



IDENTITY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Hakan CAVLAK

Gölyaka Vocational School, Düzce University, Turkey

Abstract: A lively political and academic debate has emerged about the normative viability and the empirical possibility of a collective European identity and how it relates to national identities. The debate is directly linked to the controversy about the democratic or legitimacy deficit of the European Union (EU). There is general agreement that modern democracies rely upon the diffuse support of their citizens in order to gain legitimacy which is necessary to ensure compliance with inconvenient and costly norms and rules. Collective identification with a polity provides one source of diffuse support for political systems. The EU is no exception. This paper tries to make sense of the empirical and theoretical literature by asking two questions: What do we know empirically about a European collective identity? How can we make sense of the empirical findings in light of the theoretical debates on a European identity? The short answer to the first question is that the degree of citizens' identification with Europe and the EU is regularly underestimated in the media and in the political debates. The short answer to the second question is that European identity does not replace national identities, but interacts with them in various ways. Several ways would be suggested in which we can think about multiple identities.

Keywords: Identity, Multiple Identities, European Union

AVRUPA BİRLİĞİ'NDE KİMLİK

Özet: Avrupa Birliği'nin özellikle siyasi hedeflerini somutlaştırması ile beraber kolektif bir Avrupa kimliği ve bunun ulusal kimliklerle ilişkisinin normatif geçerliliği ve ampirik olabilirliği üzerine güncel siyasi ve akademik tartışma ortaya çıkmıştır. Tartışma, doğrudan Avrupa Birliği'nin (AB) demokratik veya meşruiyet açığı iddiaları ile bağdaştırılmıştır. Moderne demokrasilerin, çeşitli kuralları ve normları uygulayabilmek için meşruiyet kazanmaları gerektiği ve bunun için de vatandaşlarının yaygın desteğine ihtiyaç duyduğu genel kabul gören bir görüştür. AB bu durumda bir istisna oluşturmamaktadır. Bu çalışma, ampirik ve teorik literatürü anlamlandırabilmek için iki soru sormuştur: Ampirik olarak kolektif Avrupa kimliği hakkında ne biliyoruz? Teorik tartışmalar çerçevesinde ampirik bulguları nasıl anlamlandırabiliriz? Birinci soruyu kısaca vatandaşları

Avrupa ile tanımlanma dereceleri ve AB'nin medyada ve siyasi tartışmalarda önemsenmemesi olarak cevaplayabiliriz. İkinci soruyu ise Avrupa kimliği ulusal kimliklerle yer değiştirmemektedir aksine onlarla çeşitli yollarla etkileşim içine girmektedir. Bu çalışmada çoklu kimliklerin nasıl değerlendirilmesi gerektiği ile ilgili bazı yöntemler de önerilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kimlik, Çoklu Kimlikler, Avrupa Birliği

INTRODUCTION

A lively political and academic debate has emerged about the normative viability and the empirical possibility of a collective European identity and how it relates to national identities. The debate is directly linked to the controversy about the democratic or legitimacy deficit of the European Union (EU). There is general agreement that modern democracies rely upon the diffuse support of their citizens in order to gain legitimacy which is necessary to ensure compliance with inconvenient and costly norms and rules (Risse, 2000: 34). Collective identification with a polity provides one source of diffuse support for political systems. The EU is no exception. This paper tries to make sense of the empirical and theoretical literature by asking two questions:

1. What do we know empirically about a European collective identity?
2. How can we make sense of the empirical findings in light of the theoretical debates on a European identity?

The short answer to the first question is that

the degree of citizens' identification with Europe and the EU is regularly underestimated in the media and in the political debates. The short answer to the second question is that European identity does not replace national identities, but interacts with them in various ways. Several ways would be suggested in which we can think about multiple identities.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT A EUROPEAN IDENTITY?

1. It is no longer controversial among scholars and policy-makers alike that individuals hold multiple identities. It is wrong to conceptualize European identity in zero-sum terms, as if an increase in European identity necessarily decreases one's loyalty to national or other communities. Europe and the nation are both "imagined communities" and people can feel as part of both communities without having to choose some primary identification (Anderson, 1991: 12). Survey data suggest that many people, who strongly identify with their nation-state, also feel a sense of belonging to Europe.

Analyses from Eurobarometer data and other sources show that “country first, but Europe, too” is the dominant outlook in most EU countries and people do not perceive this as contradictory (Duchesne and Frogner, 1999: 67). The real cleavage in mass opinion is between those who only identify with their nation, on the one hand, and those perceiving themselves as attached to both their nation and Europe, on the other hand. The individual willingness to support further European integration increases quite dramatically from the former to the latter group. Willingness to grant the EU authority does *not* require an identification that actually prioritizes Europe over the nation. The European polity does not need a “demos” that replaces a national with a European identity, but one in which national and European identities co-exist and complement each other (Duchesne and Frogner, 1999: 68).

2. It makes a difference whether Europe is defined in civic or cultural terms. ‘Culture’ in this understanding encompasses everything from history, ethnicity, civilization, heritage to other social similarities. “People by and large identify ‘Europe’ as a historical, political, and cultural space rather than a territorial entity. In contrast, when Europe is introduced in mostly territorial terms, attachment

rates drop dramatically. ‘Civic identity’ instead is much more circumscribed and refers to identification of citizens with a particular political structure such as the EU or the political institutions of the nation-state.” (Risse, 2000: 37) The distinction allows differentiating between identification with the EU as a distinct civic and political entity, on the one hand, and a larger Europe as a cultural and historically defined social space, on the other. Survey and other data suggest that Europe as a political space is identified with the EU. In this sense, the EU has achieved “identity hegemony” in that it defines Europe in political terms (Duchesne and Frogner, 1999: 69).

3. The EU is an elite-driven project – similar to other nation-building projects. No wonder that identification with and support for Europe and its institutions is highest among political and social elites. Eurobarometer data demonstrate an enormous gap between elite support for the EU, on the one hand, and widespread skepticism among the larger public, on the other. The difference between elite and citizen identification with Europe can be largely explained by how “real” Europe is for people (Risse, 2000: 42). It is referred to the concept of “entitativity” (Risse, 2000: 48). An imagined community becomes real in people’s lives when

they increasingly share cultural values, a perceived common fate, increased salience, and boundedness (Risse, 2000: 44). The EU is certainly very *real* for Europe's political, economic, and social elites. For the citizens, the EU is still a more distant community than the nation-state, despite the fact that EU rules and regulations cover almost every political issue-area by now. There are at least three reasons for this: First, while EU law is the law of the land, has direct effect, and overrides national law, EU authorities do not implement European rules and regulations, but national and subnational authorities do (Risse, 2000: 48). Thus, when citizens are confronted with, say, environmental regulations in their daily lives, they rarely know that these are EU rules. Second, 'Europe' has fuzzy boundaries. While there are plenty of indicators telling me that I have left Germany, it is unclear when I have left "Europe." Yet, boundedness is a crucial ingredient for the perceived "realness" of a community. Third, the elite discourse about the EU is ambivalent at best when it comes to 'shared values' and 'common fate.' On the one hand, there is the conscious identity construction of a liberal and civic community emanating from the EU. On the other hand, national policymakers routinely reify the nation-state in

their dealings with Brussels. Whenever they can charge the EU for some tough decision at home, they adopt a populist rhetoric of conscious blame-shifting ("Brussels made me do it").

4. Social identities not only describe who we are as members of a community, they also connote the boundaries of a group, who is "in" and who is "out." (Risse, 2000: 51) But neither Europe in general nor the EU in particular have clear boundaries (compare "Euroland" with "Schengenland" and with the EU) and the Eastern enlargement won't make things any easier. Moreover, Europe's "others" are usually invoked dependent on the political context. "The 'European welfare state' is routinely pitched against 'American laissez-faire capitalism'. In a different context, Europe's other is the continent's own past of militarism and nationalism. Finally, in the context of the 'Haider debate' regarding the new Austrian government and the European reaction to it, Europe's other was the 'enemy within', e.g. xenophobia." (Risse, 2000: 51)
5. Most people assume that the more citizens identify with Europe, the more they will be tolerant and sympathetic to fellow Europeans. Survey data seem to confirm this. But it is argued that increased

tolerance toward fellow Europeans is highly conditional on the complexity with which Europe is presented. Individuals who simply project their own values on Europe and then identify with their 'national' Europe tend to be less tolerant with fellow Europeans. This is called the "in-group projection model." (Risse, 2000: 53) If German identification with 'Europe' and the EU largely conforms to visions of *German* social and political order, this might lower rather than increase German tolerance for Italians (Risse, 2000:57).

In sum, there is good news and bad news concerning European identity based on various empirical findings. The good news is that the main cleavage in identity terms is no longer between those who feel loyalty to their nation against those who identify with Europe. Rather, most people identify with their national or regional communities *and* with Europe. They also distinguish between Europe as a cultural and historical space and the EU as *the* dominant political space in Europe. The bad news is that identification with Europe and the EU still suffers from the lack of "realness" of Europe in people's daily lives and from its fuzzy boundaries. Finally, it is not clear that increased identification with Europe also increases people's tolerance for each other in a cosmopolitan democracy.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

The empirical findings reported above confirm the truism that people hold multiple identities and that Europe and the EU can be easily incorporated in people's sense of community. However, it is less clear what "multiple identities" actually means. There are at least three ways in which we can think of multiple identities. First, identities can be *nested*, conceived of as concentric circles or Russian Matruska dolls, one inside the next (Risse, 2003: 168). For instance, my regional identity is nested in my national identity which might again be nested in my Europeanness, maybe in the future. This model suggests some hierarchy between people's sense of belonging and loyalties. European and other identities pertaining to territorially defined entities can be nested into each other so that "Europe" forms the outer boundary, while one's region or nation-state constitute the core (Risse, 2003: 170). The survey data that mass publics in most countries hold national and regional identities as their primary sense of belonging, while Europe runs a distinct second. The "Russian Matruska doll" model of European and other identities are found on both the level of elites and of ordinary people (Risse, 2003: 171).

Second, identities can be *cross-cutting* (Laf-

fan, O'Donnell and Smith, 2000: 8). In this configuration, some, but not all, members of one identity group are also members of another identity group. I can feel a sense of belonging to Europe and strongly identify with Islam, and some, but not all of my fellow Moslems would share my European identity. For example, that member of the European Parliament or of the Council of Permanent Representatives (Coreper) holds such overlapping identities by feeling a sense of belonging to Europe as well as to their party groups and their nation-states respectively. This sometimes leads to "double hating" and a sometimes conflictual relationship between European and other identities among officials working in Brussels (Laffan, O'Donnell and Smith, 2000: 10).

There is a third way of conceptualizing the relationship between European and other identities which people might hold. It could be named as a "marble cake" model of multiple identities (Risse, 2003: 177). Accordingly, the various components of an individual's identity cannot be neatly separated on different levels as both concepts of nestedness and of cross-cutting identities imply. From the 1950s on, Christian Democratic parties in Continental Europe were at the forefront of European integration. Europeanness has always been a constitutive component of post-World War II Christian Democratic ideology originating from the

inter-war period (Marcussen and others, 1999: 23). The same holds true for modern Social Democrats in Europe. "It is interesting to note that the turn toward accepting capitalism and the social market economy which the German Social Democrats experienced in the late 1950s, the French Socialists in the early 1980s, and British Labor in the 1990s, went hand in hand with a strong identification with European integration in each of these cases." (Marcussen and others, 1999: 25)

According to the "marble cake" model the identity as Europeans blends into the national, regional, or other identities implies, on the one hand, that there might be much more Europeanness in the national identities than is usually assumed. For example, if one cannot even describe his/her Germanness without reference to Europe, survey instruments pitching a German national identity against a European one might actually miss the mark (Risse, 2003: 185). On the other hand, if Europe and the EU mean very different things to different people, stronger identification with Europe and EU does not get people very far concerning a European polity (Risse, 2003: 187).

CONCLUSIONS

The available evidence shows that there is an increasing sense of community among the European citizens, among elites and or-

dinary people alike. The EU clearly represents a genuine community for the political, economic, and social elites in Europe and it essentially defines modern statehood in Europe for them. Among the citizens, identification with and attachment to Europe (in conjunction with the nation-state) has also grown in recent years, while exclusive loyalties to the nation-state are in decline. Moreover, the EU is understood as a civic community as distinct from cultural understandings of Europe in general.

There is more to an emerging European demos than many seem to realize. In particular, the European polity does not require a “demos” that replaces a national with a European identity, but one in which national and European identities co-exist. Europeanization, European integration, and European identities seem to co-evolve over time, both at the elite and the mass levels. The causal arrows between European integration and institution building, on the one hand, and the evolution of European identities, on the other, seem to run both ways. The increasing ‘realness’ of the EU in people’s daily lives seems to affect their identification with Europe as a political community. At the same time, support for European integration and attachment to Europe appear to be closely related motivating European elites toward continuing on the path of institution-building.

It follows that building a European identity has little to do with public relations efforts or information campaigns about the EU. Rather, the key toward increased identification with Europe and the EU is increasing the reality of the community in the daily lives of the citizens. In this sense, the Euro represents a huge experiment in collective identity-building. There are various things that can be done in this context:

- Europe needs more symbols and collective myths.
- Politicization of European affairs increases the salience of the EU in the perception of the citizens. Controversies about EU policies are not bad for European identity; they can actually increase the sense of community among the Europeans.
- National political elites who care about the EU, should stop the blameshifting games (“Europe made me do it!”). This does not imply to support everything that comes from Brussels. But routine references to “those faceless bureaucrats in Brussels” represent cheap ways of avoiding political responsibility.

REFERENCES

ANDERSON, B., (1991). Imagined Communities. Reflections on the O r i -

gin and Spread of Nationalism. London: Verso.

DUCHESNE, S., FROGNIER, A. P. , (1999). ‘Is There a European Identity?’, in O. Niedermayer and R. Sinnott (eds) *Public Opinion and Internationalized Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

LAFFAN, B., O’DONNELL, R., SMITH, M., (2000). *Europe’s Experimental Union. Rethinking Integration*. London: Routledge.

MARCUSSEN, M., RÏSSE, T., ENGELMANN-MARTIN, D., KNOPF, H.J., ROSCHER, K., (1999). Constructing Europe. The Evolution of French, British, and German Nation-State Identities. *Journal of European Public Policy* 6 (4).

RISSE, T., (2003). “European Institutions and Identity Change: What We Have Learned?” in Herrmann, R., Brewer, M. and Risse, T. (eds.) *Identities in Europe and the Institutions of the European Union*, Lanham: Rowman and Middlefield Press.

RISSE, T., (2000). “Nationalism and Collective Identities: Europe versus the Nation-state?” in Heywood, P., Jones, E. and Rhodes M. (eds.) *Developments in West European Politics*