

European Identity Issues in the Era of Globalization

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Abstract

Globalization is already an uncontested process nowadays. Its impacts have affected areas such as: economy, politics, geographical territorial boundaries, identity and national interest, style of life, customs and traditions. Thinking about globalization, the European Union is one of the proper indicators of free circulation of goods, people, products and services. In this context, EU member states are not just a unity of states who share benefits such as single market, currency, space, common civilization values and identity but also a division when it comes to questions related to national interest and national state model and role, sovereignty and ideological issues that some member state are such in obsolete manner attached to them. This paper will examine identity issues within the frame of European Union, in particular not implicitly the unifying factors such as art, culture and history but the divergences that stems from the fact of a single policy for a joint European national interest and speaking in one voice. Ultimately, as the globalization process continue to expand how possible will be to still cultivate culture diversity beyond national frames and extend national identities within a European dimension.

Keywords: EU identity issues, globalization, diversity, common/shared values, multiculturalism

Introduction

The European Union is sustained by a wide range of values. There are also different perceptions from the public and different layers of society regarding the values that hold together the countries of EU.

"From the standpoint of the majority of European citizens, the European Union is, above all, either a conglomerate of nations that have come together and created a Single Market and a single currency, or an ensemble of states who share the same technological and economical ambitions, rather than an entity formed on the basis of shared values and of a common European identity."(Patriou-Baltes 2013)

This paper aims to examine first identity issues within the EU context, concentrating on divisive and unifying elements, and also on key factors affecting the EU countries in not having a common European identity, especially nowadays in light of the globalization process. Seeing it from a constructivist approach, systems of beliefs and ideas or shared values within the EU, as foundational features, have influenced the social and political activity and behavior of the EU member states to a certain degree, but these countries seem to have remained in a liberal or neo-liberal context in relation with one another or with other "partners"¹. Some EU countries still set their pre-defined interests such as: national sovereignty, state geopolitical and strategic interests, as priority criteria for cooperation with allies and other partners (deferred also by a sort of natural rational egocentrism). The analysis that follows is focused on how these countries stand together according to some norms or values which set the foundations for further cooperation and help establish joint institutions, while preserving their identities and state strategic interests. In this context, according to a neo-liberal approach "states certainly join in building collaborative structures and maintaining functional international institutions, but their identities and interests are shaped or constructed not in any way through their social interaction"(Reus-Smith ; 235). EU as a great family of nations with the pros and cons, internal divisions and political and economic fractions still continues to work for the proper functioning of this engine, but recently focusing more on internal issues rather than on policies of enlargement. On one side, when examining internal issues one may notice the divisions within the union, which derives from a lack of solidarity and a continuous pursuit of national interest, and as a consequence leads to the lack of a common European identity. In this prism, a common European identity would mean an identity supported by values beyond those of cultural and historical of an individual state plan level. On the other side, when examining policies of enlargement one can notice that most of the focus is put on the political, economic criteria and state-building capacity of the aspiring countries, which on one hand seek

¹ The term "partners", is used in this case as a reference for the countries that aspire to join the EU.

to bring these countries closer toward the EU space by exerting normative power through functional duties, but on the other hand this process is an indicator of the EU's lack of capacity to absorb new countries, due to the economic crises, overload, slow bureaucracy, coordination skills, sluggish management and inability to speak in one voice within the EU. Besides these, the dual approach regarding new countries to join the EU shows skepticism of a certain degree to accept nations with "different"¹ identities within their space. In addition to the challenge of constructing a common European identity, EU is also far from perceptions of a multi-ethnic federal state guaranteed by the constitution, which would have the capacity to harmonize economic and financial policies of member countries (Habermas 2006,78). Coming back again to the constructivist approach one may notice how the globalization process in empirical way, requires the application of new insights and the ability to create an overlap with some pre-existing preferences of individual countries. The old operational way of doing and thinking needs to be displayed in reformulation of new circumstances about a common EU identity and interest and about acceptance of diversity within this context of closer social interaction. This issue requires a common will of all member states to a new reformulation of norms and institutionalized ideas by seeing and envisioning events in the light of globalization, to expand the space for new actors and multicultural elements. This is another major challenge for the EU, which is still far from accepting multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism in principle and practice, to achieve further steps to the constitution and to the United States of Europe.

Identity and values of Europe, unifying or dividing principles?

Nowadays, although there is a great awareness regarding diversity among people of different countries, and also how closer globalization brought us to people or phenomena from all kind of races, cultures or identities, the tendency to pursue national interests is still very strong. This probably happens because nation states have already been created long ago throughout different historical phases, and have independently built their own economy, culture, politics, and also developed their own language that characterizes them. They have even been in competition with other countries concerning a variety of issues and values.

Affirmed nations in international relations that have already created their national brand and image inside and abroad, continue to build and develop their national interest, regardless of the community they are part of, as happens in the case of the European Union. There has been an essence to bind together the EU countries to each other in the framework of the EU, which had to do with a common heritage and a common civilization. In that way these values created the node to connect the countries that belonged to the EU together, at least, until 1973 at Copenhagen Summit. After the Copenhagen Summit, in the other summits and enlargement waves that followed, it fell silent with the European identity issue, switching on political criteria, economic issues and the ability to meet EU obligations. The criteria were set upon the specifics of those countries to which negotiations for EU accessions were opened. Although various criteria were set in the following summits, the essential criteria of civilization and European culture still remain strong indicator for the European future of a country that aspires to join the EU, that means that in principle seen by an essentialist perspective, identity issues (in this case European legacy of values) have brought together a group of states to create the European Union. It is absolutely important to have a national identity and a unified culture within the nation or the state because it is where the success of a country depends, but on the pan-European level and in the era of globalization the excessive pursuit of national identity and national interest and the redundant promotion of some European identity specific values, has led to a slowdown of the process towards a strong and unified Europe. In a word, the vision of Charlemagne for the EU values that hold together a group of EU countries and some old concepts and points of view such as: liberal, neoliberal, nationalist, etc., which have continued until the 20th century, have now become a sort of barrier for a Europe of the 21st century. EU states shrinking in their own national interest have created a gap in decision-making, in division of responsibilities and there is a notable lack of solidarity to overcome common challenges. Unfortunately this crisis from the lack of a unified European identity is accompanied by an ongoing economic crisis which leads to further division between the countries of the Union, giving the impression like the EU is divided into blocks.

¹ European identity is supported by European art, culture, citizenship, common education for all EU members. In fact, the idea of this common identity was first established by Charlemagne's (also known as Charles, the Great) political project known as the "[renovatio imperii](#)", which represented a synthesis of the four perceived European values: the Teutonic ideal of freedom, Roman law, Christian faith and Greek philosophy. (By DR. LOREDANA PATRUTIU BALTES 2013)

These days beside the fact that phenomena of diversity and multiculturalism increase, one must have in consideration that the global environment is always changing in continuity. In this context EU needs to act as global actor, able to take responsibilities but also to deal with a new environment full of uncertainty. Therefore the EU must solve issues on the basis of identity and much further of multiculturalism, such as to unify, to speak in one voice in the global arena, to strengthen within, and to awaken and enable its absorptive capacity for countries wishing to join the EU. Precisely the issues of identity and of belonging are issues that initially created the EU locomotive, but nowadays, the world is making great strides towards unification and globalization, for that purpose different identities and cultures should be accepted to thrive in tolerance and diversity with each-other. This would be the kind of system (albeit the great challenges to overcome) that would lead EU forward, likewise has led the US forward.

The existing challenges affecting the construction of a common European identity, beyond national levels.

Globalization has brought people of different cultures or ethnic groups with different composition into an almost uncontrollable flow. How long we want to answer the question of how we should live with these people, whose identity, religion or ethnic composition is different from us, we actually live with them and life flow of globalization has put us with them in the same path. Phenomena such as migration, free movement of people, aspiration of new member states to become part of the EU, different ethnic groups fighting for their rights in various democratic societies are issues that transcend national boundaries and challenge national identities. In addition to these uncontrollable trends, governments of EU countries and beyond or political leaders must precede and adjust in a constructive way the policy making in favor of these issues, as long as we are living with the current intense and rapid phenomena, which are likely to become increasingly present and inevitable in our life. According to Francis Fukuyama the whole European project was founded on an anti-national identity basis and there was a belief that there would be a new universal European identity (Fukuyama 2012). Going on with his point of view, old identities like for instance: being German, Dutch, and Italian or French never lost popularity or disappeared in a political/institutional level. The influx of immigrants and the growth of immigrant communities that shared different values contributed for these old identities to be more problematic. The author gives great examples on what basis or pillars these identities are created taking in consideration the case of France, Germany, Holland and Britain.

“French national identity is, in one sense, the least problematic because there is a single republican tradition coming out of the Revolution, a tradition that is secular - that treats all citizens equally. In many respects, the French concept is the only viable one for a modern society that grounds citizenship not in ethnicity, race or religion, but in abstract political values to which people of different cultures can adhere. French national identity is very much built around the French language. In many ways, the French are closest to the United States in having a set of political values at the core of their identity.

The German case is very different. German national identity evolved very differently from France. The process of German unification required definition of German-ness in ethnic terms. Ndërk So, legally, their citizenships law was based on the legal principle of jus sanguinis, up until the year 2000. The Germans have changed their practice now, but the cultural meaning of saying "I am German" is very different from the cultural meaning of saying "I am French" (Fukuyama 2012).

He follows on with the case of Dutch and British identity, considering them as problematic, for they own” features and characteristics”¹ Without mentioning further cases by the author, these are concrete examples of how national identities were constructed by countries that are part of the EU. These countries indeed face the main challenges to bring national identities into a sub-national level, to overcome or fundamentally review some already institutionalized norms and one can clearly see how differently these states have created their own relations with multiculturalism and migration policies.

¹ According to Fukuyama in Holland, national identity has always been defined by the pillarization (verzuiling) of Dutch society: its division into Protestant, Catholic and Socialist pillars. These pillars are relevant to communities in Holland. They tolerate people as long as they do things over there, but not in my community. While In Britain, there was a belief that pluralism meant you have to respect the autonomy of individual immigrant communities; the government had no role in actively trying to integrate them into a broader British culture.

However, likewise Delanty tries to demonstrate “that the ideal of European unity has not, in fact, been an alternative to the nation-state, either in theory or in practice. In fact Europe is a function of the nation-state, which has also fostered the nationalism of the region. As a concrete entity Europe is meaningless without the nation-state. (Delanty 19995) These facts are true, as noted in the present reality, but the implementation and the integration of great project such as the EU, requires the construction of a new collective European identity which does not tend to eliminate old identities and multiethnic cultures and religions but on the contrary tends to harmonize and balance them in the spirit of freedom, human rights and tolerance. A Europe that would give to its citizens dignity, equality and integration and a role in this great community of countries would be the new Europe that people aspire. Maybe it is not a fair analogy, but we should take the example of the Roman Empire, when Emperor Caracalla’s edict to give Roman citizenship to all free citizens or inhabitants of the empire at the time was one of his principal achievements, but the Roman Empire at that time was in its final throes. The European Union project is a reality that overlaps the nation-state, importing from the nation state values and features that can enrich this reality. Nation-states of the EU are the cornerstones that contribute to the EU enrichment by sharing their values. In a speech by Klaus Welle, Secretary General of the European Parliament, in Strasbourg, 2013, he spoke in favor of the European identity construction. He mentioned that how long we belong to each other, our commitment in support of the European Identity construction should start and “at the same time, we need to actively engage to support and create that European identity. It is not that the facts are not there, but we also need to start thinking of our own history not just as national history but also as joint European history”.(Welle 2013) Analyzing Welle’s phrase, “we belong to each-other, should not only be relevant for the countries that are within the EU, but we belong to each other how long Europe will continue to expand toward countries and people with different or similar cultures and traditions that aspire to become part of this big EU community. EU is undergoing toward a post national identity and governance era. “A post national identity would therefore involve a commitment to cultural pluralism based on post-national citizenship which would be relevant to Muslims as well as Christians and other world religions’ atheists, east and west Europeans, black and white, women as well as men”. (Delanty 1995)

The imagination of Europe on demand of globalization process

The Globalization process has challenged the role of the national state; although some EU countries still shrink at the state level interest as shown still clear by some political discourses and realities. EU has recently undergone through division or disintegration phases and the rise of extremists and right wing side have increasingly contributed to this. If Europe has meaning, the latter is a political program (Strath, 2000:14), “therefore it brings advantages in to the methodological aspect, to think of Europe not as something given but as a process and not as something that it is but as something that aims to be.” (Sulstarova 2011) The dynamics that occur within the EU today call for a mission or a common political project and abandonment of ideological issues. A joint political initiative would require the extension of these identities from national levels at post-national contributing levels, beyond language, traditions or national cultures. This act requires great political will to construct common ideas and plans beyond already formed or given national realities. A successful EU in a long run, on demand of globalization process, should overcome crises and challenges that basically come from the lack of a common identity, solidarity and reciprocity and should set foundations for multiculturalism and diversity. These are approaches far from the reality that EU is living today, because Europe “that has become predominant today is very much one of exclusion and not inclusion”(Delanty, 1995). These are issues that require openness and capacity to provide solutions to political and social divisions in a way to achieve unity held under ethnic and national diversity.

“Europe needs a sense of meaning and purpose. We Europeans are the heirs of a civilization deeply rooted in religious and civic values. Our civilization today is being enriched by its openness to other cultures. What we need now is a humanistic perspective. Daily and systematically, our economic and social system must recognize the primacy of human dignity. It must ensure that all our citizens have genuine access to liberty, inter-personal communication, culture and spiritual life (Prodi 2000)”.

Conclusions

There are important challenges and cases which indicate significant crises originated from the level of common identity, values, solidarity and culture within the EU. These challenges shows that the EU needs to mature in many directions as well as to awaken its absorptive capability.

1. The Greek crises, such a debated case recently, strongly represents one of the weakest points in the European project. More than an economic crisis, it is a crisis in the EU management showing that the federal-institutional governance would be of imperative importance for the EU.

2. Leaving the Western Balkans on the periphery of its attention because of the internal endless transitions of this region but also because of the EU absorptive capability is another great weak point in the EU project. With the motto "we accept countries with consolidated democracy and economy to join because we don't want problem in the house" EU more than an open project seems to be going inertness.

3. The case of Turkey shows another EU weak point. Turkey continues to be perceived by the EU block as having a rather large population. The prejudices go until the point to perceive Turkey as the first Muslim country to join in the EU and that gives a sense of particularity. Turkey still represents a rather big country for the absorptive capacities of the EU. Although strong member of NATO, Turkey remains outside the EU for many reasons or perceptions from within the EU, which are culture, traditions, history, and religion that look different from "Christian Europe" in principle.

If a Greek exit would have happened wouldn't be clear in to what scenario EU could end up. "A return to a divided Europe of nation-states, the development of a static 'Fortress Europe'¹, or the development of a 'Wider Europe' (the latter less possible in this case) with positive relations with countries to the East, including Russia (Miall 1993; Miall 1994b). The first version would resemble to a Europe of great nation-states founders and other small European states acting as satellites or influence zones of other countries like at the times when Europe operated divided into blocks. Instead the international politic environment would need a Europe of peace, a role model for the aspiring countries and regions and a Europe acting vigorously globally, so a wider Europe in this case. At the moment "the European project is characterized by two opposing trends: one which emphasizes the importance of national identities and the right to difference; and the other that advocates the right for a common identity and to a universal culture." (Patrutiu-Baltes 2013) As soon as it would be decided upon these trends (having in consideration the fact that globalization urges for the second one), it would help EU to be a determinant factor in world politics, it would benefit to the enlargement policies and Russia would have a different approach toward EU. There are scholars who believe that a common European identity would virtually be impossible because of the ideological, linguistic differences and different identities formed in different ways, but EU project has failed until now to construct a common identity on the basis of other values. "The EU policy-makers have never attempted to construct an identity with solidarity, equality and justice being the core values. Nor is there a major external threat that could foster unification of different peoples in the region." (Svitych 2013)² The world politics is following the constructivist trends, so going back to obsolete ideologies will leave on hold an EU process precisely because of these arguments. "European History has been a common history and European identity has been present for a long time already, despite all conflicts and differences. (NIŽNIK 2000) The new context created by Europe's Integration is initiating the process of reconstruction of national identities. (Still there NIŽNIK 2000) The EU policy makers should operate according to this context and the above mentioned

¹ The term is usually used for the protection of regimes in Europe from the asylum seekers and refugees. 'Fortress Europe' thesis (Geddes 2000; Luedtke forthcoming) argues on a theoretical level that Member State cooperation on asylum and refugee matters has fostered restrictiveness through processes of 'venue shopping' (Guiraudon 2000; 2001), 'securitisation' (Huysmans 2000; Kostakopoulou 2000; Bigo 2001) and the legitimisation of 'lowest common denominator standards' (Guiraudon 2001; Lavenex 2001). On an empirical level, aspects of EU asylum and refugee policy have been criticized for undermining the rights of asylum seekers and refugees through the establishment of restrictive EU laws in areas such as 'safe third country' policy, detention and return policy. (according to Eiko Thielemann¹ and Nadine El-Enany²; The Myth of 'Fortress Europe': The (true) impact of European integration on refugee protection;(Paper to be presented at Fourth ECPR Pan-European Conference on EU Politics, 25 to 27 September 2008, University of Latvia, Riga, Latvia

² the Svitych article is a proposed response to Fukuyama's article "the challenges for a European identity". Svitych tries to challenge Fukuyama's standpoint by contrasting EU identity with that of the soviet Union
Svitych A. 2013, Why European Identity Will Never Work: Case Study 'EU Vs. USSR', <http://theglobaljournal.net>

trends. Meantime the European motto "united in diversity" and aspirations to a common European or supranational identity, as well as the expectations for Europe to take an active role globally in the future can be realized taking into account that "collective identities are social constructions"(Sulstarova 2011) The challenges the EU is facing today, at some point will need to respond to this global actuality and therefore the issue of constructing a common identity and accepting multiculturalism will require quick policy adjustments and solutions. At the moment these issues remain still envisioning matters within the EU, until that critical point will come, to turn the EU countries finally toward a supranational attitude or approach.

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