

## EUROPEAN IDENTITY VS. NATIONAL IDENTITY? THE CRISIS OF IDENTIFICATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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*Abstract: What do we know about the relationship between national and European identity? While national identity is a versatile formation, European identity is connected to the growth of the European Union. This article attempts to analyse some of the qualities of the European identity in Central and Eastern Europe prior to the EU accession and afterwards. The phenomenon of identification with Europe before and after the EU accession provides medium for understanding the identity mechanisms that surround the perception of European identity. Furthermore, the article will study the way in which political contexts shape Euroskepticism. We will discuss how emergent uncertainties about the status of the European Union influence European integration and individual perceptions among national publics. The method of case study will help us identify examples of integration and conflict between national and European identity. Greece and Germany will provide two diverse examples for this purpose. The empirical information from these countries is aided by Eurobarometer data, which enabled a comparative approach within the timeframe of the union. With this article we hope to contribute to the debate by designing a framework to measure national and European identities.*

*Keywords: National identity, European Union, integration, nationalism, Euroskepticism*

### Introduction

Citizenship and national identity are the cornerstones of a democratic society. Citizens constitute State's demos, which often corresponds to a nation (Lobeira, 2012). The European identity was introduced with the development of the European Union citizenship, mainly to enhance Europeans' sense of belonging to their political community. The original European project aimed at a closer union among the peoples of Europe. Yet, the European identity has faced several challenges, starting with the notion of identity in the Member-States. Many theorists argue that for the European Union to become a feasible democratic polity its citizens must develop a communal identity (Theiler, 2012). Formation of identity in the EU goes through several channels, but has yet to generate a European public sphere. Given that national norms, motivations and perceptions make a supranational democracy possible, it would be interesting to examine such aspects in the Member-States. Existing national identifications, which prove critical to the built up of transnational political trust, cannot only offer theoretically coherent data but also provide empirical analogies and precedents.

The European Union as it exists today differs greatly from the European communities founded in the 1950s. The wish for a closer union, formulated in the Treaty of Rome, has not been left unanswered (Spiering, 2002). However, as the integration process deepened critical voices became louder. In the last decades, Euroskepticism has gained momentum in a variety of pressure groups, political parties and other organisations. Euroskeptics are critical of the European Union for many reasons, but one phrase centrally describes their arguments: 'national identity'. The aim of this article is, firstly, to examine models of European integration and how they affect the notion of national identity. The public opinion on the process of European integration is crucial to our understanding of identity issues, thus a chapter will be dedicated in this aspect. This chapter will explore relationship between

European integrations and people's feelings towards national identity. In our effort to value the power of national identity in Europe, we will make an essential reference to the historical and cultural aspects of nationalism. Given the limits of our historical and cultural extend, we will utilize the characteristics of two country case studies - Germany and Greece - to explore national perceptions of the European identity. Germany, as a founding member of the EU, played a central role in the creation of the Union, while Greece, as an early member showcased an extensive pro-European attitude. Both countries' public opinion was challenged during the Eurozone crisis and, thus, they offer interesting observations in that aspect.

Finally, special attention will be paid to the part of Euroskeptic discourse. What seems to be the problem with national identity in the European Union? We will try to develop further the identity and institutional factors on Euroskepticism based on literature on the economic crisis impact. The current economic crisis has revived some feelings of national identification, but the policy responses have mainly pushed national governments into closer economic co-operation. The crisis did not substantially bring in a source of Euroskepticism, but it has caused the most pronounced increase in Euroskepticism in the countries most affected by the crisis. National data provided by Eurobarometer will aid in analyzing and explaining public Euroskepticism.

### **Theories of European integration and National Identity**

Theories of collective identities have occupied sociologists, anthropologists as well as political scientists for many years. Collective identities feature a group of people that accept fundamental and consequential similarities, which create solidarity feelings among themselves (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). This sense of collective identity is not developed separately within the individual, but is socially constructed, which means it emerges as the intentional or unintentional consequence of social interactions. Humans developed a capacity for group identification long before the development of rational faculties. "People grow up in families and communities, and come to identify with the groups in which they are socially located. Gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality, social class and age have all been the basis of people's main identities" (Fligstein et al, 2012, p. 108). Therefore, the principle of social identity theory is that 'who one is' depends on which groups one identifies with. These connections can be tremendously powerful in shaping views towards political objects (Hooghe, 2004). The strongest territorial identities are obviously national, and we suspect that such identities limit preferences on European integration.

The relationship between national identity and European integration is double-sided. On the one hand, national identity and European identity may strengthen each other (Citrin & Sides 2004). Citrin and Sides find that "even in an era in which perceptions of the European Union as successful seemed to decline, the tendency to identify with both nation and Europe increased" (Citrin & Sides 2004, p. 54). On the other hand, opposition to European integration is regarded as 'defence' of the nation against centralized control from Brussels. But it is also true that opposition to European integration is couched as defense of the nation against control from Brussels. Carey (2002) argues that national attachment combined with national pride has a significant negative effect on support for European integration.

The first scholarly attempt to explain EU integration was functionalism, which argued that intergovernmental bureaucracies would be created to solve problems across borders

(White, 2010). Functionalism is a pioneer in globalisation and international integration, and the functionalist assumptions developed provided methodological tools that helped international relations scholars to understand European dynamics. Most functionalist theory can be attributed to David Mitrany, who was theorizing about the unification of Europe during the interwar period (Mitrany, 1975). Responses to Mitrany were split between Ernst B. Haas and Karl W. Deutsch, who expressed different ‘pre-theories’ about European integration. Haas argued that social elites such as politicians, technocrats, and business people control their own governmental systems pushing them toward or away from integration (Haas, 1968). Haas inspired the next generation of integration scholars (e.g. Joseph Nye, Leon Lindberg, Stuart Scheingold and others) to process further the idea of neofunctionalism. Deutsch, the primary intellectual opponent to Haas’ neofunctional approach, developed his cybernetic theory on politics, which focused on the flow of goods and services as an alternative for growth in Europe. The result of his theory was based on statistical data comparing volumes of national economic data (Hroch, 2012). Deutsch insisted that people remained more affected by what was going on in their own country than the events of the larger European community (White, 2010).

The development of the integration theories was aided by global politics. The political developments in the 1990s brought enthusiasm about more European integration and the concept of a pan-European identity started gaining momentum. The Berlin Wall fell and Germany reunified marking the end of the Cold War and the European Community expansion larger, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Scholars were interested more and more in the process of European integration, asked new questions, specifically about the national identity (Risse, 2003). However, as the integration moved forward, the theories that explained the integration process developed, as well, to include new parts of the process. One reason for the changing theory was the new ‘post-Maastricht’ feeling that things had deeply changed, but no common narrative existed to explain what that new feeling was (Leibfried & Pierson, 1996). The approaches included multi-disciplinary approaches of social identity, ethnic and nation studies, political, economic and citizenship studies (White, 2010).

The European integration galloped forward and neofunctionalism faded away as scholars emphasised on other aspects of European political and economic changes (Duchesne, 2008). The process of EU institution-building that would result in a new European identity was explained through a set of theories, beginning with the assumption that identity politics in Europe are complex. As theoretical contributions from the previous decade were not in accordance with the EU developments in the 1990s, new theories attempted to approach the European phenomenon. Intergovernmentalism, as a strong alternative to neofunctionalism, disproved neofunctionalist predictions about member-states willingness to compromise their sovereignty in high politics areas. However, liberal intergovernmentalist approaches, also, failed to explain how national interests can merge to allow European integration to prosper. As the new institutionalists and theorists of multi-level governance anticipated a shift in the institutional balance in a supranational direction, in 1991, the Member-States strengthened their control over the EU and the integration process through key decision-making procedures, while the Commission has been in slow decline (Kassim & Menon, 2004).

Important literature link public attitudes and the EU that are crucial to understanding how institutions shape identities and how identities shape institutions (White, 2010). Rarely

do average citizens have a direct hand in the process of integration, but this does not prevent them from forming strong opinion about how or why integration should proceed (McCormick, 2008). The politicization of national identity was tightly re-established with the Maastricht Treaty itself when it sought to create an “ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen” (Treaty of the EU, 1992, Art. A). The relative lack of democratic institutions actually linking citizens together was problematic for the EU. However, little research exists to support the idea that a European identity or European citizenship is materializing. According to Sean Carey, European identities do not seem to be far from national identities; instead national identities are influencing how citizens feel about integration, especially on an individual level (Carey, 2002). Critics argue that the impact of identity on political attitudes is neither automatic nor consistent (Medrano, 2003). The connection between individual identities and his attitudes towards integration seems to be politically constructed (Hooghe, 2004).

### **Historical and Cultural Perspectives of Euroskepticism**

The history of the European Union as a group of institutions has been, originally, dedicated in the purpose of preserving peace by all means. Nevertheless, the political processes at stake with regard to European integration today are at odds with this picture. Decision makers have had to deal over the last years with an ongoing financial crisis that has caused plenty existential issues concerning the Union as a whole. In the historiography of European integration, two basic features come to the forefront. The first, the writing of European history since 1945 and the writing of European integration are difficult to match. The second is related to the absence of a social history of European integration (Crespy & Verchueren, 2012). However, little attention has been given to political and social resistances to EU integration within and beyond national states.

Wide literature argues that the shift in sovereignty has made people more critical towards the EU. “A large part of the European population saw EU membership as beneficial, but a growing number of people became skeptical towards the EU and its policies. Negative consequences of European policies reflected upon the European Union and ostensibly increased Euroskepticism” (Klingeren, 2014, p. 2). Scepticism towards the future of the Union has visibly affected a growing number of social groups. Euroskepticism had a presence of over forty years in Europe, and it even appears on highly educated social groups, which one would normally expect to worship integration (Boros & Vasali, 2013). As a matter of fact, the share of people thinking that their country has not benefitted from EU membership has been steadily increasing in most European countries since the late 1990s. “Explanations of why people are Euroskeptic have traditionally focused on the so-called *hard* factor, emphasising the importance of, for instance, individuals’ work status, income or economic evaluations. A second and more recent stream of research takes a *soft* factor approach, which focuses on more effective identity and culturally driven predictors” (Klingeren & Boomgaarden, 2014). Chris Gifford (2008) provides an example of economic perspective on the rise of British Euroskepticism. In the early 1970s, the European strategy of Great Britain became a short-term instrument of crisis management, aiming to strengthen divisions of British capital during the crisis caused by the American hegemony and economic downturn. On the long term, the economic relationship between Britain and the European Commission

was established on the rationale that the British membership was an opportunity for international capital. To all intents and purposes, Britain has been constantly undermining the EC's capacity to manage increasing competitiveness within the world economy.

Another dominant perspective on explaining public opinions towards European integration takes cultural factors into account. This approach emerged as a result of the transfer of more sovereignty from the Member-States to the EU beginning with the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 (Olsson, 2009, p. 9). The basic hypothesis of cultural theories regards the European integration project as a threat to the nation-state and national identity (McLaren, 2005). As this literature focuses mainly on national identities, many authors hypothesize varying causes for this connection in different Member-States by accumulating public opinion data on a national level (De Vries & Edwards, 2009; McLaren, 2005; Medrano, 2003). For example, Medrano (2003) argues that the historical development of national identities is fundamental, and that British Euroskepticism comes from its legacy as an imperial state, while Spain and Germany tend to be less Euroskeptic because of their strong desire towards modernisation and because of guiltiness over World War II for Germany. McLaren (2005) provides evidence that a number of Member-States still identifies sturdily with their nationality, and regards EU as a major threat to national symbols.

At the individual level, Carey (2002) notices that feelings of national identity, expressed with national pride and fear of diminishing cultures, has a negative effect on support for European integration. Likewise, McLaren claims that the alleged threat to national culture, expressed as racist feelings towards minorities, involves a negative relationship to support for the EU, highlighting that Euroskepticism tends to be based "in great part on a general hostility toward other cultures" (Carey, 2002, p. 391). Although important for its contributions to understanding citizen attitudes towards European integration, the literature mentioned above has neglected a critical third level approach that can be applied to each of the theoretical perspectives already reviewed - the regional level. Indeed, existing theories only provide an incomplete picture of the forces behind support for the EU (Olsson, 2009).

### **Public Opinion and European Integration**

Public opinion on European integration and the rising European polity are two matters of importance. Recent studies have mapped out the attitudes of European citizens towards the Union by considering their support for membership, for specific EU institutions, and for specific policy areas. At the same time, there is increasing interest in the relationship between political organizations, and citizens' attitudes to EU policies and politics. The effect of national identity on public opinion towards European Union has been of key importance to the EU policies. The EU has gained some control over a number of policies but has faced strong opposition from hesitant national politicians. This chapter argues that public opinion is an important factor in explaining such reluctance. A hypothesis of national identity to explain public opinion, assumes that those who identify with their nation-states are less likely to support EU control of EU policies than are those who identify with 'Europe' (Luedtke, 2005). Using logistics, this factor (public opinion) is shown to be stronger than support for European integration, influenced by various variables such as economic calculation, political ideology, age and gender.

The study of European integration, explanations of the process and of its pace, and the corresponding forecasts should take into consideration two major facts: the existence of differences in support for supranational arrangement in the countries that form the European Union, and the increasing role of public opinion in determining the course of European integration. In countries like Spain and Germany, for instance, both elite groups and public support for supranational solutions have been high, whereas in the United Kingdom the opposite balance has been true (Medrano, 2003). The difference between pro-integration and Euroskeptic countries has greatly influenced the course of European integration and should be taken into account when making predictions about the future of the European Union.

Eurobarometer, a measuring tool of population attitudes in the Member-States has played a key role in the process of European integration, by providing the methodological tools to analyse the foundation of the European Union (Bennie et al, 2013). Eurobarometer<sup>1</sup> surveys in twelve long-term Member-States helped to assess of the impact of individual-level indicators, such as national pride and exclusive national identity, as well as hard factors, such as socioeconomic position and perceived financial status. In point of fact, Eurobarometer 74 (European Commission, 2011) asked survey respondents in all EU-27 whether they ‘feel European’. The majority of European respondents declared they feel European (74%), which is an increase of 3 percentage points since spring 2008. One third (32%) feels European ‘to a great extent’. Similarly, the percentage of those who ‘do not feel European’ has decreased slightly. In spring 2009, just one quarter (25%, -2 points) of the respondents said that they do not feel European. According to Brubaker and Cooper’s (2000) analysis, we should examine Europe as a category because respondents were asked whether they emotionally associate themselves with the category ‘European’. Furthermore, the meaning of ‘European’ in the specific setting was not clarified. This bears some similarity with ‘identification and categorisation’ in Brubaker and Cooper’s sense. However, interpreting ‘European’ as a reference to people, i.e. ‘Europeans’, the answer to the question could also relate to an ‘emotionally laden sense of belonging to a distinct, bounded group’ (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p. 19). This understanding is supported by the introduction to the question: ‘elements that make up the European identity’.

This interpretation becomes even more convincing when we look at the following questions focusing on perceived commonalities between Europeans. The survey continues with a series of elements representing the European identity. “In your opinion, which of the following are the two most important elements that go to make up a European identity?” (European Commission, 2011). Seven different statements were listed which could be answered on a scale of 1 ‘strongly agree’, 2 ‘tend to agree’, 3 ‘tend to disagree’ and 4 ‘strongly disagree’: a) Democratic values, b) Geography, c) A high level of social protection, d) Common history, e) Common culture, f) Entrepreneurship, g) Common religious heritage. When asked to define the two most important elements that make up a ‘European’ identity, respondents selected ‘democratic values’ (41%) above all other options. Europeans, also, rate ‘geography’ as one of the most defining features of European identity (25%). Two other features bit for third place; ‘common history’ and ‘a high level of social protection’ (24%),

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<sup>1</sup> The standard Eurobarometer was established in 1973. Each survey consists in approximately 1000 face-to-face interviews per Member-State (except Germany: 1500, Luxembourg: 600, United Kingdom 1300 including 300 in Northern Ireland). It is usually conducted between 2 and 5 times per year, with reports published twice yearly.

followed by a 'common culture' (23%). 'Entrepreneurship' is rated among the least important elements listed (11%). The last of the options rated is a 'common religious heritage' (8%). Just 5% of respondents spontaneously state that 'there is no European identity'. The features concentrate on 'objective' descriptions of Europe in terms of ideas associated with normative approaches. There are indicators related to a cultural notion of European identity on the one hand: a common religious heritage, common history, and culture. On the other hand, a number of institutional and more pragmatic ways to make sense of Europe: geography, social protection and entrepreneurship. Only one question refers to broad political ideas, namely democratic values. However, this does not create difficulty to the research on identification with Europe because a bottom-up perspective inspects individual perceptions of a 'category' rather than judging against this or that criterion (Pitchler, 2008).

Interestingly enough, according to the most recent Eurobarometer (European Commission, 2013), 12% less respondents declared they feel European (62%), while more than a third disagreed totally with the statement (37%) a percentage significantly increased since spring 2009. While the radical developments that occurred in between 2009 and 2013 are of great interest to our research, we will dedicate a particular chapter to their analysis on a later stage. Although varying, the trend - led by the absolute majority - of European citizens expresses a positive identification with Europe. As Habermas noted in 2001, the question of a European identity discusses the public and democratic 'deficit' of the European Union; the difference between the ongoing predominance of the national space as the source of collective political identification and the EU's increasing influence on Europeans' way of life (Habermas, 2001). As identity involves symbolic material for its maintenance, growth and transformation, the news media play a crucial role in the process of identity formation, considering their ability to symbolically produce certain ideas of the world and our place in it (Olausson, 2010).

## **National Perceptions of European Identity**

### ***i. The Case of Germany***

Long before the twentieth century, Germany's central position and size raised the question of how both Germany and Europe could be arranged in a peaceful and productive manner that would work for Germans, as well as for their neighbors. "We do not want a German Europe, but a European Germany": the famous quote by the Thomas Mann from the interwar period became the mantra of the German political elites after the disaster of World War II (Plate, 2013). Nowadays, to be a 'good German' means to be a 'good European' and to enthusiastically support European integration. To be a 'good European German' also means to have finally overcome the country's militarist and nationalist past and to have learned the right lessons from history (Rise & Engelmann-Martin, 2002). The political elites of the Federal Republic of Germany have thoroughly 'europeanised' the German national identity since the 1950s. This Europeanization of German identity explains to a large degree why German governments since Conrad Adenauer have supported European integration as the 'United States of Europe'. This federalist and social consensus has remained unchanged despite the radical changes in Germany's power in Europe and the world. This balance is strongly linked to the Europeanized national identity, and it accounts for the constant German support for

European integration, even though the end of the Cold War and German unification should have challenged that balance (Rise & Engelmann-Martin, 2002).

Since the Eurozone crisis began, German citizens have become resistant to taking responsibility for the debts of others with having mechanisms for controlling their spending. “With the fiscal compact and demands by the European Central Bank for comprehensive domestic reforms, Eurocrats have crossed many of the red lines of national sovereignty, extending their reach way beyond food safety standards to exert control over pensions, taxes, salaries, the labour market, and public jobs. These areas go to the heart of welfare states and national identities” (Torreblanca & Leonard, 2013, p. 1). German citizens began to see themselves as the victims of the Euro crisis. Under the fear that they will be asked to pay higher taxes or accept higher levels of inflation in order to save the euro, they questioned the European identity they wholeheartedly supported for more than half a century. The Eurobarometer shows that 56 percent of Germans have ‘no trust’ in the EU, while only 30 percent have a ‘fairly positive’ image of the EU (Eurobarometer 78, 2012). All together, the mainstream political parties all support the Euro and recent polls show that three quarters of Germans are against leaving the euro. A recent anti-Euro party, Alternative for Germany, has been set up, but is so far expected to get at most two percent of the vote in September’s general election. Germans may not like the Euro as much anymore, but that does not mean they want to leave it (Torreblanca & Leonard, 2013).

### ***ii. The Case of Greece***

Greek attitudes towards the EU have long been characterised by degrees of division, ambivalence and anxiety, in some cases. These attitudes have been an influence of the country’s “poor political and economic performance since joining the European Union (European Community, then) in 1981 are direct products of the cultural and psychological legacies of the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires, and of the inherently vulnerable, dependent, embattled and irredentist nature of the Greek national state that emerged in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries” (Bideleux & Taylor, 2002). These legacies were kept alive by national threats and populist treatment of nationalist issues, leading to an ambivalent and controversial relationship with Western Europe. Despite this, Greece has remained connected to the EU project. During the 1990s and 2000s, a pro-European ideology was predominant in Greek society, considering developed EU members as the model towards which Greece should aspire and assist in the modernisation project (Pagoulatos, 2012). This ideology was largely based upon the financial benefits Greece has gained from the EU membership. The majority of Greeks could not conceive the country’s exit from the EU, and membership was only opposed by the orthodox Communist Party (KKE) and the fascist Golden Dawn (Pagoulatos, 2012). Before 2010, when the crisis began, the EU membership was associated with economic progress and prosperity, driving society into modernity.

Since then, however, Greece has gone through severe recession, austerity measures, structural reform, and degrading bailouts. Greek citizens, who had seen membership of the European Union as a factor of socioeconomic progress, now give responsibility to the EU for much of what they face. Naturally, this experience has led to a sheer fall in Greek support for the EU: in 2007 the support was +26 percent; by 2012 it was -63 percent (Torreblanca & Leonard, 2013). The popular support for the two largest political parties, New Democracy and PASOK that have been pro-Europe has also declined, as representatives of a failed political

system. The main beneficiary of the popular discontent has been the radical Syriza parties, which opposed the austerity programme agreed with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Commission, and the European Central Bank (ECB), but however prefers for Greece to remain in the single currency rather than returning to drachma. While Greece experienced widespread civil unrest and anti-immigrant violence, the support for anti-EU parties, such as the communist KKE and the far-right Golden Dawn has also increased. By spring 2012 the Eurobarometer survey implied that 14% more Greeks see the EU from a negative perspective rather than a positive one (European Commission, 2012). Greece's Eurozone partners (especially Germany) are now responsible for subjecting the country to excessive and unfair penal austerity, and these sentiments have been seized upon by extremism and populism in the country (Pagoulatos, 2012).

The anti-EU sentiment has rapidly expanded across the countries hit by the crisis, but whether it is here to stay depends on time and on the EU flexibility. There is hope that as growth advances, Euroskepticism will weaken and eventually move away. However, the collapse of trust in the EU is a dangerous enemy to integration (Torreblanca & Leonard, 2013). Enthusiasm for the EU will not return unless sincere efforts for a systematic change takes place, in the way EU deals with its Member-States and its citizens.

### **Economic Crisis and Euroskepticism**

The Eurozone financial crisis starting in 2009 caused a great shock to the European economy and put Euroskepticism into a new perspective. Falling growth, rising unemployment and public debts are a few examples of social and political impacts that aroused a new turmoil in Europe. The old conditions for Euroskepticism were created by the alleged existence of a democratic deficit within the EU, followed by the clash of national cultures and a common European identity. The current crisis, though, was born as a result of a clash between the wills of citizens in Northern and Southern Europe (Torreblanca & Leonard, 2013). And both sides rely on the EU institutions to process their concerns.

The conflict between the centre and the periphery increased as citizens in creditor countries become hesitant in taking responsibility for the debts of beholden countries without having control on their spending. In the past, there was a mutual understanding between members that allowed EU institutions to monitor the single market and technical areas of policy, while national governments maintained their monopoly on policymaking in sensitive national areas (Schmidt, 1999). "With the fiscal compact and demands by the European Central Bank (ECB) for comprehensive domestic reforms, Eurocrats have crossed many of the red lines of national sovereignty, extending their reach way beyond food safety standards to exert control over pensions, taxes, salaries, the labour market, and public jobs. These areas go to the heart of welfare states and national identities" (Torreblanca & Leonard, 2013, p. 1). Many researchers show that there has been a steady increase in Euroskepticism since 2007. This increase became more evident in the Eurozone countries compared to the non-Eurozone countries, which was expected given the fact that the impact of the economic crisis exposed the structural weaknesses of the Monetary Union (Sericchio et al., 2013). The rising trend in Euroskepticism between 2007 and 2011 offers a variety of development patterns in the Member-States. We can distinguish between three groups of countries according to the degree of change in Euroskepticism levels involved. The most obvious growing increase in

Euroskepticism has taken place in Greece, Portugal and Slovenia, followed by Lithuania, Spain, Cyprus and Ireland. A second group of countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Spain) has experienced a modest increase in Euroskepticism. Finally, Euroskepticism has remained stable and even decreased in a third group of countries including, notably, Austria, the United Kingdom, France, Finland and Sweden (European Commission, 2011).

Taking these results for granted and the fact that levels of public Euroskepticism is influenced by the global financial crisis, we are wondering which factors are likely to be most significant in explaining that change. “Since the countries that have demonstrated the most significant rise in Euroskepticism are those that have been hardest hit by the crisis, we would expect economic factors, particularly those pertaining to the sociotropic explanation, to yield enhanced explanatory power” (Sericchio et al., 2013, p. 58). It would be expected, thus, that the importance of political factors, such as identity and trust in national institutions, would be surpassed by economic factors, such as tax regulations and salaries.

Subjective economic factors could influence public opinion on European integration, alongside objective factors. European integration, in general, is perceived by most citizens as a driving force if economic advancement, able to affect their economic welfare. The key power of European integration has been to eliminate barriers to economic exchange, facilitate mobility of capital and labor, and create a single European monetary authority. Citizens who feel confident about the economic future are likely to look at European integration in a positive light, while those who are anxious will lean towards Euroskepticism (Hooghe & Marks, 2004). Therefore, it is not surprising that public opinion on European integration has been explained through economic factors.

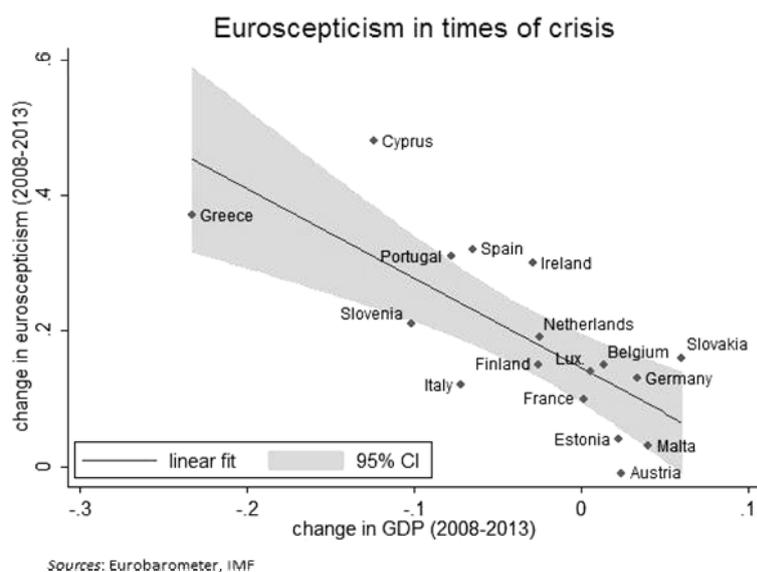
However, an analysis of the Eurobarometer results in 2011, by F. Serricchio, M. Tsakatika and L. Quaglia (2013), suggests that economic indicators were not directly involved in encouraging Euroskepticism. In contrast, national identity elements in 2007 and 2010 are interrelated with Euroskepticism. According to the results of the survey national institutional confidence has a negative impact on Euroskepticism: this means that peoples who are confident about their national political system are less Euroskeptic. That is to confirm that national institutions work as a proxy rather than a substitute of European integration (Anderson, 1998). Since national governments and parliaments are directly involved in managing the financial crisis, citizens consider them responsible for finding efficient solutions to economic problems. Thus, a low level of confidence in national institutions resulted in a high level of Euroskepticism and the opposite.

At the same time, exclusive national identity is positively correlated to Euroskepticism. This confirms Hooghe’s and Marks’s hypothesis that “citizens who conceive of their national identity as exclusive of other territorial identities, are likely to be considerably more Euroskeptical than those who conceive of their national identity in inclusive terms” (Hooghe & Marks, 2004, p. 2). As a result, Euroskepticism seems to be rooted in national characteristics and the economic crisis does not challenge this trend. To understand how the citizens feel about European integration, one needs to consider how individuals frame their national identity (Hooghe & Marks, 2004). The role of national institutional trust, however, changes across countries and there is no consistency in data.

Exploring the correlation between the global financial crisis and Euroskepticism, we came to conclude that, despite the financial crisis, economics is not the main source of Euroskepticism in the turbulent period starting in 2007. Instead, national identity and political institutions play an increasingly important role in explaining public Euroskepticism in the Member-States (Sericchio et al., 2013). The overall result indicates that people, who were more positive about their personal and their country's financial situation, were less Euroskeptic. The influence of occupational status was small, while a relative improvement of the country's economic situation led to less skepticism. More notably, exclusive national identity increases Euroskepticism, while national pride shows the opposite effect. The "difference can be explained by the fact that an exclusive identity creates opposing attitudes toward 'others' (hence, the EU), whereas national pride can more easily co-occur with European pride" (Klingeren & Boomgaarten, 2014).

Since 2010, Euroskepticism increased in all but one Eurozone country (Austria). The EU and Eurozone crises had an impact in shaping public opinion, as the relationship between economic adversity and public opinion became stronger and stronger (ISPI, 2013). The following graph shows the opposite relationship between national GDP growth and the change in Euroskepticism between 2008 and 2013. It is noticeable that countries where GDP was reduced the most, Euroskepticism increased the most.

According to the graph below, confidence dropped nearly 95% in the countries that received EU financial help (Ireland, Portugal, Cyprus and Spain), which implies that national public opinion leaned towards Euroskepticism more than even economic conditions could explain (ISPI, 2013). It is likely that bailout packages came to these countries with too many holds barred, thus generating impressions of interference from Brussels. Interestingly, Greece contradicts this trend being the only country that received bailout money from other Eurozone countries, while lying below the regression line. On the opposite, Germany's public opinion became a little more anti-European than what GDP could explain (nearly 3%).



Lastly, Italy remained controversially righteous by retaining the anti-European sentiment in low levels, while her GDP shrank by 7% during the past few years. These random exemplary data cases above reconfirm our argument that Euroskeptical sentiment cannot be solely explained in economic terms. While many scholars have explained preferences over European integration in terms of its economic consequences, it is arguable by the data collected that national characteristics – notably national identities – are more determining aspects of Euroskepticism.

## Conclusions

This article has looked at the relationship between national and European identities, in correlation to the public sentiment towards European integration. In particular, we questioned whether national identity had a dominating role over the alleged European identity, and how determining it has been in the context of Euroskepticism. We examined the contribution of theories of European integration and national identity in the literature, to conclude that European identities are interrelated to national identities and thus national aspects of individual identities are important in interpreting the level of European integration. Furthermore, the study of historic and cultural factors of European integration suggests that national pride and fear of eliminating culture has a positive correlation to Euroskepticism and negative impact on European integration. Both from an historic and cultural point of view, the case studies of Germany and Greece provide us with reverse examples of the nationalised construction of European identity.

Moreover, confidence in political institutions proved to play a key role in Euroskepticism; trust in national political institutions is negatively correlated to Euroskepticism, while by contrast confidence in European institutions goes side-by-side with the support for European integration. Euroskepticism has increased since 2009 in the EU-27. However, the hypothesis that there is an association between Euroskepticism and economic variables is not confirmed by our analysis. It is possible that the Eurozone financial crisis has amplified this trade-off effect between national and EU institutions. The crisis did not bring economics back as the most important source of Euroskepticism. Instead, it has confirmed the trends according to which national identity and political institutions play an increasingly important role in explaining public Euroskepticism (Serricchio et al., 2013).

The analysis suggests that Euroskepticism is mostly related to national contexts. Contrary to pro-economic analysis, more income inequality is associated with less Euroskepticism in Western EU countries, while there is no association of financial aid with trust in EU institutions in Eastern EU countries. Negative financial expectations are associated with more Euroskepticism, while individuals in Eastern European countries see the EU as a chance when their financial outlook is gloomy (Ritzen et al., 2014). The results also suggest that the levels of integration are not exclusively related to national identification, but it is negatively related to patriotism, and ethnic conceptions of membership in the nation (Ariely, 2012). An examination of alternative explanations suggests that European integration has an impact on national identity, as well as the opposite. This conclusion puts the phenomenon of economic crisis into a new perspective concerning support for European integration, and deconstructs the dependence of Euroskepticism on economic indicators.

This article leaves open for future research and theoretical discussion the question of the actual implications of a European identity. Considering that national identity represents, to great extent, naturalised common-sense knowledge, it seems vital that the European identity

preserves a ‘delicate’ nature that does not threaten the variety of voices and views that are distinctive of Europe. Facing and understanding the uniqueness of national identities is a precondition for promoting a pan-European identity that will embrace these cultural images and features. “Shaping a cultural identity that will be both distinctive and inclusive may yet constitute the supreme challenge for a Europe that seeks to create itself out of its ancient family of ethnic cultures” (Smith, 2001, p. 76).

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