

Article

The Hidden Interest in a Common European Identity

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Abstract: A common European identity is an important part of the European political lexicon; however, at the institutional level, it was taken seriously only when the economic crisis, the legal challenges of EU integration, and the Brexit story encouraged a fresh look into the problem. Moreover, the European identity problem may be viewed differently from the Western and Eastern European perspectives, which helps to identify the roots of contemporary “official” and “sociological” perceptions of a common European identity. The Standard Eurobarometer (EB) questionnaires were used as a proxy to analyze the interest of the EU in a common European identity. We analyzed the types of questions asked from 2004 to 2020 and took a look at the responses. The shifts in the composition of the Standard EB questionnaires signal that the “official” understanding of identity is gaining ground against the “sociological” approach. The promotion by official bodies of the EU of a one-sided understanding of a common European identity, based on the Western approach, narrows the field and creates certain risks. In the face of a permanent EU-ropen unity crisis, it would not be wise to lose one of the important instruments that could be successfully used to identify the hidden challenges of the future.

Keywords: common European identity; European Union; Eurobarometer; public opinion



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1. Introduction

The concept of a common European identity is broadly promoted by the European Union (EU) as well as national political establishments and is often imagined as a possible cornerstone of the future unity of EU-rope. However, a common European identity is exposed to permanent challenges from the outside and within.

The confrontation from the outside may be easier to acknowledge and is more deeply understood because a common European identity constantly goes through offensive questioning by diverse political players primarily at the national level. The deliberation, if such a diverse entity as EU-rope can have an identity of its own, has a certain rationale: it is hard to challenge “the assumption that a European Self has never existed” [1] (p. 437). One can hardly cherish deeper feelings toward objects with blurred borderlines or be inspired by bureaucratic concepts. On the eastern side of the continent, a common European identity faces extra challenges as it can refresh the reminiscences of the Soviet past, when the communists promoted the idea of the new entity, “the Soviet people,” which was designed to serve as a substitute for national identification. In many communist-occupied countries, the national identity acted as an inspiration and as a cornerstone of the resistance against brutal regimes [2].

The contradictions from within EU-rope regarding a common European identity arise from the postmodern understanding of the concept, which promotes the slightly idealized perception of a common European identity, built above national identities and outside conflicts between them. From this point of view, the new common European identity is not comparable with the national ones. If the traditional national identity “is a permanent drawing of borders which with the assistance of certain marks, dimensions and symbols help to restrict and to distance from the others” [3] (p. 13), the new common European identity presupposes “breaking with homogeneity and sameness [...] European identity

may be perceived as texts that contain various narrative paradigms" [4] (pp. 106, 122). This new identity is condemned to inevitable historical and discursive shifts.

The recent rise of populism and nationalism throughout EU-rope, the story of Brexit [5], or reminiscences about the setbacks of European constitutional referendums encourage a fresh look into this old topic. A common European identity is often presumed to evolve into an effective medicine against various political diseases, while the political establishments consider a common European identity to be some sort of magical civic vaccine against societal ailments [6]. At this point, another important question arises: is this common European identity a natural defense of a political organism against populist manipulations, i.e., could be seen as a bottom-up process? In this case "[a] European identity is an abstraction and a fiction without essential proportions. Identity as a fiction does not undermine but rather helps to explain the power that the concept exercises" [7] (p. 388). A common European identity could also be compared with a sophisticated vaccine administered by an omniscient doctor. In the latter case, we are dealing with a top-down endeavor of the elites, which means that "an emerging European identity is best interpreted as a dynamic interplay between structural and agentive forces made up of institutions, citizens and global actors, 'reflexive' processes and cosmopolitan imaginaries" [2] (p. 3).

The history lessons from the Springtime of Nations of the 19th century, which served as a catalyst for the emergence of national identities throughout the European continent, suggest that bottom-up and top-down attitudes do not contradict each other. Nearly two centuries ago, national identities were invented and constructed in the meetings of young idealists, who became leading figures of the nationalist movements. Simultaneously, national feelings, mixed with heroic historical narratives, stimulated the grassroots movements, inspired the resistance against oppression, and led toward the establishment of national states. The same could be true with the contemporary common European identity, despite the flourishing mood of alienation between the elites and ordinary citizens. This estrangement inside the society is a natural side product of the successful European enlargement policy; however, it has become a strategic asset for populist movements and opponents of EU-ropean unity [8].

The Great Wave of Enlargement of 2004 was the largest one-time expansion of the EU, which brought the most diverse states into the Union. For the visionaries of federal Europe, it was a temporary setback, as the increased disparities inevitably led toward slowing down of deep integration. For the supporters of the alliance of free states, it was a refreshment of their diversity agenda. In both cases, a common European identity was overshadowed by economic and legal challenges.

For the newcomers, the ideals of their national identity were indivisible from principles of freedom and equality. Although the protracted membership negotiations revealed the supremacy of economic logics in the EU-ropean life, the desire to use this historical opportunity to join the club of elite Western nations overshadowed initial worries and suspicions of the Easterners, that the main achievement of their struggle against communism—an independent national state—could be at risk.

The main aim of the article is to examine the approach of the EU regarding a common European identity after the Great Wave of Enlargement (2004) and the consequent acceptance of Bulgaria, Romania (2007), and Croatia (2013). The research is focused on a principal question: what is the interest of European political establishment in a common European identity, and how is this interest indirectly expressed through the public opinion surveys? We presume that the interest in a common European identity could have an impact on the concept, i.e., influence the popular understanding of the phenomena. Another important point in our research concentrates on the peculiarities of measurements of public opinion associated with a common European identity. It would be important to reveal the possible manipulative potential of public opinion surveys and discover if this potential is employed for the sake of the promotion of a European agenda.

The abundance of different actors who would like to speak on behalf of the EU (the European Parliament, the European Council, and the European Commission; their

presidents and ordinary members are in the first row of the hopefuls for such a position), the contradiction of messages, and the relatively long timespan (2004–2020) make our goal hardly achievable. However, the official statements and declarations do not always reveal the real attitudes and policy swings as they are the results of prolonged negotiations and compromises. The above-mentioned challenges encourage the principal shift in the research approach: we concentrate not on declarations and statements but on the questions asked on behalf of the EU. The formulation of the enquiries and their timing could serve as a useful resource of information. On the basis of the Standard Eurobarometer (EB) questionnaires and their result analysis, we try to reveal the interest of the EU in the problem of a common European identity and its dynamics. As the EB opinion polls are as a rule initiated by the executive branch of the EU, i.e., the European Commission, this research inevitably reveals most about the attitudes of this institution; however, this should not be considered a study of only one EU body.

For this paper, it is important to identify what inquiries from the Standard EB questionnaires disclose the interest in a common European identity problem, how these questions are framed, and whether there are any changes in the formulation of the questions and presentation of their results. The dynamics of asking questions should reveal the differences in the EU approach toward the formation of a common European identity during the period of 2004–2020.

The traditional structure of this article is supplemented by the historical perspective on the problem of a common European identity. This historical perspective is presented from three angles: (1) West European traditional, which is disclosed in the example of the political declaration, (2) Central European traditional, which is dispersed throughout the statements of intellectuals in the Soviet occupied countries, and (3) West European transitional, which is exposed with the help of an NGO document, created after the fall of communism and envisioning the future cooperation within EU-rope. Such broader context not only serves as an important addition to literature review but also reveals that a contemporary understanding of a common European identity emerges on a crossroad where at least three contradictory perspectives are meeting each other.

1.1. A Historical Perspective: West European Traditional

The idea of Europe and a common European identity has deep historical roots [9] and is examined in broad political contexts [10,11]. These discussions date long before the 2004 EU enlargement, when the meeting of the eastern and the western parts of the continent raised new questions. Different historical experiences create only minor barriers for economic cooperation; however, they do not help establish common attitudes, which customarily lead toward shared values with a common identity in the further future. In Europe “[t]he collective memory that one country constructs does not coincide with that of its neighbor, even when both memories concern the same event” [12] (p. 5) and this has been true for centuries.

The traditional Western perspectives of EU-ropean identity are well articulated in the “Declaration on European Identity,” which was adopted in 1973 at the Copenhagen meeting of the heads of the states of the enlarged European Community. Immediately after its first expansion, when Denmark, Ireland, and the UK joined the founding sextet, the leaders of the new entity “decided that the time has come to draw up a document on the European Identity” [13]. It was entirely a political declaration, which concentrated on the future of the enlarged community and tried to shape the principles of common actions on the international stage, which at the moment was in the shadow of a global “cold” conflict between the West and the East. The declaration became an important sign of the changes of the mood of the establishment, as at the beginning, “the integration of Europe was mainly driven by functional and economic rationales and identity per se was not necessarily one of the original concerns of the political architects of the EU” [2] (p. 29).

The political establishment, speaking as “The Europe of the Nine,” declared the determination “to establish themselves as a distinct and original entity”. After the initial

period of cooperation, built on the conviction of the founding members that durable economic interrelatedness can become the basis for everlasting peace on the western side of the old continent, the growing European Community was looking for a deeper ideological background. A common European identity looked like a perfect candidate for the role of the unifier. The Copenhagen Declaration clearly distinguished the “fundamental elements of the European Identity” and named them as (1) values (of legal, political, and moral order), (2) variety of national cultures, (3) shared attitudes to life (expressed by the intention to create a “society which measures up to the needs of the individual”), (4) principles of representative democracy, of the rule of law, and of social justice, (5) the goal of economic progress, and (6) respect for human rights.

The official recognition of the importance of a common European identity was drawn according to the pattern of all past and future declarations and treaties of the EU, i.e., top-down. It is hard to escape the impression that the Copenhagen Declaration took the European identity for granted, hardly taking into account the peculiarities and inevitable contradictions of national identities. The “variety of national cultures” was presented as a feature of the future common identity, not as a challenge. The very idea of putting the concept of a common European identity into a core of official political declaration deserves attention. However, the institutionalization of the identity through the declaration did not mean that a common identity was created. Instead, it was a signal of the beginning of the prolonged process with clear objectives and uncertain outcomes.

1.2. A Historical Perspective: Central European Traditional

Not going deep into the history of problems of a national identity in the eastern (or central) part of Europe during the last half of the century, it is important to notice the principal disparities in the different parts of the continent [14]. Life under Soviet occupation meant not only an individual physical threat; rather entire nations were pushed to the verge of extinction. Communist rule forced people to close in on themselves, official groups lacked honest relationships, while trusted ties were hidden from officialdom. The formal life in community lost its “imagined” attractions and existed on the officially enforced fundamentals, which had weak ties with reality or human feelings [15]. These enforced societies were closed from the outer world, left to the mercy of command economics of scarcity and politics of ideological brainwashing. Under such miserable circumstances, for many people, national culture, traditions, and national identity became a principal weapon in the fight against local communist oppression, which could not survive without support from Moscow. Simultaneously, the national identity epitomized a sacred fortress, which had to be rigorously defended till the very end. The decades of communist repressions encouraged the feeling that a lone person can be easily defeated by a ruthless system [16]. However, nations had a chance and an obligation to survive. This led toward the common sense conclusion that individuality could be sacrificed for the sake of a nation, that if individual identity is suppressed, then the national one lasts for centuries and generations.

In the West, a common European identity became a logical and rational extension of economic cooperation and a legitimate object of political bargain. A political deportee from the Soviet occupied Czechoslovakia, Milan Kundera, tried to explain that “the word “Europe” [and European identity] does not represent a phenomenon of geography [and politics] but a spiritual notion synonymous with the word “West” [and democracy]” [17]. The Eastern European understanding of identity (common European as well as national) could not be explained without overstressing the role of culture, nationalism, and Christianity. On this part of the continent, during the long rule of communism, the other dimensions of identity (economic, political, and especially legal) were discredited and still have to be reinstituted in the minds of people as inevitable pillars of identity.

Experiences of the communist rule teach that the cultural dimension of identity resists any unifying trends. The laws could be changed immediately, their reinforcement by force lasts a few years, and economic activities are flexible and adapt to the most devastating conditions sooner or later. Cultural identity remains the backbone of resistance. The

historical perspective presented by M. Kundera (“in each of the revolts in Central Europe, the collective cultural memory and the contemporary creative effort assumed roles so great and so decisive—far greater and far more decisive than they have been in any other European mass revolt” [17]) is evidently nurtured by Lithuanian philosopher Alvydas Jokubaitis: “This cultural aspect of political freedom is of little or no interest to those politicians in the Western part of Europe who tend to speak the language of universal principles, i.e., human rights, justice and democracy. To many people in Central Europe this focus on universal principles is too narrow because it is blind to their historical experiences” [18] (p. 86).

Contemporary EU-rope was created on the sad experiences of dreadful conflicts and fostered aspirations to avoid further fights or move all the wars from the battlefields to negotiation chambers or courtrooms. To no one’s surprise, such a historical perspective encourages a suspicious look into any expression of nationalism. However, “[i]t is impossible to understand democracies of Central Europe without paying any attention to the phenomenon of nationalism” [18] (p. 86). The same could be said about Catholicism, which, together with the native language, had served as a basis for distancing from the oppressive communist regimes. In the West, the strong Eastern European ties with Catholicism are portrayed as a sign of hanging on to the past and traditionally evoked in the example of Poland. However, Poland had not only cardinal Karol Wojtyła but cardinal Stefan Wyszyński as well. Meanwhile, other nations in the region nurture the reminiscences of Christian martyrs of their own: Hungarian, Czech, and Lithuanian cardinals, respectively, József Mindszenty, Josef Beran, and Vincentas Sladkevičius spent years in isolation, gaining great moral authority and all of their nations’ respect, which lasted for generations and outstripped the borders of religion.

The negotiations of the membership preceding the 2004 wave of EU enlargement revealed that “The Europe of the Nine” (which at the moment was “The Europe of the Fifteen”) was still focused on economic cooperation and the enlargement of the EU was primarily the expansion of the common market and free movement of goods and services. The free movement of people was initially delayed, and the spontaneous exchange of ideas was framed by the famous phrase of French president Jacques Chirac: “They missed a great opportunity to shut up” [19].

To no one’s surprise, the “old” Europe, which created the EU on the sound foundations of economic cooperation, looked at the newcomers with a significant dose of suspicion: for the liberal-minded part of society, all the Easterners remain a strange sort of retrogrades, or at least conservatives. “The conservatives in this region think that they defend the ideals of Western civilization, which they believe have been forgotten in contemporary Western Europe. This is the reason why the conservatives in Central Europe tend to speak not only about the local issues but about the ideals of Western civilization” [18] (p. 88).

1.3. A Historical Perspective: West European Transitional

After the fall of communism; the successful rebranding of European (Economic) Community into the EU; and the fourth wave of enlargement, which brought Austria, Finland, and Sweden into the body, the emerging new candidates for membership raised new questions about a common European identity. At that moment, another important document emerged, “Charter of European Identity,” which was approved in 1995 by the Congress of Europa-Union Deutschland in Lübeck. Europa-Union Deutschland is a German branch of the Union of European Federalists dedicated to the promotion of European unity. It unites people regardless of their political affiliation and plays an important role in facilitating the European processes. The charter was inspired by Czech intellectual and former political prisoner Vaclav Havel and his speech, which he delivered as the President of the Czech Republic to the EP in Strasbourg in 1994. If the Copenhagen Declaration was an outcome of the first enlargement of the future EU and expressed the political vision based on political identity, the Lübeck Charter was like an introduction to the future enlargement of the EU, which at that moment was foreseen only by a few political visionaries.

Despite its magnificent name, the charter was not an official text. It should be taken into account that just a few years ago, German initiators of the document had experienced the joy of unification of their own country. However, the unexpected challenges surrounding the merger of capitalist and post-communist societies were already revealed. Nevertheless, Europa-Union Deutschland was ready to raise the identity problem and saw it as a prerequisite of a future European policy. The charter stated: “the most important task facing the European Union today is coming up with a new and genuinely clear reflection on what might be called European identity” [20].

The document clearly identified the objectives of the EU-ropean integration process (peace, the conservation of the environment, and life with dignity). The short list of common values (democracy, the recognition of fundamental and human rights, and the rule of law) does not amplify the Copenhagen Declaration. However, it is emphasized that the values are “rooted in common legal principles acknowledging the freedom of the individual and social responsibility [and] based on tolerance, humanity and fraternity”. The proposed vision of Europe as “a Community of life” was based on the development of “a spirit of tolerance towards other people and cultures, to convince all citizens of the European idea, and to enable them to play their part in the process of European unification”.

The Lübeck Charter noted that “it has become clear that achievement in this field [economics] alone is insufficient for the development of a European identity”. Taking into account the mood of the Eastern spiritual understanding of identity, the charter wrote about “Community of Responsibility”. However, the framework for the promotion of a European identity was based on legal, social, and environmental actions.

The Copenhagen Declaration, the Lübeck Charter, and the dispersed ideas of Central European intellectuals could be considered the three most important sources that influence and shape the contemporary understanding of a common European identity. The Copenhagen Declaration is an example of political correctness, the ideas of eminent intellectuals reveal the historical roots and the spiritual potential of the concept, while the Lübeck Charter is a model of bridge building, an attempt to bind different historical and geopolitical attitudes.

2. Materials and Methods

The political declarations are mostly ritualistic actions with great symbolic importance; however, the lessons of history witness that these documents are usually the results of political bargains. Such a sensitive and contradictive topic as a common European identity is hardly compatible with compromises; in the case of negotiations, important points are simply excluded for the sake of political correctness and EU-ropean unity. The most influential governing body of the EU, the European Commission, bases its activities on consensus. Therefore, the attitudes in the capital of Europe could be better exposed not through direct statements but through secondary sources. The Standard EB questionnaires, which epitomize the wish to know what is in the minds of the people in EU-rope, looks like a perfect choice. From the formulation and timing of the question, one can derive what the intentions of the inquirer are. In his ironically titled essay “Public Opinion Does Not Exist,” French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu reminds us, that “[t]he problematics offered by the polling agencies are subordinated to political interests, and this very strongly governs both the meaning of the answers and the meaning given to them on publication of the findings. At present, the opinion poll is an instrument of political action” [21] (p. 150).

This article evaluates the contemporary interest of the European Commission, as the principal central actor of the EU governance, in the problems of a common European identity after the enlargement of the EU from 2004 till 2020. Based on the data from the Standard EB questionnaires, we track the changes of the mood in Brussels. We presume that the demand for data on public attitudes could serve as a more reliable indicator than public declarations or political statements. The European Commission is the principal customer of Eurobarometer surveys. Through the formulation of the survey questions and

the frequency and timing of certain inquiries, we can make educated judgments about the real intentions and interests of the survey customer.

The Standard EB poll has been used for research on public opinion in the EU member states since 1974. It is considered to be “the flagship public opinion survey of the European Commission” and is usually conducted twice per year. The survey “focuses on monitoring key trends relevant to the European Union as a whole, European Commission priorities as well as contemporary socio-political events. It allows analyzing long-term trends in attitudes related to European affairs” [22]. From Eurobarometer 41.1 (year 1994), the regular sample size (completed interviews) is 1000 respondents per country, aged 15 and over, except small countries, such as Luxembourg and Malta [23].

The Standard EB is a vital project based on a solid methodology. However, it is evolving in a natural manner: to satisfy the customers, the composition of the survey is under constant change and currently consists of about 200 entries. To no one’s surprise, not only does the Standard EB help to catch the changes in the EU-ropean public opinion but from the changes in the questions, it is possible to identify the priorities and attitudes of the customers, as well as the changes in the attitudes of the surveyed population.

The analysis of the EB questionnaires is thus built on three pillars. First, we analyzed the special report of the EB prepared for the 40th anniversary of pan-European public opinion research [24], which helped to reveal the self-assumed concept of a European identity. Secondly, we explored the questionnaires of Standard EB surveys [25] during the period of 2004–2020, focusing on the types of questions asked. Here, we identified direct and indirect questions (and their modifications), which could be used for the measurement of popular attitudes toward European and national identities. The comparison of these questions and tracking their rise and fall throughout the period of 2004–2020 helped to trace stages of increased and decreased interest in the problems of a common European identity. It is important to note how these stages of interest could be related to events in the EU (economic crisis, EP elections, changes in composition of European Commission, etc.). Finally, as the third pillar, in parallel to the previous analysis steps, it was important to consider the outcome of the European identity questions, as they directly reflect the EU member states’ populations’ views on the topic and may further influence the interest in it.

Using this approach, the results of the Standard EB surveys can reveal how the problems identified in the capital of Europe were met “on the ground”. This allows us to contemplate the impact of the public opinion revelations on the employment of some Standard EB questions.

3. Results

The research of EB database allows one to identify two trends in the understanding of a common European identity, which could be called (1) “official” and is expressed through the collection of questions under the title “European Identity” in the special report of EB prepared for the 40th anniversary of pan-European public opinion research [24] and (2) “sociological,” which we were able to detect with the help of analysis of the questionnaires of the Standard EB [25].

The “official” understanding of a common European identity by the customers of the Standard EB is based on four suppositions: (1) people interest in other EU countries, (2) identification of uniting factors, (3) a feeling of shared values, and (4) the impact of the crisis.

The presumption that the interest in other EU countries could be considered as an important part of a common European identity lacks consistency and is hardly incorporable into the concept of identity. The question (“In the last 12 months have you...?”) and the options of the answers (“visited another EU country; read a book, newspaper or magazine in a language other than your mother tongue; socialized with people from another EU country; watched TV programs in a language other than your mother tongue; used Internet in order to purchase a product or a service from another EU country”) are a wise indirect inquiry about interests of people. The conclusion (“Significant proportions of Europeans

are interested in other EU countries, and this interest has generally increased since 2006”) is sound and optimistic; however, it could be used as encouragement for deepening of tourist ties, language learning, free movement of goods, etc. The growth in Internet trade with other countries or the increased reading of books in other languages (which could be e.g., in Russian or Chinese, as well) says nothing about a common European identity.

The inquiry about the basis of the Europeans’ unity has more rationale; nevertheless, the question is straightforward (formulation: “In your opinion, among the following issues, which are those that most create a feeling of community among European Union citizens?”). The generalized answer (“Culture, history and the economy are the elements that most create a feeling of community among EU citizens”) allows one to challenge the elitist understanding of EU-ropean unity as the economic ties are overshadowed by culture and history.

The attempt of the Standard EB survey to evaluate shared EU-ropean values and present it as a fundament of a common European identity looks the most challenging. Together with P. Bourdieu, we would like to risk “offending a naively democratic sentiment” and contest the premise that “[e]very opinion survey assumes that everyone can have an opinion; in other words, that producing an opinion is something available to all” [21] (p. 149). The question “How close are European countries in terms of “shared values”?” is barely answerable and hardly tells anything about identity and the conclusion (“Europeans are divided on whether they think different EU Member States have “shared values”: around half (49 percent) think countries are close in their shared values, but nearly as many (42 percent) do not think so”) is right but is out of the context of the identity feeling.

The effort to put the European identity into the context of a crisis is the most politicized attempt to employ a public opinion poll. The question (“Has the crisis brought Europeans together or driven them apart?”) gives no satisfactory answer (“In countries where the crisis has been most acute, a majority feel closer to other EU citizens, but overall fewer than half of Europeans feel this way”).

The analysis of Standard EB questionnaires allowed us to identify other questions, which intends to gratify the wishes of politicians, however can help to diagnose the state of a common European identity better. This “sociological” trend includes at least three questions, which could be entitled as (1) Moreno, (2) citizenship, and (3) attachment questions. These questions correspond to the sound theoretical assumption that the “European identity is understood in its affective and cognitive dimensions. The affective dimension is operationalized as attachment to Europe on a territorial level. [...] The cognitive dimension of European identity refers to the self-perception as European” [26].

The **Moreno question**, named after Spanish sociologist Luis Moreno Fernandez, who in 1986 pioneered this question in his research on Scottish and Catalan identities [27], is a well-established instrument for identity research. The general European version of the question is: “Do you see yourself as (1) [nationality] only; (2) [nationality] and European; (3) European and [nationality]; or (4) European only.” The question is purposefully vague, as it does not present a clear understanding of what is meant by European (Europe or the EU, geographical, political, or cultural dimensions) but it allows one to introduce some gradation of identity and broadens the understanding of the concept [28] (pp. 14–15).

As seen in Table 1, the Moreno question was included in the Standard EB polls once per year in 2004–2006, 2010, and 2012, missed in 2007 and 2011, and survived some attempts at modification in 2008–2009. From 2013 until 2019, the Moreno question was included in every Standard EB survey. In 2013, the question was modified: instead of inquiring about the future (“In the near future, do you see yourself as...?”), from EB80 the survey asks, “Do you see yourself as...?” With this change, we can notice a one-time minor increase in identification with “nationality only”. However, this increase survives for only half a year. If the customer of the surveys had an intention to demonstrate that the European identity was smoothly transferred from the question of the future into the present, the change could be called a success.

Table 1. Questions about a common European identity in the Standard Eurobarometer 2004–2020.

Year	2004	2005		2006		2007		2008		2009		2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020	
EB No.	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94
Citizen Question			1					2				3																					
Moreno Question	4				5			6				7							8							9							
Attachment Question	10						11														12												

Years colored in blue signify EU parliament election years. Green (red) boxes note the presence (absence) of the original question. Yellow indicates a strong modification of the original question. Additional information about any changes in the question is allocated a number, as follows: 1. Question: And do you ever think of yourself as a citizen of the world? Does this happen often, sometimes or never? 2. Question: Thinking about this, to what extent do you personally feel you are...—European—(NATIONALITY)—Inhabitant of your region—A citizen of the world. 3. Question: Do you feel you are a citizen of the EU? 4. Question: In the near future, do you see yourself as...? 5. Question: Do you ever think of yourself as not only (NATIONALITY) but also European? Does this happen often, sometimes or never? 6. Question: Thinking about this, to what extent do you personally feel you are...—European—(NATIONALITY)—Inhabitant of your region—A citizen of the world. 7. Question: In the near future, do you see yourself as...? 8. Question: Do you see yourself as...? 9. New counting “Total European.” 10. Question: People may feel different degrees of attachment to their town or village, to their region, to their country or to Europe. Please tell me how attached you feel to... Your city/town/village—Your region—(OUR COUNTRY)—Europe. 11. New Answer option: Your city/town/village—(OUR COUNTRY)—European Union. 12. Extra answer option: Europe.

In 2016, a new category was introduced for the presentation of the results of the Moreno question: EB86 begins to count not only “Total ‘More European than National’” and “Total ‘More National than European’” but “Total European” as well. This change has no impact on the results; however, the presentation of the survey data obtains extra potential for medialization. We should not forget that the media permanently needs dynamics and the survey data are always presented as “a horse race”. When the results of “Total ‘More National than European’” is in the range of 90 percent, and “Total ‘More European than National’” in the range of 10 percent, the perspectives of a European identity look murky. There is no competition and no interest. The introduction of “Total ‘European’” (about 60 percent) revives the expectations that a common European identity is not a distant dream of the future and sooner or later the media could notice (or could be encouraged to show) that the competition of “Total ‘European’” and “National only” is a dynamic race, worth observation and comments. Such a move is a bit manipulative, but it could be an important tool for the promotion of a European identity.

The **citizenship question** can compete with the Moreno question according to its popularity in Standard EB surveys (see Table 1). However, the formulation of the question and the problematic relationship between identity and citizenship do not allow one to use the citizenship question as the best indicator of a European identity. A person can consider himself or herself to be a European but is not a citizen, or vice versa. Identity is more about a feeling, which is hardly compatible with legal or political definitions. However, there is a strong opinion that “inventing the European citizen [could serve] as the narrative core of a European identity” [1] (p. 436).

The citizenship question was introduced in the Standard EB in 2010; for the first two years, it was asked in every second survey, and since 2012, it is used in every poll. If the customers of the surveys are interested in the promotion of the European identity, the answers to the citizenship question show a slow but permanent increase in the share of the population that feels like European citizens [25]. This increase could be attributed to objective achievements of EU integration (Schengen free movement agreement, introduction of Euro, etc.) and is unaffected by the disillusiones created by the crises (contradictions do not influence the legal status of citizenship).

During the period of 2011–2019 (Standard EB 73–91), we notice a certain “competition” between the Moreno and the citizenship questions. As Figure 1 reveals, the answers to the Moreno question (dark- and light-blue lines) remained extreme in comparison with the answers to the citizenship question (dark- and light-green lines). It is hard not to notice that the Moreno questioning lacks positive dynamics while the answers to the citizenship help to identify real or imagined positive trends throughout the period. This could be one of the reasons for the decreased interest in the Moreno question.

The **attachment questions** were absent from the list of the Standard EB surveys only in the period of 2008–2011. The formulation of the question remained nearly the same throughout the period; only the list of the attachment objects lived through some changes. In different periods of time, the permanent choice of the three most important objects (“Your city/town/village—(OUR COUNTRY)—Europe”) was supplemented by “Your region” and “European Union” options. The scale of attachment measurement remained the same.

The change in the attachment object from Europe to the EU in 2006 reveals a substantial difference between the two objects (EB65 showed that 63 percent of the people felt an attachment toward Europe and 50 percent toward the EU). Maybe a 13-percentage point gap led toward the suspension of a comparable measurement of attachment toward Europe and the EU in later surveys. In any case, the practice of comparable measurements was reintroduced only in 2014. However, the attachment to Europe remains stronger than the attachment to the EU by about 10 percentage points.

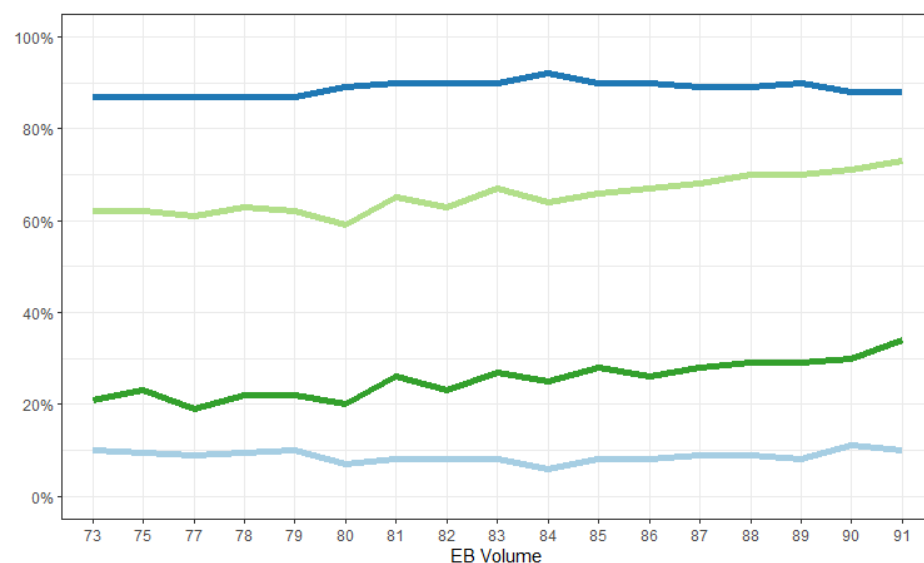


Figure 1. Percentages of respondents that answered the Moreno question with “More National than European” (dark blue) and “More European than National” (light blue) as well as the citizenship question with “Yes, definitely” (dark green) and any form of “Yes” (light green) from 2011 to 2019 (Standard EB 73–91).

4. Discussion

A common European identity in its core is a uniting idea, but the historical approach reveals that the differences on the western and eastern sides of EU-rope in terms of the identity problem can have an enduring effect on the formation of a common European identity and can become one of the principal challenges in the future. The previous experiences of Union building could be of limited use as the dialog on the questions of values is even more complicated than trade negotiations. The difficulties occur even in situations when both sides are keen to look for compromises. The inspiring V. Havel intentions, which encouraged discussions of the new European identity, in the Lübeck Charter were put into a hardly recognizable form, somewhere in between the established political jargon and the vocabulary of experienced project managers.

These two different attempts (the Copenhagen Declaration and the Lübeck Charter) to reify a common European identity on two different levels reveal the growing significance of the problem and deepening understanding of its importance. It also shows the permanent threat of bureaucratization of the concept: in the hands of the political establishment, the idea of an identity is continually overshadowed by wishes to create a grand project, which deserves essential financial support; measure the results; and declare successful implementation. Mental processes inside societies usually follow more complicated routes. Furthermore, cautious voices of Eastern European intellectuals should not be considered only as relicts of the past but important advices. The fact that these ideas were never put in an orderly form of a charter or a declaration does not diminish the value of the standpoint.

The leadership of the EU is aware of the problem and for the sake of the strong union is keen to instrumentalize a common European identity building, though the processes are poorly understood and therefore challenging. Public opinion polls are considered an important tool; however, they are not magic and cannot propose a solution. They often become a political weapon that is overdependent on the customer and the established traditions. The “official” and “sociological” trends of the interpretation of a common European identity are a mild confirmation the complexity of the problem. With the help of the same Standard EB surveys, the “official” European identity is placed in the shadow of the Copenhagen Declaration and the Lübeck Charter. This understanding is based on human curiosity about other countries and cultures; recognizes the importance of history,

culture, and economic ties; speaks about abstract “shared values”; and implies that crises and challenge encourage people to unite.

The “sociological” European identity is less clearly articulated and is unevenly dispersed among different questions. It is heavily influenced by the officiality of citizenship; however, it benefits from attachment to a certain region or entity and stresses the importance of emotions or feelings. At this point, the “sociological” European identity is drifting toward the Eastern European intellectual tradition.

In the western part of the continent, the common European identity problem was better conceptualized and is developing in a traditional way, when the national identities are put on the negotiation table as fishery quotas, pollution permissions, or tax breaks. In the eastern part, the identity problem is less clearly articulated and primarily because of its universality is considered to be a non-negotiable national asset. Sacrifice of the national identity for the sake of a European one looks highly improbable. With the broad experience of compromise building, the European Commission is carefully investigating the problem. Despite a clear wish to promote the EU-ropean unity, the Brussels establishment is not prepared to move fast. However, this situation does not allow us to presuppose that one particular side is right.

The analysis of the Standard EB questionnaires from 2004 to 2020 reveals that the principal customer of the surveys, the EU Commission, demonstrated its dedication to the problem of a common European identity. This rising awareness was predetermined by the enlargement of the EU, which increased diversity among its member states: the south–north division was supplemented by the east–west. The interest in diagnostic tools for a common European identity apparently increased after the economic and financial turmoil of 2008–2011; the refugee crisis in 2015 and the Brexit vote in 2016 only helped advertise the problem. A review of the identity questions in the Standard EB questionnaire confirms that the search for the instruments of identity measurement is underway. It is hardly possible to invent one universal question that could reveal and measure the ups and downs of the formation of a European identity.

Regardless of the formulation, identity questions reveal a permanent interest in the problem. However, the period of economic crisis (2008–2011) could be identified as a retreat from the identity problem. Maybe during this complicated period, the customers of the Standard EB surveys were more interested in other sorts of questions. Or maybe the hardships of everyday life overshadowed the European unity feelings and contradictions between member states and the disappointments of their citizens could not only be seen in the protests on the streets but mirrored in the surveys as well. However, the customers of the surveys decided that there was no need to expose that under the burden of economic and financial hardships, the European identity is experiencing a crisis of its own.

Nevertheless, the post-crisis period reveals not only the increase in the frequency of the identity questions in the Standard EB surveys but changes in the approach to it as well. We can see some attempts to present the data in a manner that supports the thesis of European identity formation. A change in the formulation of the questions or in the answer options reveals hardly noticeable wishes to see the slow but inevitable birth of a common European identity. The refugee crisis of 2015 and a Brexit vote a year later had a positive effect on the monitoring of the European identity.

If the analysis of the question creation allows us to presume that the customer of the Standard EB surveys showed increased concerns regarding the problems of identity since 2012, a quick look into the polls results reveals that this interest failed to be translated into actual results. However, 10 years of increased interest in identity problems reveals that real changes could happen only at a national level.

5. Conclusions

Beginning with the first wave of EU enlargement, a common Europe identity became an important and inseparable part of the European political lexicon. However, until 2004, this highly emotional concept was overshadowed primarily by economic and political

aspects of EU-ropean unity. With the Great Wave of Enlargement and membership of Eastern European states, an imperative historical dimension was added to the concept. From the very beginning, the need of a new understanding of a common European identity was not taken seriously by the political establishment. However, the economic crisis, the legal challenges of EU integration, and the Brexit story encourage a fresh look into a common European identity as a potential tool for unity building. Analysis of the EU establishment attitudes, based on the examination of Standard EB questionnaires, allows one to conclude that the development of tools for a common European identity research is well understood and is under constant construction. However, the “official” and “sociological” perceptions of a common European identity not only have deep roots but also influence the contemporary understanding of the issue. The last shifts in the composition of Standard EB questionnaires (decreased interest in the Moreno question) signal that the “official” understanding of identity is gaining ground against the “sociological” approach. It would be important to find out if this drift is a permanent one. A clear “victory” of Western-style identity would be logical, but the promotion of a one-sided understanding of a common European identity by official bodies of the EU narrows the field and creates certain risks. In the face of a permanent EU-ropean unity crisis, it would not be wise to lose one of the important instruments that could be successfully used to identify the hidden challenges.

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