

Waiting for European identity...
Preliminary thoughts about the identification process with Europe

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The European so-called “democratic deficit” has become a major concern for the promoters of European integration¹. The French and the Dutch refusals of the Constitutional Treaty in 2005 have been mainly interpreted in this way. No-one can deny that the European Union has an increasing hold over European lives: people travel easily throughout the union; students are encouraged to spend part of their time abroad; working in other European countries has become much easier and frequent; in the Euro zone, citizens experience the Union all the time; and an increasing amount of national laws and norms are now the mere application of European decisions. As a consequence, the indirect democratic legitimacy – European leaders being chosen by democratically elected national governments – is now considered insufficient for such powerful European governance. European institutions have set up voluntarily elements of statutory European citizenship, that is, a set of new rights. But European citizens make a marginal use of these rights (Magnette, 1997; Strudel 2001, 2003): and turn out to European elections, which was always the lowest compared to other elections in countries members, keeps decreasing.

Academics and survey makers do not resist examining thoroughly the European citizenry in order to understand this apparent long-standing lack of legitimacy. The Union has created its own tool for that, the Eurobarometer surveys, which is not only meant as a research instrument, but also as some kind of people consulting tool for improving public decision. Thousands and thousands of analyses have taught us notably two important results that resist the most sophisticated statistical investigation. First, national differences remain dramatic; citizens from Spain or Italy for instance are generally much more in favour to the Union than British or Greek citizens. Within each country, elites are on the whole more favourable to the EU than working class or underprivileged people². Yet Eurobarometer surveys hardly show that attitudes towards the Union are poorly consistent. If asked, most people do answer that they are in favour of the EU, but more qualitative work shows that most people would not mention the EU spontaneously and that they still don't feel Europe as playing an important role in their life (Meinhof 2004, Favell 2005)³. Nevertheless, for about a decade now,

¹ Many thanks to my French colleagues Céline Belot, Yves Deloye, Emiliano Grossman and Patrick Le Galès, as well as to the participants of the CINEFOGO conference in Prague and more particularly, to the editors of this volume for discussion and suggestions of various drafts of this paper.

² To put this in statistical terms, that is, to keep to the terms that are provable with Eurobarometer, nation remain a very influent variable in the analysis of attitudes towards the European Union as well as education and social class; although, with appropriate data (that is, by comparing elites' with standard surveys), Liesbet Hooghe confirms the social gap (Hooghe 2003).

³ This paper is also based on a comparative research that I'm currently coordinating together with Florence Haegel (Sciences Po, Paris), Elizabeth Frazer (New College, Oxford) and André-Paul Frogner (Catholic University of Louvain) about the politicisation of discussions. We conducted about thirty focus groups in Paris,

promoters of integration as well as analysts of the European public opinion have come to refer more and more to the notion of European identity. This paper intends to question the appropriateness of this concept and to suggest ways to enhance its usefulness in the discussion of Europe's legitimacy⁴.

In the first section of this paper, I shall briefly review the development of European attitudes in terms of identity and underline the lack of conceptualisation of this notion. In the second section, I shall make some suggestions in this regard and emphasize how a more convincing concept could help us to make sense of the complex transformation of attitudes in what may become properly European identity.

Trends in the analysis of Europeans' attitudes toward their Union.

The development of an approach of attitudes towards integration in terms of European identity.

For decades, the study of the relationships that citizens in Europe used to maintain with the political system created by European integration primarily focused on the support to the integration process (Janssen 1991; Eichenberg & Dalton 1993; Franklin, Marsh & McLaren 1994; Bréchon, Cautrès & Denni 1994; Niedermayer & Sinnott 1994). Empirical indicators classically allowed to distinguish between the different components of the European system, among which the "community one", as well as between the different dimensions of attitudes, cognitive, evaluative and affective (Niedermayer & Westle 1994). For a long time, the dominant thesis was indeed the lack of masses' attitudes towards the integration process: mass public seemed very little aware of the issues at stake in this process that resembled, from their point of view, as foreign affairs. This lack of interests contrasted with elites' strong and continuous support. This configuration – masses indifference and elites' commitment – was happily named "permissive consensus" (Lindberg & Scheingold 1970; Percheron 1991)⁵

Things changed in the mid-90's, following the public debate on the ratification of the Maastricht treaty but also, as already said, as a consequence of the institutional measures concerning a European citizenship and the long-term process of integration. Based on survey data, the thesis according to which European attitudes toward the Community was becoming more substantial spread out. Correlatively, attitudes in favour to the EU were considered as potentially conflictive with former national feelings. Most of the articles in support of this thesis of a growing antagonism between support to European integration and national identities came out in the second half of the 90's, due to delays of data availability and publication (Mayer 1997; Blondel, Sinnott & Svensson 1998; Dargent 2000; Dupoirier 2000).

Bruxelles and Oxford (ten in each city) on the topic of Europe. The groups were composed of about 6 to 8 participants, socially homogeneous and ideologically diverse. The moderator writes the discussion on a board in such a way that the participants can follow it; the main questions were; what does it mean to be European? How should the power in Europe be distributed; who benefits from Europe; and are we for or against the entry of Turkey in the EU? The analysis is in progress and I cannot refer to any publication at this stage, but the points I want to make in this paper – and more particularly the fact that European identity is not yet a mass rooted phenomenon and the strong connexion between national and European identifications - were indeed very much influenced by the hundreds of hours of discussions that I have attended while conducting these focus groups. For more information about this research, visit its website: <http://erg.politics.ox.ac.uk/projects.asp>

⁴ This paper is in line with a series of analyse that I have been working on with André-Paul Frogner since fifteen years. In a way, I shall revisit in these pages the conceptual approach that we have been using all these years (Duchesne & Frogner 1994, 2002). A preliminary version of this discussion was presented in a workshop organised at Louvain by A.P.Frogner which has been published the *Annales d'Etudes Européennes* (Duchesne 2006)

⁵ Frogner's and mine first analysis is part of this context. We then questioned the notion "Is there a European Identity?" (Duchesne & Frogner 1994) and actually concluded then rather negatively

From this point, two trends coexist in European public opinion studies⁶. Part of authors goes on with the analysis of the support to European integration, mainly because they pay specific attention to the evaluative rational behind positive or negative attitudes to the EU (Gabel 1998; Hooghe & Marks 2004; McLaren 2004, 2006). For these authors, national identity is understood as an affective dimension of attitudes and confronted with the rational instrumental dynamic of interest in the explanation of support (or non-support) of further integration. Others scholars follow the path of the possible development of an affective relationship between the citizens and Europe and focus the analysis on European identity (Bruter 2004, 2006; Hermann, Risse and Brewer 2004; Diez Medrano 2003; Duchesne & Frogner 2002; Gillespie & Laffan 2006, EURONAT 2005; Risse 2003; Robyn 2005; Schild 2001).

Empirically, a clear change of indicators accompanied the growing interest in identity. The so called “Moreno” question (Moreno 2006) - do you in the near future see yourself as (nationality) only, (nationality) and European, European and (nationality), European only? – has become since 1992 a standard question of Eurobarometer surveys and replaced a former question where being European was proposed as a future possible complement of nationality⁷. It then supplanted, in the second trend analyse, other standard questions⁸. But because identity is considered a subtle notion and because the statistical relationship between indicators of European identity is quite complex, more and more questions were raised against Eurobarometer surveys⁹ and an increasing number of researchers have turned to alternative methods: introduction of experimental questions (Bruter 2005, ch.5), qualitative interview (Belot 2000; Diez Medrano 2003; Ichijo 2003), focus groups (Bruter 2005, ch.8) and Q methodology (Robyn 2005).

Relationship between national and European identities: diverse hypotheses

In parallel with their effort to measure national and European identities more accurately and despite their critics, most researchers continue to use Eurobarometer data in their research project about European identity. The analysis of the statistical relationship between indicators of national and European identities is far from simple: To summarize very briefly, statistical relationship is almost always significant in the middle term but vary in sign and intensity depending of the context (in space – between the European nations – and in time) and can even have opposite results with different indicators (Duchesne & Frogner 2002). This complexity – like the glass halfway full or halfway empty - gives rise opposite hypotheses.

Sean Carey and Lauren McLaren (Carey 2002, McLaren 06) continue to argue that these identities are contradictory, i.e. that a strong national identity tends to disrupt the development of the European identity. But most analysts today, contrary to the 90’s, support the thesis of a partially cumulative relationship between national and European identities at the individual. They suggest diverse explanatory models in order to account for this partial overlap.

Hooghe and Marks show that national identity may have opposite effects on support to European integration depending if it is exclusive or inclusive (Hooghe & Marks, 2004). Some authors focus on the way the different levels of identification interact, as do the nested identity theory (Herb & Kaplan 1999; Diez Medrano & Gutierrez 2001) or the marble cake

⁶ The distinction between attitudes and identity analyse is a dramatic simplification of a wide variety of approaches. For a more sophisticated categorisation, see Belot 2002 and 2006.

⁷ “Do you sometimes think of yourself not only as a (nationality) citizen but also as a European citizen? Does it happen often, sometimes or never?”

⁸ Questions like attitude towards a possible dissolution, general evaluation of European integration, of integration speed, of one’s country benefit. This set of question remains central in attitudes analyse, where they are frequently used to build indexes of support of European integration or European Union.

⁹ Questions which were raised as well by researchers who keep on with the analysis of rationality and integration (Eichenberg 1999)

metaphor (Risse 2003). Others presuppose the multidimensionality of the notion of territorial identity itself. Schild distinguishes between an evaluative and an affective dimension of territorial identity and considers the European level to be more evaluative and the national more affective (Schild 2001). Michael Bruter opposes a civic and a cultural dimension of territorial identity (Bruter 2004, 2005). Frogner and I supported a distinction between a sociological and a political dimension of both national and European identities (Duchesne & Frogner 2002)¹⁰. Yet all these models, including our¹¹, are too analytical and none of them gives enough consideration to the theoretical questions raised by the notion of European identity.

European identity, an insufficiently elaborated concept

On the conceptual level, as well as the empirical and analytical levels, the shift to identity gave rise to discussions; but they seem to me less convincing than the debates about measurement. One of the reasons for this flaw may be the important role that social psychology played in the matter: indeed, the first important book in the field was edited by Breakwell and Lyon in 1996 and called “Changing European Identities: Social Psychological Analysis of Change”. Not that the influence of social psychology in a field (citizens relationship with the European Union) first dominated by political sociology is illegitimate: anthropologists and social psychologists have first elaborated the very notion of identity, and more particularly of collective identity (Tajfel 1982). However, this influence may partly account for a relative unsuitability of the current understanding of European identity. The concept of collective identity was indeed developed about groups like ethnic groups, gender and class (for a recent review of socio psychological work on identity, see Howard 2000), which are quite different from the kind of group we are interested in here, that is, a political community.

The volume *Transnational Identities* recently edited by Richard Hermann, Thomas Risse and Marilyn Brewer, for instance, is clearly in line with the social psychological tradition (Hermann, Risse & Brewer 2004). Hermann and Brewer do introduce to the specificity of political identities, by comparison with social identities, and consider that it is less confusing to refer to nationalism than to nations. But a few paragraphs later, when they examine the diverse possible configurations of identities, they cast aside the specificity of political identities and deal with territorial identities, be they European, national or local, in the way they deal with social, professional or even personal (family) identities. The next chapters, where the very notion of European identity is discussed, are in line with the socio psychological tradition, in accordance with the quality of the authors – Glynis Breakwell and Emanuele Castano. They put the question of the group’s subjective borders at the core of the analysis and do not address the question of the specificity of a political group like a nation or a continental union. This theoretical framework leaves its mark on the whole book, including on chapters written by political scientists like Jack Citrin and John Sides.

This is the same with *Citizens of Europe* by Michael Bruter (Bruter 2005), who happens to be also an author of the preceding volume. In his book, whose theoretical part is not the more convincing, Bruter also seems first to differentiate between different categories of identities, including political identities. His way of doing it is first to postulate that political identities do give rise to strong affective feelings, contrary to social identities – a quite debatable statement if class, ethnic or religious belonging are considered social identities. Bruter then introduces

¹⁰ Although we have been hesitating from the beginning about the labels political and sociological (Duchesne 2004)

¹¹ I take the point made by Jean Leca in a conference organised in Paris in October 2005 by the journal *Politique Européenne*: “Les études européennes en France: perspectives et développements”. The second section of this article may be considered as a kind of late reply to him.

specificity of European and, by extension, national identities, by referring to the classical distinction between cultural and civic components of such identities. Although these categories civic/cultural (although referred to as civic/ethnic) are widely used, they have been submitted to numerous and (according to me) definitive criticism, from a theoretical as well as an empirical point of view (Brubaker 1999; Diez Medrano 2005; Duchesne & Heath 2005; Dieckhoff 2006). Lastly, Bruter, like Hermann and Brewer in the book I referred to before, forgets about the postulated specificities of European and national identities when he presents his general framework of intersecting identities at the individual level (Bruter 2005 p.18)¹².

Paul Gillespie and Brigid Laffan, in the recent *Palgrave Advanced in European Union Studies* (Cini & Bourne 2006), suggest an original concept of European identity, based on a review of research pieces on identity and on relationship between citizens and the European Union (Gillespie & Laffan 2006). They rightly elaborate the European identity concept from an historical perspective. They set European identity back in the context of territorial integration, and hence, in the long term history of nation building. They take into account a wide range of theoretical understanding of identity and suggest a bi-dimensional analytical framework: first identity may be focused on the self or on the other (the basic in/out group distinction); second, identity may be apprehended as singular or plural. They then apply this framework to the combination of national and (possible) European identities combination and suggest four hypotheses about the way European identity may find its way which they illustrate with different historical situations: the Classical Nation-State, the Post WWII West European State, the Austrian Empire, and the Multileveled Polity.

Gillespie and Laffan's concept of European identity is a great deal more convincing than the preceding ones, but two problems remain. First, they do not differentiate between the collective and individual aspect of identity, and their quick empirical tests¹³ shift from collective identity to personal identification without explanation. As a consequence, they do not make any distinction between nationalism and national identity. Nationalism is an ideological process of congruence between a nation and a State (Gellner 1983); while national identity refers to the nature of the link between people and their nation, to the subjective ties that hold them together in a feeling of shared belonging (Smith 2003; Jaffrelot 2005). Mixing the one with the other, when trying to conceptualise European identity, is confusing.

Outline of a European identity concept

A heuristic concept of European should take into account the following points.

European identity does not arise from scratch – if it does arise at all.

First, Europe, as well as nations and possibly regions and cities, are not any kind of social group. They are indeed social groups insofar as they are no natural units: they are historical constructions based notably on the in/out-group dynamic. But they have their specificities. Howard emphasizes in her review of social psychological work on identity the insufficient consideration made to politicised identities (Howard 2000) – that is, identities that relates to groups whose recognition and borders are conflictive matter. In the European and national cases, these identities are not only intrinsically politicised; moreover, they are politically constructed in a specific way, that is, a democratic way: they are meant to be political communities, that is, groups of people whose purpose is to govern itself. Hence the group

¹² Another example of the importation of identity concept from canonical social psychology and the therefore limited conceptualisation, can be found in Lauren McLaren's recent book: *Identity, Interests and Attitudes to European Integration* (McLaren 2006).

¹³ If their conceptual bringing-in is convincing, on the other hand, the empirical sections which follow are far less sophisticated than Citrin & Sides or Bruter's analyses.

boundaries are only part of their definition: the very nature of the ties between group members and the relationship between any member and the group is as much important (Duchesne 2003).

Second, European identity, if such thing (already) exists, is work in progress. The long-term roots of the European Union are under discussion; but the novelty of Europe as a political community and of a European citizenship that presupposed some kind of feeling of belonging to the Union, is universally acknowledged. A heuristic concept of European identity hence should be conceived as a process rather than an analytical categorisation of a well- (or even badly) finished object.

Third, European identity does not develop in a vacuum. It was born in a context of post-industrial societies characterised notably by growing individualism, high level of education, increasing mobility of goods, money and people but also, by strong former political communities called nations. Like Gillespie and Lafan, I think that a concept of European identity has to be closely anchored in the prior concept of national identity¹⁴.

For a heuristic concept of European identity: sorting out priorities

Fourth and last, a concept of European identity should firmly be based on the huge amount of work on identity. We know that identity is a vast and polysemous concept, which tends to be used in extremely varied and quite contradictory senses, mixing in ways loosely mastered essentialist and constructivist understandings (Brubaker & Cooper 2000). Like Charles Tilly, I consider that we should not throw the baby out with the bathwater (Tilly 2003). Identity is a demanding concept as it aims to deal at the same time with persistence and change, similarity and difference, objectivity and subjectivity, the collective and the individual level of social and political understanding of the self. Even if we cannot succeed, it is worth trying to develop a concept that tries to deal with human paradoxes. But we then need move on cautiously and sort out priorities.

Tilly, in his reply to Brubaker, explains that identities are social arrangements meant to answer the questions “Who are you? Who are we? Who are they?”. Answers to these questions take the form of stories that are highly debated by social and political groups. They never become consensual, but nevertheless exert powerful constraint on human behaviour: “Whatever their truth or falsehood by the standards of historical research, such stories play an indispensable role in the sealing of agreements and the coordination of social action” (Tilly, 2003 p.608) In cases of major identity change, we know quite well how to study the way social and political groups interact to create or transform these narratives that are identities; we know less precisely how to apprehend the change at the individual level. Although the ultimate aim is to account for the whole process – collective bargaining and institutional setting of identities on one side and the way individuals internalise them and come to see themselves as characters of these stories on the other side – I tend to consider that we do not know enough about the second process in such a case as the building of a new political community. We thus would be better off if we sort out our priorities and some of us concentrate on the second part of the process for a while. In this case, instead of dealing with European identity as such, I suggest to focus on a narrower concept: identification. Moreover, using the term identification with Europe instead of European identity incorporates the notion of process and does not anticipate the existence of a European identity. Social and political groups are engaged in a battle over the existence and the meaning of European identity. Writing today about European identity as a finished object is a way of taking side in this battle. Lastly, it leaves open the question of the very nature of the European political community and in particular, avoids making a stand on the federal or post national discussion.

¹⁴ This point is also clearly made by Juan Diez Medrano in his excellent book *Framing Europe* (Diez Medrano 2003)

Identification is a process that aims to account for the way individuals develop feeling of belonging to a group. Anyone identifies more or less intensively, more or less voluntarily and more or less consciously with a range of available groups. The availability of a group for identification is influenced by its social and political construction – the collective side of identity or Tilly’s story – and the position of the individual in the social structure. In the European case, I think that we should first get a better understanding of the processes of identification with Europe before trying to reconcile both sides of the (possible) European identity. Because Europe is meant to be a political community, identifying with it should entail some ways of considering one’s self as its citizen, that is, as a politically efficient member of the European union. And because people are already citizens of their own country, identification with Europe proceeds, although in different ways, from national identifications. Let me summarize my argument up to this point: identity change is a complex issue and current concepts of European identity do not seem convincing enough, because they are too analytical, insufficiently referred to the process of political community building and too ambitious. I suggest keeping separate for a while researches on the collective and the individual aspects of (a possible) European identity. As for the individual aspect, I prefer a more cautious concept of identification with Europe: a process by which individuals do or do not come to consider themselves as member of the (new) European political community. This process does not start from scratch: it is anchored in former similar attachments that are local, regional and most importantly, national. In the following paragraphs, I shall borrow from the literature a few hypotheses about how the shift of identification may happen¹⁵, and speculate about their interactions.

Three alternative processes that complement each other

So many pages have been published about people’s identification with their nation, my borrowing will necessarily be highly selective and incomplete. I chose three authors from quite different academic backgrounds but other suggestions could be made. My choices are: one article of Norbert Elias’s late selection of texts (Elias 1991); Inglehart’s early work on cognitive mobilisation (Inglehart 1970); and lastly the famous Anderson’s *Imagined communities* (Anderson 1983).

The first hypothetical process is the one that Norbert Elias highlighted notably in *The Society of Individuals*, that is, the consequences at the individual level of the increasing process of world integration. Elias explains how the process of “we-building” is a direct consequence of the existence of survival units, that is, social and political structures of human association which offer means of protection, both material and regulatory. The increasing process of world integration pushes these units further away from the individuals; the recurrent shift of the social unit of survival from the very local to the nation, and now the continent, results in growing individualism. Nevertheless, each unit still gives rise to we-feelings and as such, each level contributes, even if less and less efficiently, to curb the growing imbalance between I and we which characterises post-modern societies. In this respect, Europe may be understood as a further degree of cohesion and protection of the (European) people. In the middle term, it would back up its nations in the socialisation process of we-building and hence contribute to slow down the growth of individualism; although in the long term, it would contribute to aggravate the imbalance between I- and we-feeling once Europe has replaced the nations as survival units.

¹⁵ Like Gillespie and Laffan, I shall borrow from the literature about the nations a few hypotheses about how the shift to Europe may happen, except that the hypotheses they refer to deal with national and European systems as a whole while I focus on the way individuals apprehend their political communities.

If Elias was right, during the process of European integration that we experience currently, a national identifications are a powerful source of further identifications, and notably, of identification with Europe. Empirically, we should thus record significant positive statistical relationship between strong measurements of national identification with weaker measurement of European identification; the relative strength between them should evolve in the long term up to the point where European identification exceed national identification and takes up the lead in the generation of feelings of belonging.

In the 70's, Ronald Inglehart refuted the common sense thesis of antagonism between national and (future) European identification on a different basis. According to him, nations, and the feelings of belonging they give rise to, result from a process of projection of the individual into distant and abstract solidarities, built to the detriment of local and personal solidarities and generated by higher level of education. He suggested that this abstraction process of distant solidarities should increase in the near future because of the continuing increase in levels of education, and that Europe should become a next level of identification for highly educated Europeans, in a more abstract way than former nations, as a further level in cosmopolitanism, that is, in such a way that post materialist outputs – freedom, quality of life, human values, in opposition with materialist outputs like consumption goods and physical security - would become more important for Europeans than it was for nationals.

The “cognitive mobilisation” thesis leads to two further hypotheses. First, it suggests that contrary to the discourse of the promoters of a Europe of regions, or contrary to commentators who believe that decentralisation and Europeanization undermine nations together, identification with Europe is first of all a process which undermines local and regional identifications, in line with national identifications. Second, it suggests that this further step of cognitive mobilisation, because it introduces a further degree of abstraction in people solidarities, may result in some transformation of the link between citizens and the political community. This hypothesis is in line with the writings of quite a few specialists of European integration who expect the European Union to become a new kind of political community, which should give rise to a different kind of commitment, free from the nationalist tendency to xenophobia (Ferry 1998; Magonette 2003; Nicolaidis 2005).

Empirically, if cognitive mobilisation is well founded, we should expect the following result: measurements of identification with Europe and local identifications should have strong negative statistical relationship; while statistical relationships between European and national identification could tend to be rather non-significant, because they both are abstract belonging and because of the shift in the very nature of the political community from the nations to Europe.

I shall refer to the last process that I take into account in the process of identification with the European Union as “Imagined Europe” – by analogy with Benedict Anderson’s famous *Imagined communities*. Who writes nowadays about national feelings without quoting “an imagined community”? And yet the quote is incomplete as it lacks the three basic characteristics which indeed characterise the way nations are imagined: political, limited and sovereign¹⁶. The limits remind us of the centrality of boundaries in founding anthropological work on identity (Barth 1969); sovereignty reminds us of the specific nature of nations as political communities. As would-be political community and hence, sovereign entity, Europe cannot but compete with its nations in citizens identifications. If we believe Anderson to be right about the way people imagine themselves in their nation, considering the way the European Union expands (by taking hold over national governments in an increasing range of activities and giving direct rights to the people of selecting governing elites and controlling

¹⁶ The complete sentence is: “In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community - - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.” (Anderson 1983, p.5)

them), we should expect European feelings of belonging to develop in direct competition with former national attachments. Empirically, indicators of both national and European identifications should be statistically negatively related.

Explaining the complexity of identity change

In this paper, in order to better understand identity change related to European integration, I suggest developing a concept of identification with Europe as a process starting from former identification with the nations. Relying on previous knowledge of processes of identification with the nation, we can make several hypotheses about possible processes of identification with Europe. For the moment, let us satisfy ourselves with the processes taken from the authors briefly presented above (Elias, Ingelhart and Anderson), whose work on the national level is generally acknowledged.

The complication is that the three different processes suggested here, if we project to the European level what was written about the nation, lead us to contradictory hypotheses about the current relationship between national and European identifications: this relationship is thus expected to be at the same time complementary (Elias), independent (Ingelhart) and antagonistic (Anderson). Should we expect the data to arbitrate between these different processes and tell us which one is at work and which hypotheses are false? My point here is that we should not. We should on the contrary face complexity and accept that different processes are under way whose effects are sometimes (or often, in this case) contradictory. Empirically, statistical relationships between indicators of national and European identifications have indeed contradictory statistical relationship: depending on the period, the intensity of the relationship changes with the same indicator; at the same time, this sense changes according to the indicators; although the relationship and its changes is always significant.

If we accept the idea that contradictory processes are underway, then we are no longer surprised by these empirical results: depending on the context, depending on the social position of individuals, one or the other of these processes will dominate the others unless they neutralise each others effects.

Moreover, we can thus account for the two long term results reminded in the introduction of this paper, which are: remaining strong national differences as well as the social gap between elites and less privileged people in the support of European integration.

Let me summarize one more time the argument. European identity, which seems to be needed for further integration, is the meeting point of two levels of interaction. On the one hand – the collective level – the writing of narratives of Europe by groups that compete with each other, be they institutions, political organisations, academics, medias or organised actors from civil society. At least three kinds of European narratives are currently supported and compete with each other: a federalist (or intergovernmentalist), a postnationalist and a supranationalist ones (Nicolaidis 2004). Different publics in Europe are diversely exposed to each of them.

On the other hand, individuals are currently learning (or not) to become part of these narratives by completing, transforming or forgetting their current national identification.

As Juan Diez Medrano convincingly showed¹⁷, the former national narratives serves as frames of suggested European narratives and thus explain the long-term national differences as different national narratives are more than other likely to be either completed, or transformed or competed/replaced by European narratives.

As for the social gap: From Ronald Ingelhart's emphasis on the impact of education on the propensity of individuals to identify with a remote political community follows that elites, as

¹⁷ Although he refers to national political cultures. Moreover, his book deals with Spain, Germany (West and East) and the UK (Diez-Medrano 2003). Our current research project based on focus groups conducted in France, French speaking Belgium and the UK confirms pretty much his findings, a couple of years ahead.

highly educated people, are more likely than others to identify with a postnational narrative of Europe. Norbert Elias's analysis of the link between we-feeling and available survival unit suggests that people who actually experience Europe as being yet the source of power that provides them with new protection and opportunities are more likely to identify with a federalist European narrative where Europe empowers their nation. These people will again be elites, as elites are first to experience Europe as the level which empowers their lives by their extensive use of Europe's new facilities concerning studying, travelling, working and generally speaking, becoming full citizens in a broader world (Favell 2004). But other categories of people, whose professional opportunities are extended by European regulation, or whose concern (for environment, gender inequality and so on) is taken into account by European governance, will as well be likely to identify with such federalist narrative.

What is left to others, lesser-educated or who do not experience Europe as empowering their life, is an Andersonian, supranationalist narrative, where the imagined political community is imagined as limited and sovereign. What follows is that elites can possibly identify with three different kinds of European narratives, while on the other side of the social scale, most people need, in order to identify with Europe, to renounce the nation they been taught to identify with all their life (Billig 1995).

Conclusion: Looking for European identity.

Of course, this is a very rough, highly theoretical outline of the implications of the European identity concept suggested in this paper. If one accepts it though, the research agenda is clear, although quite sophisticated. We need on the one hand to identify more precisely competing narratives of Europe that have been debated in the last two decades and how individuals in Europe have been exposed to them. On the other hand, we need to specify people's relevant categories regarding the three processes at stake and to distinguish between different ways of identifying with Europe. Elites as well as under privileged/low educated people are no sociological categories. We need to figure out precisely which people are experiencing Europe as any kind of survival unit, what kind of education (in each country) dispose people to higher cognitive mobilisation and measure how strongly people are exposed to Andersonian narratives of their nation. And we need to find ways to distinguish between identifying in a postnational, federative and supranational way. Then and only then we should be in position to work out in detail how Europeans come to develop – or not! – a European identity.

Theoretically, most recent work emphasized the fluidity of identity in spite of its depth and hence the strong influence of the context when one tries to measure any identification. This cannot but be even stronger in the case of identity change. At this stage, European identity cannot be taken for granted and would benefit from cautious analysis, distinguishing between the collective and the personal aspects of identity change. We cannot be sure that European identity will ever be; but I am convinced that it is yet only work in progress.

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