NATIONAL AND/OR EUROPEAN IDENTITY?

Issues of Self-definition and Their Effect on the Future of Integration

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Major findings

The present study takes a look at current attitudes and identity-patterns measured among European citizens, as well as political/economic developments interacting with these cultural/social factors. It also examines the groundwork they create for the future of European integration. Instead of an utopistic vision, the paper hopes to offer a realistic picture of these developments and evaluate the European Union's effort aimed at consolidating European identity in that light. The study also takes a closer look at Hungarian research data and makes some suggestions for policies that may deepen European identity.

- According to surveys, the primacy of national identity is unchallenged in all cases.

- At best, a sense of Europeanness is secondary and there are few traces of a robust European identity.

- By now, euro-scepticism and in some cases outright anti-EU sentiment have gained currency in mainstream politics. In this context, and especially at the periphery of the European Union, national populism deserves special attention.

- In our understanding, taking our analysis somewhat beyond politics, identity is always the result of a construct of one kind or other. Just as national identity solidified in tandem with the development of the nation state in the 18th and 19th centuries, so does the future of the European Union point in the direction of a stronger European identity. Today there are but few signs of that because the self-definition of 'us' and the concept of a common enemy that help to forge a sense of community belonging are antithetical to the very essence of the European Union.

- In Hungary the conflict between 'Europeanness' and national self-identity has clearly escalated in the past few years. However, the effects of this tension are apparent primarily in political discourse and to this day have barely shown up in polling data related to the European Union.

- Experience to date shows that the expansion of integration in itself will not lead to the development of a common European identity, a sense of community and belonging. Due to the multiplicity of nations and traditions it may be illusory to believe that national identities will ever be replaced by a European identity. However, as Western states have extensive experience in the coexistence of various cultures, there is hope for the consolidation of a European identity. The content and success of the latter is essentially defined by the shaping of national identities, for a European identity follows from these.

- The symbolic and emotional bases of a European sense of community are unlikely to match the intensity of that for the nation state. However, this does not mean that the concept cannot be brought closer to the citizens of Europe. Attention must be paid to citizens' anxieties, to a general misunderstanding of the operation of the EU and the lack of information. The goals of integration, its advantages and drawbacks must be addressed boldly and with confidence at the member-state and European level alike. The foundations of a political community to be developed must be discussed and fine-tuned at national and pan-European forums. European identity shall not be defined in opposition to national identity, but rather as an 'extension' of the same.

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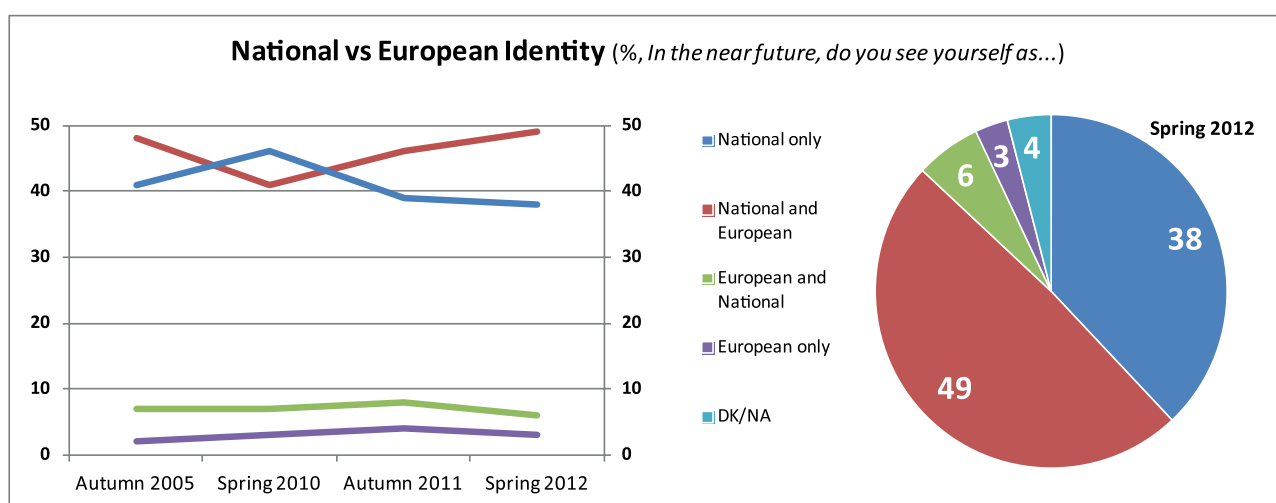www.riskandforecast.com

An overview of research on European identity

Regular surveys show that European identity couldn't gain ground in the past two decades. The question specifically aimed at this issue has been posed since 1992 in Eurobarometer surveys: ever since that time national identity has bested European identification in each country by a wide margin.

In the spring of 2012 38% of those interviewed said they considered themselves as part of their own nation without any European identity. Every other person identified him/herself first as belonging to a specific nation and identification with Europe came only after that. The number of those having no European identity at all reached its peak in the spring of 2010: with 46% they were in a relative majority at the time. In the past 10 years the proportion of those who consider themselves only European or European first can be described as stable. Within the EU average they represent 10%. A comparison of surveys conducted in 2012 and 2010 make it clear that while the percentage of those describing themselves as Europeans first declined from 10 to 9%, people defining themselves as having only a national identity decreased while the ratio of citizens for whom national identity comes first and a European identity second increased.

In Europe as a whole the percentage of those with no European identity declined from 46 to 38%, while the number of those defining themselves first by nationality and secondly by Europe increased by a similar rate from 41 to 49%. In other words, compared to the 2010 nadir, the number of those for whom Europe became an important source of self-identification started to rise again.

(The average spread of responses in %, source: EB64, EB73, EB76, EB77)

National vs European Identity (%, *In the near future, do you see yourself as…*)

In Hungary the sense of being European has developed differently from the overall European trend. Following the country's accession, identification with Europeanness 'spread' gradually until the spring of 2010, when 53% of the respondents described themselves as European citizens as opposed to 35% in the fall of 2004. Simultaneously, the number of those defining themselves as only Hungarian decreased steadily, although it remained above the EU average.

In the fall 2011 survey the percentage of those defining themselves as European declined somewhat and 50% of the respondents claimed only Hungarian identity. However, by the spring of 2011 identification with Europe gained some ground again and essentially the numbers returned to levels measured two years earlier. An analysis of recent survey findings shows that compared to the European Union average 7% fewer Hungarians have a European identity.

Looking into the near future, how would you identify yourself?

(the distribution of Hungarian responses in %, EB62, EB64, EB73, EB76, EB77)

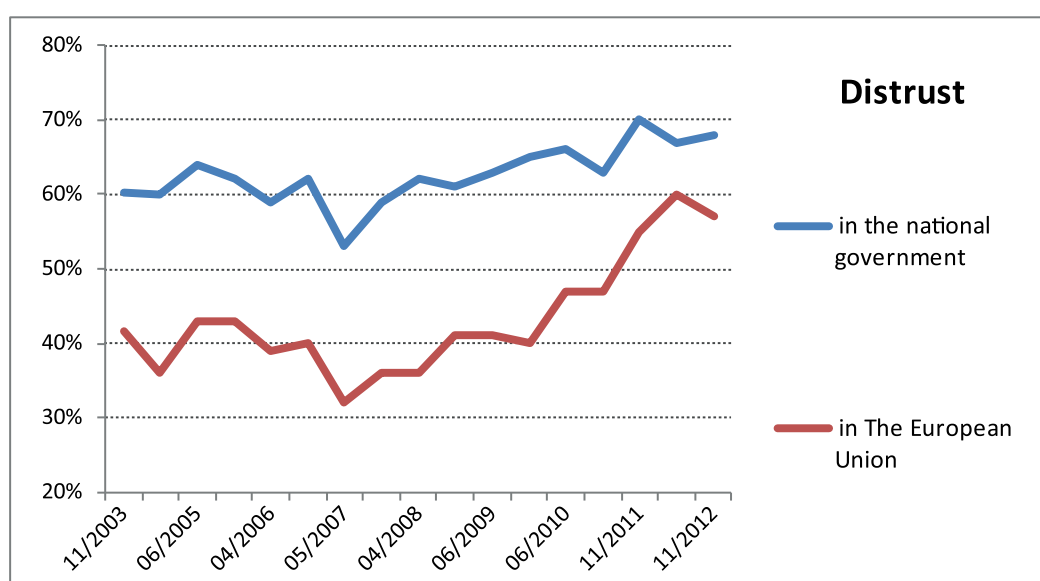|	Only Hungarian	Hungarian and European	European and Hungarian	Only European
Autumn 2004	64	32	2	1
Autumn 2005	51	44	4	0
Spring 2010	47	47	5	1
Autumn 2011	50	41	6	2
Spring 2012	45	47	4	2
Spring 2012 (EU27)	*38*	*49*	*6*	*3*

There are some more in-depth studies focusing on national and European identity, although at this time we have no access to freely available and fresh data. The findings of surveys conducted between 1995 and 2003 under the auspices of ISSP (before the eastern expansion and the economic crisis) correspond to the conclusions drawn from the data listed above. See the most salient ones below:

- While the primacy of national identity is obvious, this does not necessarily prevent the consolidation of European identity. And vice versa: a strong national sentiment does not necessarily counter efforts at European integration.

- European identity becomes problematic within the European Union; the desire to identify with Europe is usually stronger in countries waiting to be admitted to the Union than in member states.

- Earlier ISSP and recent Eurobarometer surveys all show that a country's economic maturity and productivity define the relationship between national and European identities. The economic crisis encourages forms of nationalism that oppose the vision of European integration.

In the last analysis, the future of European identity is defined by three major, apparently inevitable challenges. One is the creation of a single European economic and information space, the second is continued immigration to Europe, and the third is represented by a global rivalry between various cultures.

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Political and economic environment

The political/economic environment and the current crisis are not helping the assessment of the European Union. Aside from the political skirmishes among member states, the declining assessment of the European Union is well illustrated by recent poll findings. While based on Eurobarometer surveys following the 2004 expansion until the end of 2009 those putting their trust in the European Union were in the majority, starting from 2010 the trend has shifted. The number of those losing confidence has increased and those with a negative opinion are in the majority. The number of sceptics peaked at 60% in the May 2012 survey. Although the latest survey (conducted in November 2012) shows a slight decline in the number of EU-sceptics, their number is still the second highest.

Social and cultural environment

The deterioration of the EU's assessment at the nation state level may be attributed to rising anxiety about outside danger, an external enemy and some kind of turning inward, a common phenomenon in times of social and economic crises. This reaction also highlights the EU's basic features: even as integration among member states has deepened with time, it has yet to gather sufficient force to develop a strong and shared European consciousness, a workable sense of community and a kind of 'us' feeling among Europeans.

- Cultural and linguistic fragmentation among member states and their citizens is one of the major reasons for a generally perceived absence of a pan-European, supranational working community. As a result, there is no European public sphere, or what there is is inconsequential. Public opinion is still formed within national borders and the role of pan-European forums promoting citizen participation and information is negligible. However, a supranational political community cannot emerge without common public space.

- Another reason is the absence of a common enemy. Thanks to its very nature, the European Union lacks the concept of the 'other' that would foster a feeling of belonging to a community. As a last resort, a large majority of European citizens identifies the enemy in Muslim immigrants, although this is not the case in Eastern Europe. Moreover, while the regulation of migration from outside the Union is a state competency, many blame the European Union for immigration.

- This is well illustrated by the fact that among respondents rejecting migration from outside the EU those claiming exclusively national identity are in the majority. The majority of the respondents (54%) set against all policies encouraging labour immigration view themselves as belonging to their nation.

- The third reason is that, from the very start, European integration has been a project promoted by the elite. While references are often made to European citizens and the European public, in reality the average citizen rarely has the chance of making a meaningful contribution to the process. Decisions are made in the course of lengthy, arcane discussions between government representatives, little understood by the public. Subsequently, officials try to explain and justify the resulting policies to a national audience retroactively.

Conclusions

The deteriorating trust in the the EU and the spread of Eurosceptic opinions and parties (even if it did not have a dramatic impact on European identity) force formerly pro-integration politicians to take a cautious and defensive position as well. Speeches promoting the European Union are toned down, European topics fade into the background, statements criticizing the EU appear in the rhetoric of traditional parties, the parties try to keep a distance from the EU, the separate interests of member states are amplified, pronouncements related to deepening integration and European reforms become more guarded, and the topic all but vanishes from the agenda.

The above reactions offer a good explanation for the inadequate management of the economic crisis in Europe. To get the economy moving again, first the vacuum created by policy and legitimacy failures must be filled, a task no national government is ready to undertake under current conditions. Instead, of all the options listed below they tend to move in the direction posing the smallest social resistance and the smallest political risk.

Three paths to a resolution of the constitutional crisis:

1. Constitutional reform entailing major legal and political risks; drafting a new EU Treaty at a European convent or a comprehensive amendment of existing treaties. At the end of the process the Treaty shall be ratified by all member states, in many cases requiring a referendum. In the current state of affairs, none of the participants consider this lengthy process with an unpredictable outcome as a viable option.

2. Minor and pragmatic changes not reaching the level requiring a comprehensive revision of the existing treaties. However, in some member states (e.g., Ireland, Holland and Great Britain) a partial treaty amendment is also tied to a referendum, i.e., this solution also offers but limited opportunities.

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3. Differentiated integration; as this alternative generates the least resistance, in the past few years cooperation aimed at reforms moved in that direction. It has a number of varieties and appellations: a la carte Europe, multispeed Europe, changing geometrics. This gives states ready to move ahead the opportunity to advance integration without the participation of all member states. There are a number of tools available for the implementation of differentiated integration: an EU Treaty provision on reinforced cooperation, inter-governmental coordination through the EU-organization and international legal cooperation outside the EU.

While a differentiated integration offers a cure for apprehensions concerning major reform as it holds out the promise of deepening integration, in the long term it may be dangerous for the Union. Once the number of member states participating in various cooperation projects reaches a critical mass the cohesion of the EU may be undermined by amplified centrifugal forces. In other words, if European Union member states wish to pursue integration, in the medium and long range they have no option but to embark on a comprehensive constitutional reform.

Tasks to deepen integration and consolidate European identity

Experience has shown that in and of itself the deepening of integration will not lead to a single European identity, a sense of community and homogeneity. Owing to the multitude of nations and traditions it may be an illusion to believe that distinct national identities will ever be replaced by a European identity. However as Western countries have a long experience in the coexistence of a variety of identities, the odds for strengthening European identity and bringing it up to par with national identity are promising. The content and the success of this identity will be defined by the future shape of national identities, i.e., identification with Europe is a function of that process.

The symbolic and emotional foundations of European community awareness will never match the intensity of national identification. However, this doesn't mean that the concept cannot be brought closer to European citizens. To that end:

• Instead of retreating, straight answers must be given to citizens' fears and anxieties.

• Citizens' anxiety, their lack of understanding the EU's operation and their need for more information must be addressed.

• The goals of integration, its advantages and drawbacks must be discussed boldly and with confidence at the member-state and European level alike.

• The basic principles of a future political community must be debated and fine-tuned at national and pan-European forums.

• The concept of European identity shall not be defined in opposition to national identity but as a form of 'extension' of the same.