

---

# The political basis of the European identity

**Liljana Siljanovska**

Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communications, South East European University, Tetovo, Macedonia

**Email address:**

[l.siljanovska@seeu.edu.mk](mailto:l.siljanovska@seeu.edu.mk)

**To cite this article:**

Liljana Siljanovska. The Political Basis of the European Identity. *Social Sciences*. Vol. 3, No. 3, 2014, pp. 80-85.

doi: 10.11648/j.ss.20140303.13

---

**Abstract:** The concept of European identity is understood as an attempt to consolidate the process of European integration that would provide the European Union with a more stable future. This is why, generally speaking, the concept has gained its full relevance with the entry into force of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993, establishing the European Union, thus ever growing integration. Under the concept of European identity, it is not enough to be within the borders of the EU. One can become “more” European by accepting what is considered to be European norms and values while at the same time having appreciation for the background. The European identity is expressed by trying to speak the local language, by trying to assimilate and integrate to the extent that will facilitate our everyday life in the given environment, by respecting an opportunity to be part of such an environment, etc. The official establishment of the concept of the European identity during the 1973 Copenhagen Summit at that point was a political category as a foreign policy tool. Since then, it moved from political to social category and back. For example, the veil issue has moved from being a cultural issue to become a political issue and this also has implications for the development of European identity. The politicization of European identity in international scientific circles is more of a question as a practical reality versus efforts of the Union for Americanization of European cultural space that imposes globalization to the values of culture, especially the media space.

**Keywords:** European Identity, European Values, Political Category, Americanization, Globalization

---

## 1. Introduction

The attempt to define an identity, according to psychologists, is the self-image of the individual or the collective regarding oneself and one's own specificity. That mental image is a socio-psychological form that the individual or the collective itself manifests in its communication, behavior, self-representation and round up in its system of values and other social practices. The second dimension of identity is its comparative or contrastive dimension, i.e. it manifests itself through the confirmation of its own difference in terms of others (individuals or collectives).

Firstly, it is evident that identity is primarily in the domain of interiority, i.e. in the sphere of self-awareness of the individual or the collective regarding himself or herself. Identity cannot experience any changes without including a change in one's mental image that further generates a different manifestation, behavior and interaction towards change.

Given the dynamic character of identity, which is greatly dependent on the socio-economic and political conditions, the external factors can be both numerous and

versatile. Thus, identity can overlap with other identities, they can be mutually influential, exchange elements from their own systems of value (the so-called “acculturation”), group, change, evolve. However, the key dimension of identity always remains the same: the internalness. That is to say, the core of identity forever remains a shared mental image on oneself that manifests itself through pre-given and generally accepted communication, symbolic and value practices. Identity is a specific code or cipher that manifests itself from inward to outward.

The cipher or the code of identity is formed by the individual or by the people, searching for the structure of their own code. To illustrate: for this region, language is almost without an exception a distinctive indication or characteristic for one's identity. The Slovenians speak Slovenian, the Croats Croatian, the Serbs Serbian, the Bosnians Bosnian, the Turks Turkish, the Greeks Greek, and the Macedonians Macedonian. Still, this does not have to be a universal (or mandatory) distinctive indication: The English have the English language, but so do the Americans, the Australians, the Irish, the New Zealanders, and so on. Their identity code has another structure based on geography, culture, symbols, history, folklore and such.

The manifestations and structures may be different, but the principle of internalness and self-expression. Identity cannot, under any circumstances, omit the principle of self-expression. Any institution, regime, state or organization cannot prevent the principle of self-expression. It is an adopted, fixed standard of the civilization we live in.

There is no fixed end result in the process of integration. Integration and expansion of the European Union are the main issues in Europe's policies on a national and local level. Integration can run into a conflict with national sovereignty and cultural identity, and is being opposed by Eurosceptics.

The issue on political integration in the European Union, according to some analysts, requires a normative and conceptual reassessment of the concept of national identity. The Europeanization of national identity means that the integration of national groups in and between the states of the Union is a project that marks the future of the political Union. Consequently to that, the national identity, which is based on history, has reached the phase in which its validity is running out.

The citizen of Europe has more identities and one can say this is being achieved by the concentric circle principle. The individuals in the European Union have a multilayered identity, as follows: regional, in the sense of affiliation to the region of the state, national – connected with the state they are born in and European. These identities are not mutually exclusive, but they are emphasized depending on the situation determined by external economic, political and cultural realities. This means that a citizen of Paris feels like a Parisian in France, like a Frenchman in Europe, and as a European in California. Politization of the European identity can also be seen from a theoretical supposition of a two layered public legal status of the individual. One can, simultaneously, be a citizen of the Member State and a citizen of the European Union. However, this also means that the individual would have to simultaneously possess a double political identity, as well as a double political loyalty. Of utmost importance to the European identity is not just the question of strength, when it comes to expressing one's individual identities, but of stressing that a European identity actually exists. Its roots should be found in the idea of Europe which dates back to ancient Greece, as well as the concept of citizenship.

In the syntagma "European identity", both terms should be understood as a dynamic category. As a geographical determinant, Europe can be observed through a historical context. Culturally speaking, this is an environment in which key civilization process took place. Politically speaking, the term Europe can now be reduced to an institutional structure of the European Union rooted on the mutual values of the citizens, the nations and the states. The mutual values constitute the identity of the European Union and when the other countries from the European continent, who still haven't become Member States, accept and apply the mutual values, only then can we talk about a European identity.

The value crisis means a crisis of the European identity. Numerous phenomena influence the European values crisis, such as the concepts on xenophobia, nationalism, the anti-Islam concept that are no longer only isolated or marginalized phenomena. Particularly with right-wing parties they win more spots in the national and European parliament. The issue at hand is whether or not this is an expression and a consequence of the deep economic crisis and recession in the EU or if it resembles the appearance of fascism in the economic crisis in the thirties of last century.

The European identity is expressed through the values and other features which citizens, nations and Member States of the Union share including states that by accepting those values wish to be members of the Union. The mutual values occur in two ways – through the individual contribution of each Member State and through the consensual establishing and practice of mutual standards and values. Thus, values and features of universal importance created by each Member State of the Union become part of the European values. We are not just talking about the positive values, but also about the anti-civilization and undemocratic processes such as fascism, holocaust or genocide.

The Preamble of the Charter of Fundamental Human Rights of the Union talks about the European values that characterize European identity. Thus, aware of its spiritual and moral determinants, the Union is founded on the indivisible and universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity, the principles of democracy and the legal state. It sets man in the center of its activities by establishing the citizenship of the Union and by creating a space for freedom, safety and justice. The Union contributes to the preservation and development of these mutual values with respect to the differences in the area of culture and the tradition of the European nations, as well as with the national identity of the Member States and the organization of their area at a national, regional and local level. It strives towards promoting a balanced and permanent development and towards ensuring the movement of people, capital and goods.

## 2. On Dimensions of Cultural Identity

In order to determine the dimensions of the cultural identity it is necessary to define it and to determine the relation between the identity and the identifier... the cultural identity, according to Erwin Goffman, enables social groups in their mutual contact to self-identify, to define other groups and to establish a relationship towards them [1]. Cultural identity, according to many definitions, can be defined as "Self-consciousness of the members of a group which is historically created and developed depending on the criteria which that group establishes in the relations with other social groups" [2]. As true creator and carrier of social relations, and in that context we cannot exclude the determined self-aware and original existence of the

individual. Such analysis leads to the conclusion that cultural identity is not the need for a new concept tied to our time, but a notorious fact of the history of culture and of cultural dynamics. Thus, the opportunity for the elements of the relation to be achieved is exactly the identifier that the cultural identity should point out, above all the differences between the social groups. The cultural identifiers mostly regard language, customs, beliefs, art and in general facts which round off a model of a value system. Identifiers of separate cultural identities can be in collision with one another, because individuals, and even whole social groups, often belong to different subcultures. Identifiers also represent a basis for the creation of stereotypes, i.e. social groups can sometimes create and establish simpler and value colored representations of themselves and of other social groups. The fundamental problem that could always be established here is the manner and the degree of communication between cultural identities, i.e. the possible supremacy and its consequences in terms of one relation or other cultural identities. Here, the cultural divisions and differences of Europe, which are directly dependent on the principle of distribution of social power, i.e., the social inequalities, again come into play. Actually, the cultural identity of the social groups and that of individuals is a dimension of manipulation in terms of protecting their interests in a determined social system. In that sense, Jordan and Weedon state:

“The relative dominance of different groups over some other groups is partly aided and reproduced by the actions and the products of cultural instructions. Here we bear in mind the language, the family, the educational system, the media, the laws and the religious organizations” [3].

Thus, we have to bear in mind the fact that the world today faces the imperial logic of the great forces, with cultural imperialism that unifies, artificially homogenizes and technically transports the role of heterogeneous cultural identities. Therefore, it is difficult to believe in the hypocrisy of political logic of cultural democracy.

“Postmodernism tried to relax this new reminiscence of power and inequality, offering us the end of history through the attempt of erasing some fundamental values of human culture, i.e. denying their importance to man as an example: nature, religion, science, revolution, experience, tradition. It offers a particularism and eclecticism instead of creativity and historicism in the understanding of the facts and the truth” [4].

Thus, essentially on the historic scene and even in the EU there is no surpassing the practice of those in power to create and impose the fundamental mechanisms for establishing values contained in cultural identities and according to the principle of hierarchy. Although, not as complex as the idea of European identity, the national cultural identity is also quite complex and a multilayered concept. Cultural identity is described as a social achievement, carrying itself the stamp of history and that is why it is connected of citizenship and can be used, i.e. misuse to nationalistic goals. However, cultural identity is a dynamic concept and depends on the

conditions in which it is developed, and that is why today's cultural identity of a country is not the same as 20 years ago. Bearing in mind that identity is something that is felt, and not something that is imposed to us. Identity is a concept that is simultaneously defined as a concept of something that is artificial, imaginary, subjective and moving.

### 3. The Politization of the European Identity

The European Union has the political basis of the European identity in the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, which introduces the law of the European citizenship above all as a higher degree of political integration of the Member States in the Union and “speaking in one voice” in regards to its foreign policy. Thus, it is important to state certain characteristics of the Maastricht Treaty or the Treaty on the European Union. Actually, the Treaty on the European Union represents a big step towards achieving the strategic goal – a Union of the European countries, as a new phase in the process of the European integration that started the established European community. This shows that the end of the division of the European continent has its historical meanings and imposes the need for setting up solid foundations to build a future Europe. Thus, the European citizens confirm their loyalty to the principles of freedom, democracy, respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as the legal state. Deepening solidarity as one of the European values enables people to respect their history, culture and traditions.

Through the Maastricht Treaty, the European Union confirms its identity in the international stage, above all by leading a mutual foreign and safety policy, which soon enough might lead to a mutual defense. By introducing the law on citizenship, i.e. citizenship of the Union, it strengthens the protection of the rights and interests of the citizens of the Member State of the Union. This right especially gives them an opportunity, if they so need it, particularly when they are out of the territory of the Union to be represented by any consulate of any Member State of the Union. That explains the direct link between the citizens and the European Union. That is why it is no wonder that the Union was in a phase to discuss its own constitution, because these issues are connected to constitutional normative of a state, which based on national structure determine the personal and national identity. This means that the issues on identity are not within the competences of an international organization such as the European Union. A citizen of the Union is any person that has a citizenship of one of the Member States. The citizens of the Union also have the right to freely move and stay on the territory of the Member States. A citizen that resides in a Member State of which he is not a citizen has the right to elect and be elected in municipal elections, i.e. local elections under the same conditions as the citizens of the said state. He also has the right to elect and be elected in

the elections for European Parliament in the Member State he resides in, under the same conditions as its citizens. Establishing the right of a European citizenship. Allows for each citizen of the Union to enjoy rights on the territory of a third state, in the state whose citizenship he possesses has no diplomatic-consular office, diplomatic-consular protection from a diplomatic-consular office of another Member State under the same conditions as its citizens. All citizens of the Union have the right to submit petitions to the European Parliament upon issues from the scope of the work of the community that is of interest of the community or for their own. Also, each citizen of the Union can address the Ombudsman, who is appointed by the European Parliament, with authorization to accept complaints against measures and behavior of the administrative and collective services.

The European identity that also represents the Union's political integration, upon enforcing the Maastricht Treaty, also politicized issues on the EU identity and its place and role in terms of the European communities, i.e. whether or not the European communities and the European Union are independent organizations or not. According to the form in which it is formed there is no doubt that we are talking about a union (alliance) of states, i.e. it is an international organization created by an international treaty. According to the character of tasks and content of the activity the European Union can be regarded as a Union of the European nations within which conditions for free communication and cooperation of the peoples and citizens of Europe are provided. The European Union can also be regarded as a Union of peoples because in most Member States the people via a referendum accepted the Maastricht Treaty. The answer to the question on the place of the European Union and its relation to the European communities should be looked for in the provisions of the Maastricht Treaty where it is defined that the Union is based on the European communities supplemented by the policies and forms of cooperation established therein thus specifying that it is its task to organize the relations between Member States and its peoples in a harmonized and solidary manner. This means that the European Union is not an independent creation that exists and functions independently of the European communities, i.e. Member States. They do not cease to exist, but they acquire new quality.

The politization of the European identity can now be analyzed from the aspect of the Declaration on European Identity adopted on the Summit of Member States of the Union in Copenhagen, on December 14, 1973. This political document expresses the determination of its members to define the foreign political identity as a dynamic and united Europe [5]. Reviewing mutual heritage, interests and special obligations of the ninth members, then the degree of their unity reached in the Community and especially the assessment of the degree that the members act together with the world and the obligations that arise therein, as well as taking into account the dynamic role of

the European uniting, are the main keystones of the Declaration. They show the guidelines for unification of Europe and above all to building the European foreign political identity. From an economic creation constituted in the Roma Treaties, the European Union increasingly becomes a political club that uses the European Identity as a collective memory that should manifest an integral and cohesive political whole. The EU is supposed to build the autonomy of an international entity particularly in world politics in the relations with the United States of America. The Union is thus promoted as a hard promoter of functional multilateralism, as opposed to American unilateralism, the strengthening of Russia, and the creation of new world powers such as China, India, Brazil and Japan. In the international constellation, the European Union needs to show the only identity as an international entity with a hard foreign policy that despite the uniformity of identities, should encourage, deepen and develop the national cultural identities.

#### **4. The Different Scientific Outlooks on European Identity**

It is a fact that one of the basic reasons for politization of the European continent is the stability of the political community that is better provided through the construction of a politically rooted identity. Why this cannot be achieved through a national identity? Because there are ethnic characteristics which cannot expand from one nation to several nations and its firm roots with the past and cultural contents of manifestation represent limiting factors in the demonstration of political unity. Redefining a nation is just one of the many answers offered by the European scientific circles on the question of European identity and as an answer to the cultural difference, and in order to express political unity of Europe with many nations within the states or among them. The mutual political future should be in the focus of attention without looking for a mutual ethno-national identity. Despite the claims of Habermas (1981) that there is nothing similar to European people so that there may be a creation of a European state, John Rawls (1980), within the liberal understandings of society and its development as a political entity, defines the issue of European identity as a mutual feeling of sympathy. According to Miller (2009), who then tries to set the dimensions of the issue of patriotism on a level of the European Union, the constitutional patriotism is synonymous to the European identity. It makes the issue of European constitutional regulation problematic, as an open process of political debates and political struggle because the European Union is also an open process and cannot be understood as a constitutional force or as one people. In that sense the European citizens feel and mutually recognize each other as free and equal, but sometimes distinguish their differences in terms of nation, culture, tradition, beliefs and customs. Thus, they will never become "others". That is why

the recourse that is being used more frequently in scientific debates on the European identity is the post-national identity. Building a collective memory between the Member States of the Union is more and more understood as building a sense of a European that contains the members of different national states. The European identity is seen by many of the scientific circles as a political instrument in uniting the European national and cultural diversity, i.e. this is possible by emphasizing, respecting and developing mutual values, culture and history. The active European citizenship must allow for strengthening of mutual understanding between the European citizens of different countries. In that sense, the French politician Jean Monnet will say – we do not join the states, we unite the citizens. (Monnet, J., 2007, Europe, our mutual home, Skopje: Government of the Republic of Macedonia). For the sociologist, Emil Dirkem (1928), European society has its own values that need to be upgraded, and he sees European identity as a synonym of European society solely as a reproduction of any national state, but also on a higher level. Thus, in his opinion, Europe has that and only needs to upgrade European identity. Opposite of Dirkem's Gerard Dalenai's (1937) opinion, the EU must build its own new European identity, because the values of separate national states cannot be the basis for its creation. Thus, one of the new European values should be knowledge, and Europe should be identified as society of knowledge.

In a time of post-modernism, where media and communication technology have especial influence, European identity is more and more understood as a response to globalization, i.e. in its beginnings known as Americanization, through specific policies and European practices of protecting European audiovisual and film works, the application of quotas on language and production of media products, but mostly directed in protecting the language and production of national Member States of the European Union.

As a manifesto mark of the EU, the differences from other international entities are the symbols and the European flag, the European anthem, the European currency, the draft of the European constitution, Eurovision, the European Cups. Still, it is arguable to say that they are the most important indicators on rooting the European identity, because we are talking about developing the inner sense of affiliation. This is especially expressed in conditions of economic, financial and institutional crisis of the European Union. Within the Union, the countries nurture an affiliation to a politically safe and economic mean and this gives a dimension of nurturing a collective identity that can be seen as a hierarchy in polysemy of identities of individuals and of social groups.

## 5. Conclusion

Although there are differences in the manners of building European identity, scientists are unique in defining its essence as an ideology of European society whose practical application should be seen in promoting and implementing

the new European values. They should represent the collective ideology and the collective identity in the building of the European Union as a political entity and should be realized as its general milestones, i.e. policies. Endangering European values such as peace and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, unity and equality, freedom and solidarity, as well as respecting national identity, represent and endangering of the feeling of affiliation towards one, unique and united Europe, Europe of the citizen, i.e. endangering the European identity.

The European identity is more and more felt in the constellation of international relations with the USA and with countries of other continents, while internally within the EU it has a different intensity of manifestation. In order to provide its own position and role in the European family the European political identity, at least in the beginning, becomes dominant in the countries of Central and South-Central Europe in contrast with the national features of the countries. With the countries aspiring to join the EU, especially the Balkan ones, European identity is a synonym for national security, investments, employment, i.e. there is a phenomenon of an idealization of European values such as the case with the Republic of Macedonia as a candidate country for EU membership. Unlike Balkan identity which as a mental code in the collective memory of western democracy stands for something bad, unstandard, undemocratic, European identity is trying to be imposed by Balkan countries in the hierarchy of identities without it representing an expression of inner feeling, tradition, beliefs and customs. Still the expression of national and cultural differences over the collective European identity is mostly expressed in Western Europe, among the old ladies Germany, France, England and Italy. Thus, defining European identity seems to be more and more a political category. The inner feeling of trust, security and strengthening of European values should represent the main factors in the creation of a collective memory of the phenomenon – European identity. Defining Europe as an identity crisis is just a symbolism of its insufficient development as a strong political entity, the inconsistency in its foreign policy, the formal, often times with the application of political criteria, expansion with new Member States without strengthening its internal capacity of institutions and due application of European policies, especially in the social and financial spheres. Thus, redefining the European Union in terms of its identity should go along the lines of a political supranational community with national and cultural diversities, but also by strengthening and equal application of European values as identifiers of the European identity.

---

## References

- [1] (Gofman, Stigma: Notes of the management of Spoiled Identity, 29)
- [2] (Group of authors, Cultural Rights, 22).

- [3] (Jordan and Weedon, Cultural Politics, 123).
- [4] (Petkovska, A., Tribune, Skopje: Broadcasting Council, 54)
- [5] (Declaration on European Identity, Copenhagen report, 1973, [www.ena.lu/declaration\\_european\\_identity\\_copenhagen\\_14\\_december\\_1973-020002278.html](http://www.ena.lu/declaration_european_identity_copenhagen_14_december_1973-020002278.html))