



CREATING AN EUROPEAN IDENTITY

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Introduction:

The purpose of this essay is to explore the following questions: Who are the Europeans? What are the foundations of a common European identity? What can the EU do to increase a European Identity? Which tools are in place and which policies can be added? Are there obstacles currently endangering the formation of a European identity?

Conceptualizing European Identity:

What is Europe? Can Europe be defined by territory, a common cultural with shared values or the institutions that define it? This chapter explores various viewpoints of Europeans and European Identity.

One of the first things we think of when we think of Europe is the geographical definition of Europe as a continent. "Europe is surrounded by seas in the North, the West and the South, but there is no obvious geographical limit to the European project in the East" (Chopin 2018). Yet in geographical terms Europe can be understood in much broader term: „the Organization for Security and Peace in Europe (OSCE) includes 57 countries from Vancouver to Vladivostok; the Council of Europe has 47 members, including Russia and Turkey“ (Chopin 2018: 1). It is because of this that Europe should be less thought of as a territory, but more of a region composed by nation states defining a union. „In the Preamble of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and in the Union's objectives there is mention of the establishment of "an area of freedom, security and justice without any internal borders", as well as the construction of an "internal market (...) comprising an area without internal borders (...)" (Chopin 2018: 1). It becomes interesting when we take a closer look at this European area, its composition and the specific function it includes: „the internal market (28 Member States, 27 after the Brexit); the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU 19 members); the Schengen Area (22 Member States and 4 associate States - Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland)“ (Chopin 2018: 1). The area, which makes up Europe, seems to be composed of different states and types of integration segmenting the region itself. Moreover, the European Union defines itself within Europe as an „area of rights“ (Chopin 2018: 1), which refers to not only tangible history, culture and religion shared but to common values: „the respect of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and the respect of Human Rights. These values are shared by the Member States in a society typified by pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between men and women“ (Chopin 2018: 1). It appears, that an essential part of the European Integration and Identity process is based on a community of values: „It now seems possible to speak of a core of European values that bring together part of Europe and comprise the base of a joint political identity [9], and this, in spite of the specific nature of this value or another linked to the political and national culture of one country or another“ (Chopin 2018: 1).

Without any doubt, Europe shares a common cultural identity and history, while at the same time simultaneously experiencing very individual national plurality; „There is a duality at the heart of European identity, between the existence of a common culture and the political fragmentation that goes with it On the one hand there is the factor of community that provides Europe with its unifying framework: Renaissance and Reform, the scientific revolution, the Baroque Crescent, from Rome to Prague, classical art, the Republic of Letters and then the Enlightenment etc. It is in this sense that Europe is "a nation comprising several" (Montesquieu quoted by Chopin 2018: 1). On the other hand, there is the factor of "particularity" with the creation of nations in France and England, the national revolutions of 1830 and 1848, the Italian and German unifications, etc.“ (Chopin 2018: 1). The plurality of nation states has led to competition in various forms accumulating in two world wars. It is between these two elements that the European Union can create its own identity: „The identity of Europe is [...] of an intermediate nature: it must accept economically and from a human point of view, to be both part of a globalized whole and comprise Nation-States that retain their discrete identities. Europe's specific vocation dictates its identity and vice-versa. This identity involves finding a middle road between the global and the local, between dilution and self-withdrawal, to avoid, as much as possible, a brutal confrontation between world interdependence and blind, xenophobic, sterile isolation" (Chopin 2018: 1).

Overall the term European Identity "can in general be described as a feeling of being European as an integral part of one's own social identity [...] and people might attach quite different meaning to being European" (Ciaglia 2018: 10). In a research paper on European Identity (2018) conducted by Ciaglia, Fues and Heinemann the authors try to conceptualize identification as European by distinguishing between civic versus cultural European identity: "A European civic identity refers to the perception to be part of a European political system or even a European state that defines rules, laws and right with relevance for one's own life" (Ciaglia 2018: 11). Consequently this approach equates being European with being part of the European Union, whereas

the cultural identity approach is independent from political structures. A European cultural identity “labels the perception that fellow Europeans are closer than non-Europeans because of shared culture, values and history” (Ciaglia 2018: 11). Furthermore the authors argue that European identity in that sense is fostered through a sense of Input legitimacy, which refers to the involvement of European citizens in common institutions and policies. And output legitimacy, which refers to the resulting policies and good performances of European policies (Ciaglia 2018: 11). Following this change of thought European Identity has accumulated to being able to identify with the European Union. I am not saying, that my argument is the sole argument, which can be made on European Identity. In fact there are various views on what it means to be European but for the sake of this Essay I would like to argue, that the European Identity is composed of civic and cultural aspects resulting in an identification with the European Union – although identification doesn’t automatically equal support. The following chapter focuses on current tools employed by the European Union to activate an EU feeling and offers an overview of future policy options to strengthen a European Identity.

Proposals on How to Activate an EU Feeling:

It may come as no surprise, that researchers found, that the group with the highest European identity consist of “young, wealthy, well-educated, eager to travel, work and study abroad” (Ciaglia 2018: 23) Europeans. Overall, this can be viewed as a positive development over the last 20 years, yet it becomes apparent, that a much larger part of European society identifies increasingly less with the EU. How can the European Union respond to this identity deficit? How can a sense of feeling connected to the European Union and its institutions be achieved? What existing tools are there in place today and what actions does the EU have to employ to be able to connect with all of its citizens? Chopin writes, that this deficit can only be overcome through deeper integration consisting of tangible European Elements: “Responding to Europe’s identity deficit first involves a strategy that aims to provide its citizens with points of reference in time and space” (Chopin 2018: 1).

Again I would differentiate between a civic and a cultural identity. If we look at current civic tools implemented to foster a common European community we will find the following for example: Voting in EU Parliament elections, citizen’s initiatives and dialogs, petition, complaint and consultation opportunities, a common European passport, uniformed license plates, free mobility, EU-wide job agency (EURES) and free Roaming (Ciaglia 2018: 40). To encourage an European identity civil components will have to be explored. Overall, the European Union has to increase its “transparency, the completion of political ideas and solutions, and make institutions more efficient” (Ciaglia 2018: 43) to legitimize itself yet again. Only legitimacy will build trust in institutions and the higher the trust is the more likely citizens can identify with their values, policies and politics. To heighten the involvement of citizens and with that hopeful their identity it has been proposed to bestow the right of initiative to the European Parliament (EP). Currently, only the EU Commission has this right. Granting the EU Parliament with more competencies will make citizens feel represented more adequately. This will hopefully lead to a higher participation in EU elections. In 2017 President Macron made a proposal in his speech to implement transnational party lists for the EP elections (Macron 2017). “Federalist endorse this idea hoping for it to be a real game changer and encourage politicians to advocate for truly European interest” (Ciaglia 2018: 45). Additionally, the terms of these elected politicians would be limited to increase completion, involvement and transparency. Some see the necessity to have the European Commission held more accountable. The EU sees itself confronted with allegations, that the EU is solely elitarian project run by cooperation and technocrats. To counter these claims the EU Commission could be held accountable by issuing an annual “General Report on activities of the EU” (Ciaglia 2018: 45). Furthermore Commission President Juncker (2017) suggested “to merge the position of the Commission president and the president of the European Council” (Juncker 2017). Similar proposals call to have the Commission president directly elected (Ciaglia 2018: 45) by the people to enhance integrity and democratic legitimacy. To increase participation one could also imagine instating a citizens’ assembly at EU level and employing community counselors on local level, who’s purpose is to explain EU policies to citizens (Ciaglia 2018: 46). Also on international level could a common EU consular service create a stronger feeling of community and belonging. A joint study by the Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Centre for European Economic Research (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2013: 56f.) suggested establishing an “EU embassy with 28 flags” (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2013: 56f.) “These embassies could provide counselor service for all EU citizens” (Ciaglia 2018: 47) without full national sovereignty, foreign policy and national security concerns being transferred to one common embassy. Furthermore citizens need to be motivated to work on public good projects together by developing common visionary projects in science, working together to fight climate change and developing ways to seek energy independence for example (Ciaglia 2018: 47).

If we look at the cultural component to foster European identity the EU already offers a number of programs, which support this narrative: Erasmus, Free Interrail tickets, Town twinning, European Capital of Culture and European Symbols. A few of these components I will look at in detail and add new ideas to create a more solidified European identity.

One of the earliest initiatives the EU underwent to establish some kind of European identity was the creation of symbols: “Symbols being means to experience an abstract content, and not only representing one in a

brief and vivid way for the purpose of intellectual understanding as with metaphors” (Verkyten 1995: 267). A symbol may refer to a value, an emotion, an association or something, which is simply on a person's mind (Verschorr 2012: 20). Nowadays the EU has established the following symbols: The European Flag, an European anthem, Europe Day and the European Motto unity in diversity. These symbols were implemented to create a sense of identity with the EU. When looking at one symbol for example in the Euro barometer survey conducted in 2007 91% of respondents recognized the EU flag, 78% associated it with something good, while only 55% present identified with the EU flag. Nevertheless this is an 11% increase of identification from 2002-2007 (Verschorr 2012: 43). Symbols often have to do with the perceived association of one. On the one hand they can create a feeling of alignment when individuals can identify with common values. It may create a feeling of belonging and simultaneously a feeling that others do not belong.

Moreover several studies suggest, that cognitive mobilization increases the formation of a European identity. This implies, that “similar knowledge and information and news about the EU and politics increase the likelihood to develop a European identity” (Ciaglia 2018: 23). Based on these findings Chopin suggests that it is vital to implement the teaching of a common European history, without neglecting or replacing national narratives: “Young Europeans will learn that every national historical phenomenon was also and primarily European” (Cho-pin 2018: 1); “Europeans should learn about shared places of memory and heroes - without obscuring the things that have torn Europe apart, and the crimes, since we can build nothing good on a lie, even by omission. But by showing how, based on a shared memory of past ills, a joint will to build a better future can emerge. This is not a bad definition of a true policy for European identity” (Barnavi 198: 38f.). Besides common history and heritage lesson, schools should offer compulsory EU Simulations. Because increased knowledge and information on the EU offers opportunities for “substantial and fruitful citizen engagement” (Cigalia 2018: 29) and simultaneously has been found to have a positive effect on the level of trust in EU institutions (Ciaglia 2018: 29). Finding a common ground between all EU member states, without them fearing to lose more sovereignty in their own domestic issues to the European Union will be the main challenge of implementing a common education reform. But we also have to dare to venture outside of schools to reach other age groups. For this reason and to gain increase European identity, the European Parliament purposed a pan-European television channel in 1980. Since 1993 Euronews has been the tangible result of this mission, currently reaching 200 million households. Its purpose is to cater to a wide European audience on “politics, education, cultural information, entertainment and advertising” (Polonska-Kimunguyi 2011: 512). Although there can no direct link made between the Channel Euronews and European identification, an 2008 EU Commission report found, that since the installment of pan-European television domestic broadcasters had devoted an average of 63% of their air time to European related news (Polonska-Kimunguyi 2011:516).

Furthermore transnational contact has been shown to increase European identity. Transnational contact can be defined as exchange with other Europeans, traveling, personal transnational relations and relationships (Ciaglia 2018: 23). Yet every aspect has a different influence on feeling European. In their compiled research Ciagali, Fuest and Heinemann concluded, that traveling does indeed contribute to an European identity, yet staying at home and being exposed to tourist from various European countries does not (Ciaglia 2018: 23). The Erasmus Impact Study conducted by the European Commission in 2014 (European Commission 2014: 130) showed that mobile students, staff and researchers feel more attached to the European Union than non-mobile academics. Based on these findings we can assume that participants have a reduced national and regional identity and an increased interest in cultural, language and academic exchange. Osborne (2015) confirms these findings in a survey conducted with 12.000 Erasmus students. About one third of them felt more European after their exchange in an European country (Ciaglia 2018: 24). Nevertheless I have to stress at this point, that Erasmus programs are only available to a fraction of the European population and are heavily de-pended on the socio-economic backgrounds of participants. Therefore it has to be conveyed, that Transnational contacts on academic level need to be enhanced, widened and increasingly funded, through which lower income classes also have this European experience available. While maintaining the current form of the Erasmus program we currently run the risk of our integration efforts of backfiring on us. Since transnationalism depends on the social back-ground we may see an increase in “distance between people who are a lot transnationally active and those who are not” (Ciaglia 2018: 24). Leaving these people (the majority of people) feeling left behind and excluded by the European Integration Project. The EU should implement programs such as a Vocational Erasmus Program for apprenticeships and a Pensioner's Erasmus. Furthermore scholarship programs for people from various backgrounds should be established, allowing young people to intern in the parliaments of other EU countries. Last but not least I believe Erasmus programs should expand beyond universities. We need to foster exchanges on every level of education including primary and secondary schools. To make all of this possible and as beneficial as possible the EU should go beyond common history lessons and establish an EU-wide language curriculum. (Ciaglia 2018: 49). A wide net of approaches, which appeal to various socio-economic backgrounds, would increase an European identification dramatically.

I believe differentiating between civic and cultural components especially highlights the sheer amount of possibilities the European Community has to foster a strengthened European Identity, whereas the focus

should remain on a bottom-up approach. Identity needs time to grow and although the EU can implement compulsory classes and programs it is more important that people become involved, active and are curious to go abroad.

After exploring civic and cultural measures the EU could undertake to strengthen a European identity I would like to add another factor. In his Article "Europe and the identity challenge" Thierry Chopin writes, that not only do internal factors contribute to the formation of an identity but external factors are vital as well. Even though we live in a period dominated by peace and security and European integration has contributed to this tremendously external threats and crisis do exist. "The challenges made to European internal and external security may be a factor to use to strengthen the feeling of belonging to a common whole" (Chopin 2018: 1). Russian Aggression, the rise of China, the British Exit out of the EU and economic sanctions could have the potential to increase a European Identity by creating a concept of them versus us. As an example for this increase Chopin points out that after the attacks in Paris 2015 Europeans rediscovered their freedom and united in solidarity with a fellow member state. Furthermore one can purpose, that the tedious Brexit negotiations have brought forth a increased unity a strengthened identification with Europe, because EU citizens can clearly draw the line between them and us now has been visible during the tedious Brexit negotiations. Proving Aristotle right in saying "a common danger unites even the bitterest enemies" (Beard 2005: 37).

The European Union as Its Own Greatest Enemy:

The previous chapter demonstrates, that the EU is clearly invested into creating an identity from top down and has various approaches in future policy strategies. But may this high tend approach be a threat to the European Identity itself? Many scholars propose that the revival of populism and extremism in Europe "is a strong symptom of the identity crisis" " (Chopin 2018: 1). Many Europeans can't shake the feeling, that the European Union is imposing a new identity onto them, while at the same time stripping them of their national identity. The fear of having their identity replaced, of losing more sovereignty to Brussels, being controlled by elitist technocrats and having liberal views forced onto them by cooperation's and lobbies has citizens struggling to identify with the EU. Populist and far right parties in Europe are able to foster and amplify anxiety about identity loss as well as the tension between cultural differences of member states. Populist have got it wrong: "The European identity is not something that destroys or dismantles the national identities, it is something to be added to them" (Ramiro 2009: 6f.). Although the European Union currently has many means to create an European Identity the EU might be becoming a threat to itself. Europe needs to recognize, that identity needs to be shaped from bottom-up not solely from top-down and that this is a very time intensive process, which if too much pressure is applied from above will backfire.

Conclusion:

Nevertheless, even though we all have different national identities and traditions the EU Member States share a common past, values, principals and interest, which as a region distinguishes them from other countries (Chopin 2018: 1). The European Union will face many obstacles in the future and will have to overcome various crisis. Yet, the European Identity will increase in the future as well, because the EU constantly implements decisions and policies based on common values and are willing to admit its imperfections - yet not always willing to immediately reform them.

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