

THEMATIC ARTICLES – IDENTITY AND MULTICULTURALISM

European Identity between Ethnic and Civic Identities

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Abstract. The European identity is not a reality, but a necessity for a stabile future of the European political construction. The democratic deficit problem results from the fact that the European project was conceived as a top-down type of action. Its legitimization is however a bottom-up process. For this reason, the institutional project needs to be supported by an ideological project for a European identity. There are two ways, two different patterns for the second charge: the ethnic-cultural identity or the civic identity. Each has his advantages, but also disadvantages. This paper analyzes the results of one sociological research among young Romanian students.

Keywords: *European identity, legitimization process, civic identity, ethnic identity*

This paper has as object the relationship between national and European identities. In the present days, there is a great interest among the political scientists for this new form of collective identity, the European, and for the relationship with the ancient one, national identity.¹ This interest is motivated by

¹Some authors and titles will be suggestive: Jeffrey T. Checkel, Peter J. Katzenstein (eds), *European Identity*, C.U.P., 2009, Senem Aydın-Düzgit (ed), *Constructions of European Identity*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, Paul Bayley and Geoffrey William s(eds), *European Identity. What the Media Say*, O.U.P., 2012, Furio Cerutti, Sonia Lucarelli (eds), *The Search for a European Identity. Values, policies and legitimacy of the European Union*, Routledge, 2008, Catherine Guisan, *A Political Theory of Identity in European Integration. Memory and policies*, Routledge, 2012, Inés M.ª Gómez-Chacón (ed.), *European Identity. Individual, Group and Society*, University of Deusto, Bilbao, 2003, David Michael Green, *The Europeans: Political Identity in an Emerging Polity.*, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2007, Marion Demossier (ed.), *The European Puzzle: The Political Structuring of Cultural Identities at a Time of Transition*, New York: Berghahn, 2007, Michael Bruter, *Citizens of Europe? The Emergence of a Mass European Identity*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, Neil Fligstein, *Euroclash. The EU, European*

many factors, economic, political, cultural and social. But, there is a European identity and why it is so important? After David Michael Green, this importance of European identity is justified not only because he link its existence to the ongoing success of the European integration project, but also because it is vital to a conceptual refinement of integration studies. Green further insists that European identity matters because “it is, at the end of the day, the only true preventative for war,” arguing that the existence of a collective “we” makes it impossible to identify “others” against whom wars can be waged. Green claims, again, that European identity “represents something substantially different from that which has heretofore been observed in the world”², and positions European identity as a having the “potential to be to postmodernity what nationalism was to modernity”³. Finally, his conclusions are that a European identity does exist; that however it is not a mass phenomenon; that socioeconomic factors, cosmopolitanism, gender and political attitudes (postmaterialism, general attitudes towards Europe) offer the best explanations of European identity; that European identity is most often associated with an instrumentalist attitude and ‘cognitive calculation’⁴ rather than emotional affection; and that this identity, to the extent that it exists, is relatively ‘deep’ in that citizens are willing to make sacrifices (both in terms of tax and life) to levels that are lower, but not that much lower than the nation-state.⁵ But Green let untouched the question what is “identity” and how we can define the collective identities. For this reason, in the first part of my paper, I will examine some way of defining identity in general, the collective identity in special.

The central empirical tool of measuring European identity is considered the Eurobarometer. Some authors⁶ have express some methodological reserve for the relevance and he proposed other ways of measuring. For this reason, my empirical analysis is based on a questionnaire inspired by this research.

Finally, in the third part, I make some conclusions on the topic.

Identity, and the Future of Europe, O.U.P.,2008, Lorena Stuparu, *Romania’s European Identity between Substantialism and Conventionalism*, Revista de Științe Politice. Revue des Sciences Politiques, ns. 37-38, 2013

²op.cit., p.6.

³.Idem,p.16.

⁴ Idem, p.129.

⁵We can see that the existence of European identity and his importance are strong related with his content.

⁶Richard Robyn, *The Changing Face of European Identity*, Routledge, 2005, p.17.

Talking about identity is very difficult because of ambiguity of the very concept. What is identity? There are many meanings of the term, some of them are in contradiction one another. Logical identity means stability and circularity (identical means unchanged with itself). Empirical identity is conceived as a rapport between two or many objects which suppose some common characteristics: twins are identical in some respects etc. At this level of empirical identity we talk about individual(s): that is real objects with observable properties which we can compare one another and we can conclude they are or are not identical. But in the case of empirical identity even we speak of identity for the same object (temporal identity) we suppose a partial identity, that is some properties are identical, but others are not. Identity coexists with difference in a tacit manner. Logically this means a weakness of the concept, because identity and difference are polar concepts. This weakness is more marked when we pass to collective identity, which is when we speak about the collections of objects which own some common properties. In social sciences, we can speak about "identity" only with this very weak meaning as common resemblance from a particular point of view. Even this concept is questionable, because it is very difficult to state if these common resemblances are important or are not. The ancient logical vision about identity thinks that these common properties are essential for the object, for what it is and that all the differences are non-essential for what is the object in itself. It is what we can name the vision of „red thread”.⁷ The modern epistemology, after Ludwig Wittgenstein has refuted this vision and has replaced it with a different one, the vision of the „wool thread”, that is empirical identity is not unchanged or unique: like the thread of wool, it is composed by many little fibers intertwined⁸. Identity, in the classical, essentialist sense, is replaced by „family resemblances”⁹, that is there is no common property, essential or not, which were present to all members of the one class. That is, identity is not one, but many: like in a photo family, we can state some common resemblances between the mother and the children and other common

⁷This expression is originated in the fact that British Royal Navy had specific lines for his ships, with a red thread intertwined for discouraging the thieves and for an easy identification. The red thread is what permit to identify a line as „the line of his majesty”.

⁸ Here is the citation from Wittgenstein: *we extend our concept of number as in spinning a thread we twist fiber on fiber. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fiber runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibers.* (*The Brown Book*,§67)

⁹*Familienähnlichkeit* in German.

resemblances between the father and the children and even some common resemblances between the adults (mother and father) or between the children (boys and girls). When we look at the family photo we see not the common property of the all members of this group, but this „familiarity“, „family resemblances“, that is the „common differences“ rather than the „common resemblances“. This ultimate notion of identity is at the opposite of the classic one. For this reason, we think that is necessary to express clearly about what identity we talk, that is more about what notion of identity we represent than what is really “in the object”. Many empirical research rest on classical epistemological vision and for this reason, the meaning of the research can be affected by this epistemological frame.

For this reason, we can talk about what is common for EU only in a metaphoric way. Ontologically, there is no reason to speak about an essence, national or European. But this no means that we must to give up this notion, but only to quit the idea that “identity” means “have something original in common”.

Another way to treat the subject is empirical and more constructivist: identity is defined essentially by belonging: we are human because we belong to the human race¹⁰. In this way, what define European identity, like national one, is the belonging to EU or nation-state. In this way, also, we are not Europeans, but we become Europeans. Like nationality, European-ity is a historical construct, a by-product of treaties, negotiations, and institutions. This other way permit to view identity as plural, same individual can belong to many different class: the European citizenship express exactly this compatibility between national and European identity. More, only if you are a citizen of a nation-state member of EU, you can be European citizen. Otherwise, the national identity is the necessary and sufficient condition for assuming European identity.

We can see now that there are two different ways of thinking identity and that they are divergent and for that reason we cannot agree with Lorena Stuparu, when she say that “essentialist and constructivist visions of identity are complementary, and in this respect the main methods used could be qualitative comparativism, phenomenology and philosophical hermeneutics.”¹¹ We must quit the essentialist approach for another more empirical. For this reason is imposed an empirical research.

¹⁰ Here, “race” is defined in empirical-descriptive sense, as a collection of individuals.

¹¹Op.cit., p.17.

Why this specious discussion about identity? Mainly, because national identity was (and is commonly) conceived in an essentialist way, in the meantime European identity is viewed more as a political-institutional construction; ontologically speaking, national identity is viewed as plain (eventually biological-anthropological) reality and the European identity appears as a "candidate to existence", challenger to reality price. Neil Fligstein present the political consequences of this approach:" When applying the model of national identity formation to the possibility of the emergence of a European identity, one has already bought into the notion that the endpoint of European economic integration is to produce a nation-state. This idea is currently at dispute in Europe, among not only political elites but also the citizens of Europe. The opponents of a European state argue that the EU is not a proto-state but instead an intergovernmental organization focused only on issues of joint benefit to nation-states. They also argue that for a European nation-state to come into existence there would have to be Europeans, i.e. citizens of Europe, who would want this transition to occur."¹² In the same line of thought, he suppose that "a European identity would precede the emergence of a European state or instead be an effect of its emergence, depends on the process of whether or not, and to what degree, the member-state governments pursue political integration."¹³

In the few words, the main reason is the fact that the majority's opinion about identity is essentialist and the classical ethnic identity is the paradigm of thinking European identity. For this reason, an identity founded only on formal (juridical) belonging appears to be unreliable. Tzvetan Todorov underline this aspect: "People have therefore wondered whether the political action of the EU might regain a bit of its momentum by emphasizing and reinforcing its cultural (or "civilizational") identity, with culture becoming the third pillar of European construction alongside of the EU's economic, legal, and political institutions. People moreover hope that this cultural identity might provide the moral or emotional force lacking elsewhere. Knowing that today in Europe it is easier to build a consensus on the subject of great cultural monuments than on administrative regulation or economic decisions, people imagine defining this identity to be an easy task."¹⁴ In this line of thought, appealing to Paul Valery's definition, he "call

¹²Op.cit., p.124.

¹³ Idem,p.124.

¹⁴Tzvetan Todorov, *European Identity*, *South Central Review*, 25.3,2008, p. 3.

European..., those peoples who over the course of their history have let themselves be shaped by three major influences, those symbolized by Rome, Jerusalem, and Athens. From Rome comes the empire, with the organized power of a state, law and political institutions, and citizenship. From Jerusalem, or rather from Christianity, Europeans inherited subjective morality, self-examination, and universal justice. Finally, Athens gave Europe the love of knowledge and of rational argumentation, the ideal of harmony, and the idea of humans as the measure of all things. Valéry concluded that whoever claimed this threefold heritage could justly be considered as European.”¹⁵ This definition is, in the same time, too narrow and too large for what we mean by European identity: too narrow, because there are some parts of the continent (especially the Nord) which, in ancient times, have no influence of Athens or Rome. For this reason, can we conclude that the Danish, the Norwegian or the Finnish are not European? Too large, because there are many peoples outside the European continent which support ancient cultural influence of all three cultures. For this reason, can we call the Syrian, the Turk or even the Persian European? If we examine the values, we can see easily that they are universal, not specific to European culture: any modern democratic state assume these values and we can call, from this point of view, European states like U.S.A., Japan or South Africa.

Searching cultural unity inside European continent, Todorov is constrained to conclude that: “...diversity takes precedence over unity. The idea of constituting one common, immutable European cultural canon is untenable. The project of the EU is not to constitute a European state or a European people, but rather to unite those that already exist. On the other hand, on the level of values, the European tradition is dissolved in universality. The search for an irreducible core turns out to be problematic in itself.”¹⁶ Finally, he arrive at this final point: “My hypothesis would be as follows: the unity of European culture resides in its manner of handling the different regional, national, religious, and cultural identities that comprise it by granting them a new status and taking advantage of this very plurality. The cultural identity of Europe does not lead to wiping out particular cultures and local memories. It consists not in a list of proper names nor in a repertory of general ideas, but in the adoption of one common attitude in the face of diversity.”¹⁷ We

¹⁵Op.cit., p.4.

¹⁶Op.cit., p.6.

¹⁷ Op.cit.,p.7.

can see that his conclusion is negative: there is no common (European) traits or ancestors or values. Only “a common attitude in the face of diversity”, that is tolerance. Again, we can see that multicultural states like Canada or U.S.A. correspond to this new definition. Todorov cannot avoid the similarity, the comparison with USA: “The United States is inhabited by an even more heterogeneous population than that of Europe, but on the level of foreign policy the United States, contrary to what is the case in Europe, forms a single state, a nation-state.”¹⁸ We can respond that EU is a political solution exactly to this multiplicity of nation-states and, for this reason, a single nation-state, like USA, can be the future of the political Europe. The problem is not the political form, but the cultural identity of the European peoples. The fact that, actually, EU is not a nation-state, like USA, that not means that it cannot become in the future. Ethnic homogeneity is not a condition for becoming a nation-state for USA, neither for EU.

My research was breakout by this final assertion of Todorov: “The young Europeans of our time have a hard time imagining that these countries, among which they circulate so freely, could have gone to war with each other in the recent past, and they tend to project this situation over the rest of the planet.”¹⁹ Neil Fligstein also, consider that young intellectuals are more attracted by European project than other social categories. He reasonably assert that : “In order for a European identity to emerge, one must consider which national groups are the most likely to interact with one another on a regular basis and thereby produce bonds with people from other European societies, bonds that suggest that these people are more alike than different and hence, Europeans.”²⁰ He point out here: “Young people who travel across borders for schooling, tourism, and jobs (often for a few years after college) are also likely to be more European. Educated people who share common interests with educated people around Europe, such as similar professions, interests in charitable organizations, or social and cultural activities such as opera or art will be interested in travel and social interaction with people in other societies.”²¹

What think the young Romanians about European identity? There is something they call “European”? What they think about the relationship between

¹⁸ Idem, p.12.

¹⁹ Idem, p.14.

²⁰ Op.cit., p.125.

²¹ Idem, p.127.

European identity and national identity? There is a future for EU? How is look-like?

This questionnaire was applied to 62 subjects, 32 collegians from College of Fine Arts from Timisoara and 30 students from Faculty of Political Sciences, Philosophy and Sciences of Communication. This questionnaire is intended to measure three dimensions:

1. the relationship between national identity and European identity;
2. the personal attitude, in terms of benefices and costs to the European identity;
3. What future is viewed by each subject for this identity?

The first item was suggested by another research²², larger than mine, which tended to know if the citizen of the UE think the European identity in classical terms (cultural, ethnical, essentialist) or in new terms (more constructivists, civic and pragmatically).

The departing point was an example²³ from Robyn research which I tested on my students.

Rank the following statements in order from the one (1) MOST characteristic of you, to that (4) LEAST characteristic of you:

- A. *I think of myself as a European first, then my own nationality next. I feel I am a citizen of Europe more than of my own country.*
- B. *I want a Europe of nation states that are as politically and culturally different as they are geographically diverse.*
- C. *Adopting a single European currency will be difficult but necessary for my country.*
- D. *I may obey laws, but I don't feel especially patriotic.*

I was curious if I can classify the results after the taxonomy adopted from Charles Pentland and proposed by Robin for this questionnaire. Pentland classify examining the various theoretical position on integration in Europe, described two as predominant: the functionalist (a primarily economically-derived term that has later been better labeled as supranationalist in the EU literature) and the pluralist. The supranationalist stance correspond largely to what we can designed as a full acceptance of European identity and the pluralist stance correspond to also to what we can designed as a moderate acceptance of European identity. If the subject prefer A before B, then he is supranationalist. If he prefer B before A, then

²²Richard Robyn (editor), *The Changing Face of European Identity*, Routledge, 2005.

²³Op.cit., p. 233.

he is pluralist (nationalist).

The second item I introduced because I was unsatisfied by the fact that another research has no means for control on the results at the first point. There is no hypothesis about what determine adoption of one or another position in identity problem. My second concern, hypotheses that there is a causal relation between the evaluation in terms of costs/benefices of the European identity and the view about the content of this identity.

The third dimension is intended to make difference between what it is and what will be (present/future), between what we judge as „reality” and what is “possible” (desirable). I introduce this dimension for two reasons: it is important to make difference between an attitude of acceptance of this identity like a destiny, even you don’t like it, because „this is the situation now” and the belief about the accomplishment of this project. Many Romanians judge EU as a short term project, necessary only now, but not necessarily on the long term. 2. How is viewed, politically and culturally, this identity? How, in the case of adoption, is managed his relationship with national identity? For this reason, this item comprise two separate questions: the first concern the definitional values, if exists, of the European identity, the second concern the future, in 50 years from now, of the Europe. The first question propose some values common for EU members: diversity, democracy, soft power and no common value. The second propose some political patterns for the future EU state: USA federation, German federation, Swiss confederation and a Europe of nation states.

Costs/benefits analysis

This item was open question: the subjects was demanded to write, at most²⁴5 advantages and 5 disadvantages associated with the EU admission. The quota of responses to this item was different: for benefices, 40%, for costs 30%.²⁵ For simplification, I ranged the responses in 5 classes: economy, international politics, cultural/national, social and institutions.

Benefits

²⁴The majority of subjects formulate 3 advantages and 3 disadvantages.

²⁵ There is a less motivation for disadvantages than for advantages of European identity, I think.

- Economy: European funds, work mobility, economic aid, jobs, financial aid, economic development.
- International politics: security, better external politics, better international image of Romania, political support, military(defensive) support, soft power, EU prestige.
- Cultural/national benefits: Romanian culture promotion in EU, cultural diversity, cultural exchanges, better Romanian image, positive values, respect for Romania, ethnical diversity, European citizenship, tolerance.
- Social benefits: free movement in EU states, ecological interest, ERASMUS program.
- Institutions benefits: democracy, integrity, corruption reduction, administration enhancement.

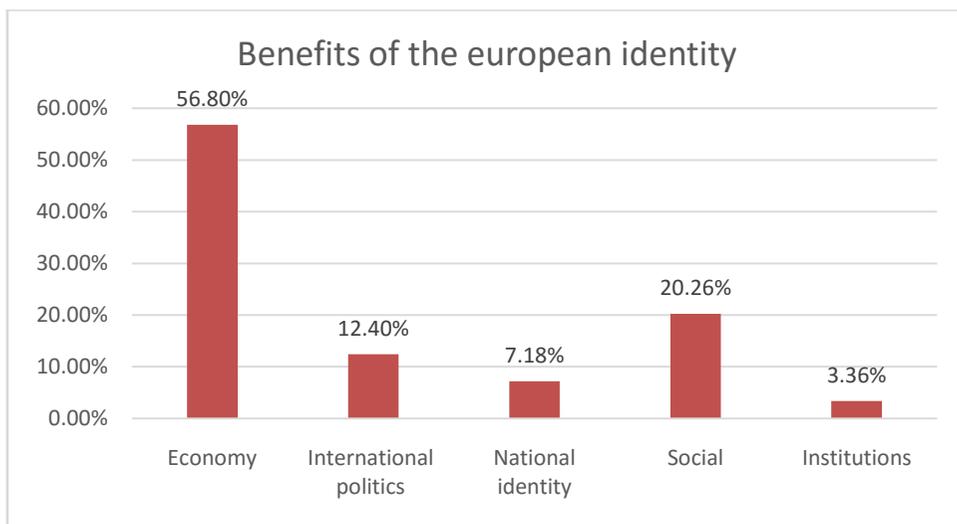


Table 1

We can easily notice that economical benefices are on the first place for the majority of subjects. On the second place comes the social benefices. The last place is occupied by the institutional benefices. Here, I think, will be necessary a discussion, because the institutional changes are, in fact, more important and bigger than economic or social ones. One reason for this lack of importance can be the fact that economic changes are more direct effects on our life than the institutional ones. On the other hand, we will see in the analysis of the costs, institutional benefices are reduced by the costs implied.

Costs

- Economic costs: bigger prices, financial pressure, euro adoption, economical domination, economical dependence, euro adoption, national debt, European competition
- International politics: limitation of the extra-European cooperation, tensions with Russia, soft power, globalization
- Cultural: decline of nation culture, European tolerance,
- Social costs: criminality, migration in other European countries
- Institutional: European legislation imposition, privatization, standards too high

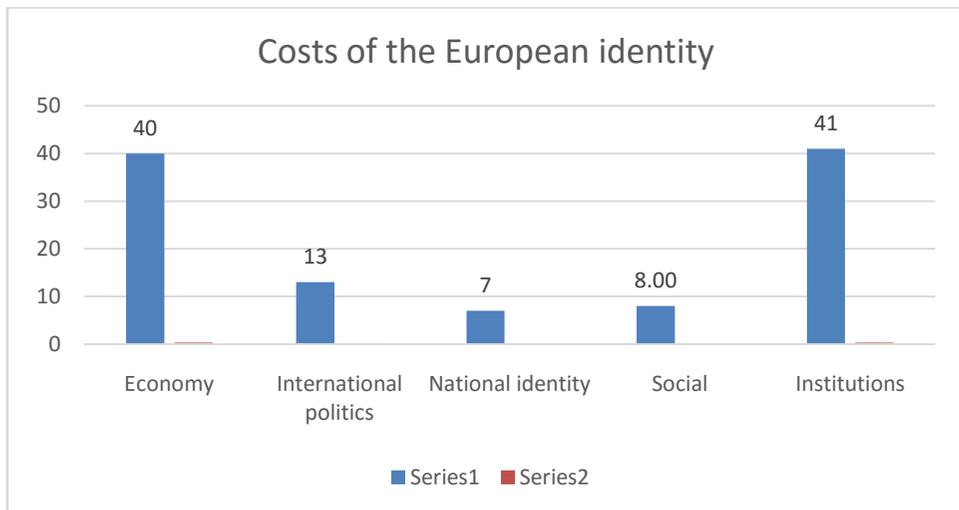


Table 2

From this diagram, we can see that institutional and economic costs represent $\frac{3}{4}$ from the total of disadvantages envisaged by the adoption of the European identity. The attitude is paradoxical, because the subjects judge the economical domain as being, in the same time, advantaged and disadvantaged by this new identity. The economic costs, on the other hand, by difference of the institutional ones, does not affect the importance of the economical benefices. In other words, the young Romanians are most receptive to the economic changes, despite the costs supposed, because of bigger valorization of advantages, in the meantime, considering disadvantages carried by the institutional changes more important than advantages.

Cultural diversity, but political homogeneity

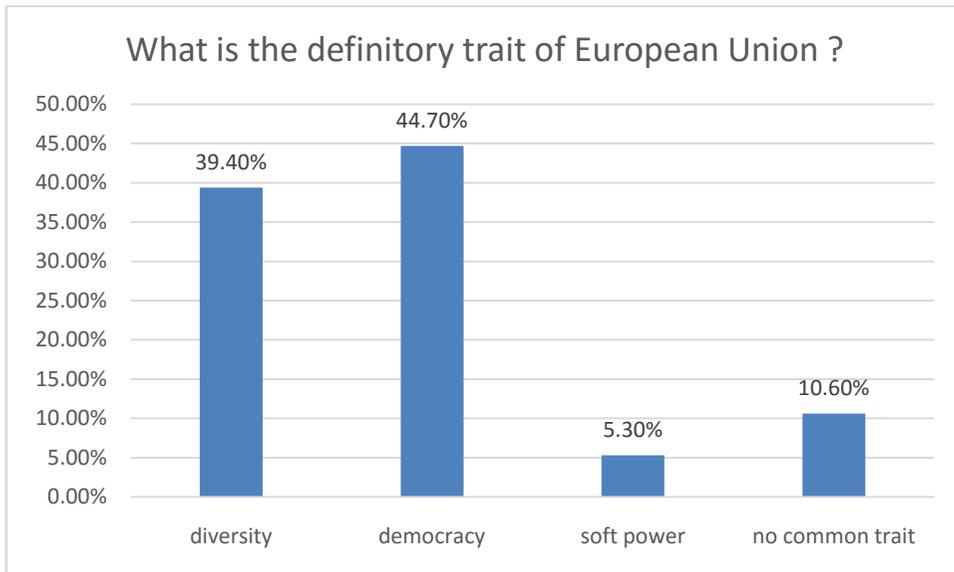


Table 3

We can observe that the first two values, diversity and democracy, collect more than 80% from the total. Only 5 young men (10%) consider there is no common value for the EU members. The majority is focused on the first values and the difference between them is the importance of democracy as an identity value: despite the motto of the EU and the theoretical effort to conceptualize this identity as diversity, the young Romanians prefer democracy. This option means, I think, a constructivist view about this identity, more political than cultural. Democracy is a pure political value, which may fit with a nationalist (ethnic) view. Soft power is less preferred by two reasons, I think: 1. it concerns international politics – and for many Romanians NATO rather than EU represents our identity. 2. Soft power is a very technical (theoretical) concept, many don't know what it means.

If we compare the results of these two items, we can see the coincidence between the subjects who see no common trait for EU members and the subjects who think that EU has no future (10%). There is one person only who thinks that even has no common trait for this identity, EU will survive in 50 years.

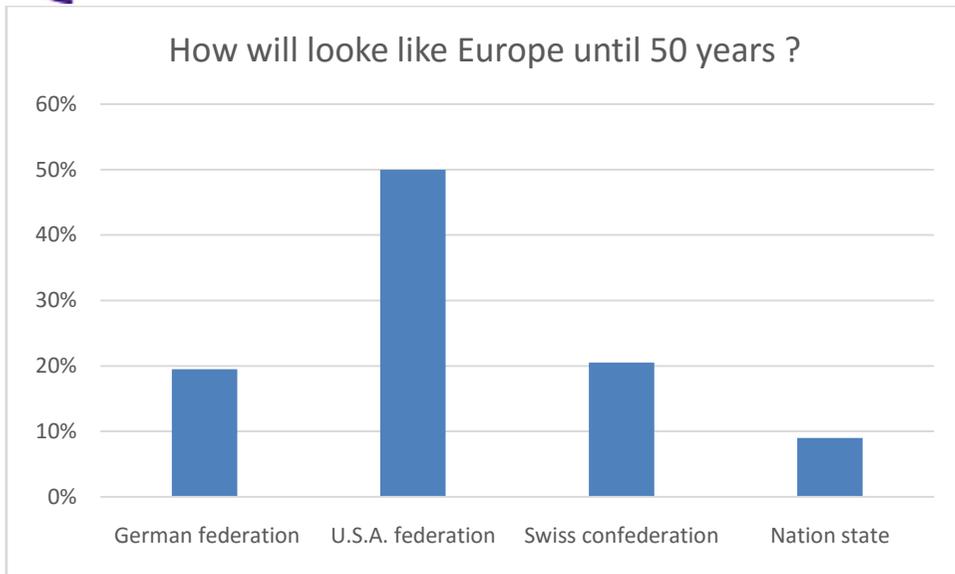


Table 4

I want to discuss this enormous option for American federation and his particular significance: the German federation is more European than the American federation. The difference between two discover how is conceived this identity: in what consist this attraction for American state? The presidency, in other words, the personalization of power. In German federation, the prime-minister is the most powerful politician, the president, elected by the parliament, has a symbolic role. For this reason, Germany is more close to a parliamentary federation than a presidential one. But this view is only political, not cultural, because there is no past form of this presidential federation in Europe (even for short time²⁶). The federal system represent the future political system for Europe, for 70% from responders. Only 20% see the confederation as a political system and the situation from the past (the Europe of nation states) is possible for only 9% for responders. What is specific to a semi-presidential regime? For the Romanians, at the executive level, the empirical fact that the president control the activity of the prime-minister. The advantage is that one politician legitimated by direct election (the president) can balance, al executive level, the power performed by other politician with a weaker legitimacy (the prime-minister – elected by the parliament). There is another reason, I think, for this choice: there is a big difference between Germany

²⁶ France was not a presidential federation, but a presidential nation-state.

(very homogenous from ethnical point) and Europe, the latter sharing with USA the ethnical heterogeneity: the formal (political) unity must counterbalance the cultural diversity.

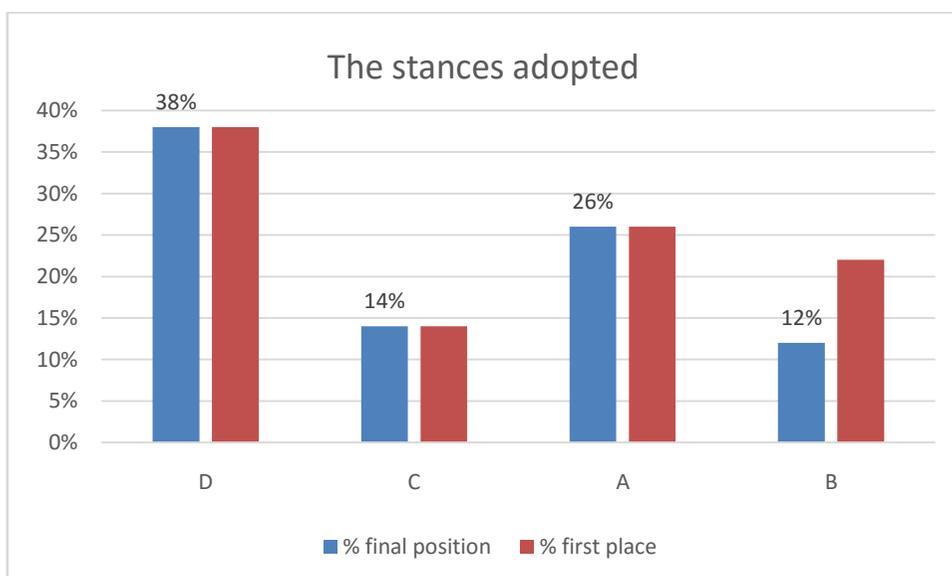


Table 5

This classification is the most difficult to interpret for many reasons: 1. A certain ambiguity, because there is no common subject for all sentences: some concern the subject, his will (I want...) or his personal attitude (respect of the law), others are more objective; 2. Some sentences are about what must be, others about what it is; 3. There is some ambiguity in the same sentence between what I do and what I feel (I respect the law, I'm not (feel) so patriot).

All this ambiguity makes the choice more difficult, because each subject thinks each sentence or part of the sentence separately. The advantage is also important: we can capture the tension between these two identities, national and European.

This ambiguity is easy to note in the case of the most preferred sentence: I respect the laws of my country, but I'm not so patriot. The first part is a factual sentence, the second is a self-evaluation. Or, you can be a nationalist even you do not think about yourself that you are so, this is the ambiguity of the sentence. You are nationalist just for the reason that you think in these terms. The intention of the authors was different: they want to discover those subjects who adhere to an

ethnic version of national identity: the respect of the laws=love of the country. The final meaning of the sentence is that civic national identity is not national identity. But I think that the subjects choose this sentence for the same reasons like the authors propose it. For this reason, I think that the meaning of this choice is not to underline a tacit high standard of national identity, but to identify an explicit attitude. In this sense, the last part of the sentence must be interpreted in an explicit way: I assume that I'm not so patriot, because the patriotism means more than respecting the laws. It is a solution for affirming national identity without conflicting the European one. On the second place comes the Europeans, with 26%, after they come the supporters of C stance, the constructivists, and finally, the nationalists represent only 12% from the group.

Finally, the interpretation of the results look that, for the young Romanians, there is no tension between national and European identities, even there is an essentialist vision about national identity. The first is cultural, the last is political. One can be affirmed without affect another. Young Romanians choose to refuse assume that one comes first and another second, because they are different concern. Only 26% assume overt the European identity. For this reason, the sentence D is preferred in first place by 38% from responders. His support means that European identity is conceived as a civic-political identity, like the professional one: we are professors because of the benefices of this professional identity, not necessarily by nature.

After this discussion, we can conclude that:

National identity still present in self-perception of the young Romanians. Even if they are aware about the importance of the European construction and belonging of our people at this new identity, the last still something strange. European civic identity (political institutions and values) is perceived distinctly from the cultural one. Economics is not so important in adoption of European identity, it is more a source of anxiety related to this new identity.

Cultural identity still the core of the national identity, but the youth think that political identity is more important than cultural one: political unity of the Europe is preferred to nation state. This last point is very important for the future of EU, because it is very favorable to a strong political structure: a federation with a strong executive power (presidency). There is a weak, but favorable perception of the European citizenship as the core of European identity.

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