11	.07	.02	.07	NI	.03	06	.06	02	08	NS	05	-
Desired movement of EU	-	-	-	-	-	.13	.14	.06	.05	.11	.03	.08	.10	.03	.10
R square	.15	.13	.15	.12	.12	.19	.21	.15	.12	.18	.11	.12	.18	.14	.20

variances)

-= absent in the relevant EB

NI= not included due to high multicollinearity with other social psychological variable



Changes over time in social variables

The "Perceived importance of EU" variable seems to show some fluctuation over the time-span of 20 years. While it has a significant beta of .21 in 1982 it steadily decreases to a significant beta of .03 in 2000 and even a negative beta in 2001 (beta = -.01). However, in Eurobarometer 2002, its beta suddenly rises to .12. Thereby, "Perceived importance of EU" seems to have less importance for European identity, but then (in 2002) seems to become more relevant. The latter change might have been caused by the introduction of the Euro in many European countries around the same time.

Similarly, the "Perceived movement of EU" variable starts off with a significant beta of .10 in the first Eurobarometer included in the analyses, but gradually the beta decreases. In 1991, the beta is only .02 and it is even negative in the Eurobarometers of the following years: 1993, 1995 (Eurobarometer 44.1), 1999, 2000 (Eurobarometer 53), and 2001. This change shows that the "Perceived movement of EU" variable initially loses some weight for influencing European identity and later also changes its meaning in influencing European identity. The latter shows that before 1993 a higher "perceived movement of EU" would lead to a higher expression of European identity, while after 1993 a higher "perceived movement of EU" leads to a weaker expression of European identity.

On the contrary, the variable "Good/Bad thing EU" becomes more important over the 20 year time-span. Its significant beta goes from .06 in 1982 to .18 in Eurobarometer 44.1 (1995) and remains above .10 in later years. Thus, the relevance of this variable seems to have increased over time.

The other independent social variables seem to be more or less stable over years, although incidental changes can be distinguished. The "Desired movement of EU" variable has a significant beta of .13 in the results of Eurobarometer 37 (1992) analyses, but a beta of .03 in the Eurobarometer 52.0 (1999) results. "National pride" has a beta of .06 in the Eurobarometer 53 (2000) results but a negative beta of -.12 in the Eurobarometer 56.2 (2001) results.

Another important change could be found for the social variable that has the highest importance (i.e. beta) relating to European identity compared to the other social variables in the same Eurobarometer. From Eurobarometer 17 (1982) until Eurobarometer 43.1 (1993) "Perceived importance of EU" has the highest relevance. From Eurobarometer 44.1 (1995) until Eurobarometer 54.1 (2000),



"Good/Bad thing EU" has the highest relevance. The latter Eurobarometer is the first Eurobarometer included in the analyses in which "European pride" is included, and from this Eurobarometer onwards "European pride" has the highest relevance. In other words, the most relevant social variable for influencing European identity changes from "Perceived importance of EU" to "Good/Bad thing EU" and then again to "European Pride". Table 1 clearly shows that the importance of "Perceived importance of EU" is become less, while "Good/Bad thing EU" is becoming more important. Before 1995, however, the most important social variable predicting European identity expression is clearly "Perceived importance of EU". This finding might indicate that the relevance of people's European identity expression has changed: from a focus on the importance that people attach to the EU, to the idea that they consider the EU as a bad or good thing. Eventually, the most relevant social underlying mechanism of European identity in the future seems to be the pride that people derive from being European.

From these findings we conclude that some social variables might be important for influencing European identity expression, depending on when the data is gathered. The findings show that variables change concerning the importance these have for European identity. This provides an indication to believe that European identity is a dynamic concept of which underlying drivers are changing over time. European identity per se is therefore not stable over time, and can relate to various variables over time.

Conclusions

Firstly, social variables used in this study are important for European identity, in particular political and psychological variables can predict European identity expression. This is a very interesting conclusion as the European Union was firstly set up as an economic driver for bringing European citizens together. However, social mechanisms are strong drivers for European identity at the moment. This shows that the relevance of social variables for influencing European identity. The results of the regressions give validation to the hypothesis, i.e., to some extent European identity can be influenced by the social variables of "Perceived importance of EU", "European Pride", and "Good/Bad thing EU" to a large extent, and the variables "National pride", "Life satisfaction", and "Benefit

Geetha GARIB



JIMS – Volume 5, number 2, 2011

from the EU" to a lesser extent. Thus, the results show that some social variables are more relevant or less relevant to predicting European identity than are other variables. Both political and psychological variables seem to be relevant for understanding the expression of European identity. However, political variables, like EU importance and EU value are more relevant than some psychological variables, like national pride and life satisfaction. Nevertheless, these variables are still of relevance for influencing European identity. In would be interesting to see if this is still the same in the future or whether political variables compared to psychological variables remain to be more important for driving European identity. The same analyses could be performed with Eurobarometer data of 2002 onwards to see if this still is the case. It would be interesting to perceive if any changes in the explanation of European identity are taking place. If so, this would mean that European identity is becoming a more psychological concept compared to a political concept, as it seems it is already the case to some extent. It is also interesting to see that currently, the European Union has made it possible to let Europeans perceive the European identity as a psychological concept, whereas it was created as a political and economic concept from the start.

Second, the study shows that the influence of the social variables on European identity changes over time. It seems that in particular "Benefit of the EU" would have the lowest relevance for predicting European identity. However, this does not mean that it has no relevance at all for influencing European identity. It still is significant for some Eurobarometers, and was even reported to have a beta of .10 in Eurobarometer 53 (2000). Consequently, it should not be excluded from research concerning European identity. Taking into consideration the findings, it might even seem that in the future this indicator could become more important compared to other indicators of the same principle. Therefore, one should be careful not to completely exclude indicators on the basis of their betas, because these can change over time. The finding that some variables are more important than others in influencing the strength of European identity could be related to that Europeans are experiencing stronger levels of exposure to the European Union over time. It is also interesting to see that the EU benefit as a political variable seems to decrease its relevance concerning predicting European identity. As has been mentioned, some indicators have become more relevant for the prediction of EU identity compared to the other indicators included in the regression. On the basis of the range of betas reported, "Perceived importance of EU", "European



Pride", and "Good/Bad thing EU" might be more relevant for research on European identity than the other social indicators. Two of these indicators are actually psychological variables, whereby evidence exists that psychological variables indeed are increasing its relevance over times. Moreover, the results show that these three variables have each been the most relevant variables at a different period in a single Eurobarometer. Thus, it appears that the indicators "Perceived importance of EU", "European Pride", and "Good/Bad thing EU" should be of higher relevance compared to the other indicators for any study concerning European identity. This might indicate that the status of the European Union used to be important for determining the strength of European identity, while now the status or utility of the European Union seems to be more important for influencing one's European identity. This indicates the lower relevance of political variables for driving European identity and a stronger relevance for other variables, like psychological variables. As a consequence, European identity is becoming a more psychological concept than a political concept that was created by the European Union from the start. The empirical evidence shows out that European Citizenship that was created as a political or economic entity seems to be driven more and more by psychological phenomenon that European citizens are perceiving: namely the fact that they psychologically feel as being part of a European entity that is not mainly driven by political or economical mechanisms but also by psychological mechanisms. European citizens in fact do "feel" that they European and express their European identity based on the psychological motivations they feel inside. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the expression of European identity is merely and only driven by these psychological motives. In fact, it does seem that political variables are still of relevance, but the relevance might be less in the future. Therefore, it might be interesting to see if in recent years of Eurobarometer surveys this finding can still validated, and if indeed psychological variables are more and more driving the European Union citizenship compared to political variables.

One should bear in mind, however, as the results point out, that some social (i.e. political and psychological) indicators might be more relevant than others. The order of relevance of these indicators might, furthermore, even change over time. Thus, even if the social variables might be useful for predicting European identity in future studies on European identity, the interrelations of indicators or variables could change. Consequently, in the future the most suitable indicators for



European identity should be found, but with this study a starting point has been made. Specifically the indicators in this study could be used for predicting European identity in the past, present and future, taking into consideration the relevance of the indicators. This will help us to understand how we can also increase the European identity among EU member citizens, so that we can fulfill one of the main goals of the European Union. As the creation of a European identity was one of the goals that the European Union strive to succeed, it seems that the European did fulfill that goal partly, but in order to encourage that goal one could make use of the mechanisms that are driving European Identity. If the European Union, for example, focus more on these mechanisms, it could strengthen the European identity of many more Europeans over time even more, and thereby, reach a higher level of achievement concerning this goal.

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