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Plurality of Identities in Europe

Motto:

“...The community is founded upon a thin post-national identity defined by liberal values and norms of domestic and international conduct...” (Frank Schimmelfennig)

The European Union differs from the traditional states not only due to its external policies or internal institutional design, but also due to its claim to act as a single and unitary actor. Moreover, if we look within European Union, some of the member states are many times rivals for the EU as actors in the international arena. In this context, the present article is trying to analyze this difficulty of European Union to be a unitary international actor from a more recent approach to international relations, that of *identity*.

The discipline of International Relations is, recently, witnessing a surge of interest in identity and identity formation. This development has definitely been permitted and facilitated by the general uncertainty of a discipline that feels itself to have spent the 1980s barking up the wrong trees. Furthermore, since identity formation has been foremost among the common concerns of social theory for years and years, it was very easy to become one also in the theory of international relations.

Until 1980s, the positivist and empirical approaches dominated the theory of international relations. All these theories were concentrated on the states' actions. They believed that states are the only important actors in the system. Moreover, all their studies were based only on empirical

methodologies. The new theories that appeared in the 1980's tried to bring a totally different view towards the theory of international relations. They criticised the ontology, epistemology and methodology of all the previous theories. They claimed that there were some normative aspects in the international system that had to be taken into consideration. One of the most important ideas that was brought by, due to these theories, was the role of identity and the importance of its formation in the study of international relations.

As I've stated before, the 1980's brought a lot of changes in the theory of international relations. For the first time, the states and their high politics didn't play the only role in the international system. The emergence of the concept of *identity* in the study of international affairs was due to the changes that happened in the last years. A lot of national and ethnic movements appeared; changes that urged the theorists of international relations to try to analyse the causes of all these changes. Consequently, the conflict between different states transformed into the conflict between different identities. What were these identities and what was their importance were only some questions to which the theorists tried to find answers. Moreover, what was most important was to see how these identities formed and what implications could this have on their behaviour.

The theorists of international relations started to compare the man's behaviour with the state's one, and so they started to compare the formation of self-identity with the formation of national identity.

When we look to the Oxford English Dictionary we see that identity means: "the sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances, the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else" (Neumann 1999: 216). "In the philosophical sense an identity is whatever makes a thing what it is. [...identity is] a property of intentional actors that generates motivational and behavioral dispositions. This means that identity is at base a subjective or unit-

level quality, rooted in an actor's self-understanding." (Wendt 2000: 224). So identity is actually a set of core values that one person develops for him/her self.

Since identity implies – and indeed literally means – selfsameness, what could we say about collective identity? Moreover, is collective identity as flexible and context changing as the individual identity? Could we apply the same characteristics and discuss in the same terms about collective identity as we do about individual identity?

These were just a few issues that some of the theorists of international relations did not take into consideration when talking about identity in international relations. Consequently, when theorizing identity in international relations we should concentrate on the collective understanding of identity and its particularities in comparison with the more cohesive individual identity. Following the same logic, when discussing about European identity and its crucial role in the integration process we should first focus on its collective and diverse character.

Indeed, at the level of collective identity, the pursuit of consistency, of a strong cultural identity, or of selfsameness is completely different from the ones of individual identity. Consequently, we cannot claim (as most of the scholars do) that European Union has, either, cultural, religious or politic unifying identity; it is rather a very complex and diverse identity.

There are a lot of theories and different approaches on the formation of European identity. Still, greatly simplifying existing theories concerning the emergence of European identity, there could be identified three main approaches, distinguished by the different possible sources of European identification they defend. These three approaches are the “cultural”, “instrumental” and “civic” theories.

The “cultural” approach to European identity stresses the idea that it should emulate from the “classical” nation-building of the type seen during the 19th century, but now developing at the European level and including an attempt to construct a stronger European identity. Still, cultural diversity and structural differences are deeply rooted and, as a result, expectations of the emergence of a European identity should be regarded as rather utopian.

For the proponents of the “instrumental” theory, European identity would be consciously decided on, and are thus based on calculated individual self-interest. Consequently, the perception of the potential gains or losses that might result from the membership of a given social group may influence peoples’ identification with it.

Finally, the third approach, the “civic” theory, stresses the development of identities around agreement over rules for peaceful political co-existence, shared cultural norms, and common beliefs. From this perspective, the substance of EU membership and European identity lies in a commitment to the shared values of the Union as expressed in its constituent documents or a commitment to the duties and rights of a civic society. Drawing on deliberative theories of democracy and Habermasian conceptions of communicative rationality, the emergence of a European public sphere would be crucial for the emergence of a European identity.

Analysing all these theories, we could easily observe their focus on unity and the cohesive understanding of European identity. Still, as I claimed before the collective identity is different from the individual one: it is not at all cohesive and does not focus on absolute selfsameness; it is rather based on diversity among its units.

Moreover, if we take into consideration the last and future Eastern enlargement the situation of cohesiveness is even more elusive. Heterogeneity within EU will strongly increase with the accession of Central and Eastern European countries. The new members will bring with them a peculiar historical, political, economic and social heritage and the problems of their region. They have a particularly low level of socioeconomic development, struggle with specific problems of transformation from the Communist society, and possess political traditions (long periods of authoritarianism, foreign domination, etc.) that distinguish them clearly from the other Western member states.

The socialist experiment in Eastern Europe exhibited three important aspects. One was an exaggeration of those characteristics that had defined Eastern Europe's past- authoritarian rule, the erasure of boundary between the state and the society, the state and the economy, the private and the public, the radial structure of a political system, and the rejection of an interest-based, pluralist, and competitive politics.

Another important characteristic was a dramatic break with the past. Especially in the early decades of socialism, there was extraordinarily rapid urbanization, expansion of the educational and health care systems, and economic growth.

The final aspect of the communist period was that related to the complex approach taken to the national question. On the one hand, socialist identity was to supplant nationalist identity; on the other hand, national differences were encouraged – most notably in the multinational states of Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Soviet Union with their multiple officially recognized languages; their representation at the centre and their ethno-territorial federal structures that allowed for a coincidence among nationality, administration, and geography.

To conclude, what the Soviet state socialism was designed to do was to separate the East from the West, and in many respects it managed, as the Eastern Europe is still followed by its past. Even though we are now talking about a united Europe, there are still embedded differences between the East and West that will, of course, continue its impact on further developments.

Moreover, the differences among the Member States are not only among West and East, but they are much wider and complex. The next table will reveal the complexity of differences among the member states in European Union, due to some important conflictual lines between them.

Table 1. Conflicts within European Union

Criteria	Conflicts
Size	Big vs. Small states
Location	Northern vs. Southern states
Industrialisation	Urban vs. Rural states
Point of entry	Founding vs. New member states
Independence	Atlanticists vs. Europeanists
Domestic government	Unitary vs. Decentralised/ federal states

Source: LODGE, J. 1983. **Institutions and politics of the European Community**. London: Frances Pinter.

The table reveals a very complex and dynamic net of conflicts within European Union. These conflicts among the member state are very strongly embedded in every nation's identity and cannot be undermined in the construction of a future European identity.

The eastern enlargement brought, as I've stated before, another problem into the equation: the post-communist inheritance. The new member states have a different history and past that influence their current behaviour. Even if we take into consideration all their recent economic

and political developments, at social level, the population remain still marked with the communist inheritance: low level of trust in people and institutions, low civic participation and engagement, but most importantly low level of cohesion.

Moreover, if we look forward to the 2007 accession of Romania and Bulgaria, or later Turkey and Croatia, the diversity will increase even more. Orthodox and Muslim countries will join the European family. In this context, how we could talk about a unifying European identity?

All in all, it is obvious that European Union does not have a unitary collective identity, and much more, it is impossible even in the foreseeable future to construct one. What we could only argue is that the European identity lies in its diversity and its differences among the units. We cannot talk about unitary and common identity, but we could talk about a plurality of identities in Europe that agreed on a set of basic rules and values.

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