

## Unpacking European identity

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The creation of the European single market, the Euro, the enlargement of the European Union from fifteen members in 1986 to twenty-seven members in 2007, and the “deepening” of the institutional, legislative, and policy frameworks of the European Union in the past twenty years have run parallel to an increase in the role of citizens in the integration process. For various reasons, political elites in different EU countries have felt compelled to periodically consult the citizens about the Treaties that embodied and made possible the transformation of the European Union into a multi-level governance polity. Concern about the democratic credentials of the European Union, negative outcomes in many of the consultation processes referred to above, and relatively low levels of support for European integration since the early 1990s have motivated scholarly interest in support for European integration and European identity. This interest has not always been matched, however, by conceptual clarity as to what was being investigated, realistic assumptions about the social and cognitive processes shaping the citizens’ approach, and systematic empirical tests of theoretically-informed hypotheses. This paper builds on a previous project, entitled *Framing Europe*, which examined how British, German, and Spanish citizens conceptualize the European Union and European integration, in order to find clues as to the socio-historical processes that explain lasting country-level contrasts in support for membership in the European Union. The project rested on more than 180 in-depth interviews with ordinary citizens and local elites in a total of six cities (two per country). My focus was not the study of European identity. At the end of the questionnaire, however, I included three questions pertaining to the degree to which respondents identified with their country, their region, and Europe.

This paper begins with a puzzle: while support for European integration and membership in the European Union has and remains solid, the citizens’ level of identification with Europe tends to be low and stable over time, despite the

Europeanization of people's economic and political behaviour and experiences in the last twenty years. This puzzle has not been addressed in the literature. To begin to address it, I go back to the answers to the questions on identity referred to above and to the justifications respondents gave to them, to deepen our conceptual understanding of what these questions on identity mean to citizens and what factors enter in the explanation of identification with Europe.

### The problem

The literature on European integration has tended to 1) conflate behaviour in referenda on reform treaties of the European Union, support for European integration, and identification with Europe, 2) conflate different dimensions of European identity, 3) failed to unpack the various meanings that citizens attach to the idea of identification with Europe.

The first problem mainly concerns public commentary and discussions related to European integration. The best kind of research on public opinion and European integration certainly differentiates between different dimensions of how citizens position themselves with respect to Europe (see Gabel 1998). Once we move away, however, from empirical, quantitative, research, where great weight is placed on the rigor with which different concepts are defined and measured, the discussion on citizens and Europe becomes murkier. Nothing exemplifies this better than some commentary published after the No votes in the French and Dutch referenda. The *Daily Mail*, for instance, concluded that "there is still no such thing as a common European identity. The sense of national interest that Europeans have always had has not been eliminated: and it exploded in France on Sunday" (Simon Heffer, "Why can't the arrogant elite see...enough is enough," May 31, 2005). The *Daily Mail* was not alone in bringing identity into the explanation for the referendum outcomes. William Pfaff, writing for the prestigious *New York Review of Books* hastily wrote that "The rejection surely demonstrated the current gap of comprehension between European political elites and the European public, but was mainly evidence of the consistently underestimated forces of national identity and ambition in each of the twenty-five nations. The French were enthusiastically seconded by another highly nationalistic and individualistic European society, the Netherlands—also one of the founding Fathers of the European Union" (*What's left of the Union*, July 14, 2005). More sober reactions certainly stressed that the referendum results did not mean that French or Dutch voters do not support

European integration and that they said little about the extent to which French and Dutch citizens identify with Europe, but the impact of these on the public at large were probably less than that of the more sweeping and simplistic generalizations drawn by journalists working for major newspapers and magazines.

Journalists, of course, are not the only ones to consistently conflate concepts such as support for the EU, identification with Europe, and behavior in referenda. Scholars often fall into the same trap. The closest example I have of this tendency is how *Framing Europe* has been understood or referred to in the literature. Thought of as an investigation of how ordinary citizens understand the European Union, grounded on the simple idea that attitudes to the EU reflect in part the combined effect of how people frame the European Union and their values and expectations, many readers have interpreted it as a study of European identity. In fact, since one third of the book is devoted to demonstrate that people's frames about the European Union are anchored/resonate with their national political culture, *Framing Europe* is, if anything, a study of national political cultures in three countries,.

One can speculate that part of the explanation for the conflation of concepts and the misreading of publications on European integration reflects the enduring strength of the nation-state model. This model says that a polity's legitimacy rests on its encompassing one and only one community of identification and that a polity's degree of legitimacy depends on the citizens' degree of emotional investment in the community upon which this polity has been built. This model, however, has been strongly disputed on moral, political, and empirical grounds. It is indeed perfectly conceivable, and for many even desirable, to ground a polity on "cold" principles of efficacy and democratic participation and accountability. *Eurobarometer* survey data show, in fact, that European citizens are perfectly capable of supporting European integration while remaining primarily attached to national or local communities.

The second problem listed above, that is, the lack of precision in the use of the concept of European identity, has been brilliantly discussed by Brubaker and Cooper in their well-known piece "Beyond identity". Brubaker and Cooper criticize in this piece the social scientists' lack of conceptual rigor in using the term identity, distinguish three different uses of the term, and propose to substitute the term "identity" by alternative ones that unambiguously concern each of these three uses. Brubaker and Cooper differentiate between identity as membership in a group category, identity as the attributes attached to a group category, and identity as degree of identification with a

group category. The distinction between the first and the third usages is important because individuals can acknowledge that society places them officially or informally in a given category (e.g. "I am a Spaniard because this is what my passport says") but still dispute this categorization or have only a small emotional investment in this category of membership (e.g. "Although my passport says that I am a Spaniard, I think of myself as German"; "Although my passport says that I am a Spaniard, being Spanish means very little to me".)

The third problem listed at the beginning of this section is the one that concerns me in this paper, which is the assumption that the notion of "identification with Europe" is unambiguously understood by scholars who use the term and even more importantly, by citizens who answer questions about their degree of identification with Europe. These assumptions, however, have not been tested empirically. This is troublesome, for if one wants to explain the low and stable levels of identification with Europe that one observes survey after survey, it would be nice to know what it means for people and to check whether it means the same for scholars who provide the explanations and for respondents who provide the answers to variously formulated questions (e.g. "How often do think of yourself as European?"; "How attached you feel to Europe?"; "How strongly do you identify as European?"; "How would you define yourself: Only European, More European than National, As European as National, More National than European, or Only National?"). However they define the concept of identification with Europe, it is a safe assumption that European Union officials eager to promote a sense of belonging to Europe and scholars concerned with the lack of identification with Europe among citizens, are mostly interested in the emotional dimension of identification. What they want is citizens for whom the category "European" is a salient aspect of their sense of who they are and whose emotional well-being is tied to the collective well-being of members in this category and the fate of the collective represented by this category.

When I started asking German, Spanish, and British citizens about the extent to which they identify as Europeans, I assumed that their understanding of the concept of identification with Europe would be close to the politicians' and scholars'. It was thus with surprise that I soon realized that this is not the case. Ordinary citizens are still at the stage where they are trying to see whether the category of identification "European" "suits" them, that is, whether it is a suit that they can wear comfortably because it does not contradict their self-image of who they are. Very seldom does one find citizens who

have internalized the sense of being European and who invest emotion in this identity, akin to the one placed on regional or national identities. Therefore, when we measure identification with Europe we are still dealing with the first dimension of identity discussed by Brubaker and Cooper. In the remaining of the paper, I sketch out how respondents justify or rationalize feeling or not feeling European. These justifications contribute to clarifying both the low levels of identification with Europe one finds in surveys and the lack of change over time in these levels.

### Who feels European?

The literature on identification with Europe has already examined the explanatory role of a selected number of variables. Díez Medrano and Gutiérrez (2001), for instance, apply insights from social identity theory to empirically analyze the impact of images of Europe on people's degree of identification with Europe. Social identity theory states that, given a choice, individuals choose those identities that provide them with a better self-image. Díez Medrano and Gutiérrez verify the validity of this hypothesis by showing that in Spain the propensity to identify with Europe is greater the more positive images of Europe are. Díez Medrano and Gutiérrez also validate Inglehart's and Deutsch's cognitive mobilization hypothesis, according to which more educated individuals, because of their greater capacity of abstraction, are more capable to identify with imagined communities such as Europe than are less educated ones.

The ethnographic work I conducted in Britain, Germany, and Spain, allowed me to uncover other factors underlying the extent to which individuals identify as Europeans. Three of these factors refer to how people perceive the category of identification "Europe" and can be labelled as "salience", "structural position", "heterogeneity". They complement the factor "image" implied from the argumentative logic of social identity theory. The fourth factor, like Deutsch's and Inglehart's cognitive mobilization skills, refers to people's individual characteristics, and can be labelled as "Up-rooting".

#### "Salience"

To identify with something, to feel that one is part of a category of identification, one has to be aware of the category and of the possibility of identifying as member of this category. In other words, the category must be meaningful. An anecdote may suffice to illustrate this point. A few years ago, I had breakfast with Philippe Schmitter, a well-known political scientist. I had never met him before and therefore much of the conversation consisted in me telling him who I was and what my work was about. In

particular, I told him that I had just finished a book, entitled *Framing Europe*, and I proceeded to briefly synthesize its contents as well as I could. Shortly after I had begun to provide this synopsis, Schmitter interrupted me and asked me whether I was a 'constructionist'. The question caught me by surprise and I did not have a clue about how to answer: coming from sociology and having worked almost exclusively with the literature on public opinion attitudes to European integration, I was oblivious to many of the theoretical debates that have dominated scholarly discussion in the IR and comparative politics fields. I was therefore thrown off balance by the question. Concerned, however, about not being perceived as an ignorant, I hastily told him that yes I was a constructionist. The point here is that Schmitter asked me to identify with a category that was meaningful to him but that at the time had no meaning whatsoever to me. (Fortunately, he did not ask me, as survey researchers like to do, to answer 'how strongly' I identified as a constructionist!). As scholars we take it for granted that the category "European" is meaningful to individuals and we ask them for their level of identification even before ascertaining whether they see themselves as members of the category. The fact is that many respondents seem surprised when one asks them the question and behave very much the way I behaved with Schmitter; that is, they define themselves in these terms based on whatever information they can hurriedly summon in their head at the moment in which the question is raised. Some of their answers, improvised as they are, reveal, however, that the extent to which Europe is perceived to exist as an object, in this case, as a political object, matters in guiding their answers. One respondent, for instance, told me that she did not identify much with Europe because it does not exist yet ("I suppose I am a pro-Europe, but I don't greatly identify myself as a European because it doesn't exist as of yet"; Northampton, 30-50 years old, >High School). By this, she meant that the political construction of Europe had not advanced as much as to become a meaningful category of identification. Another respondent, on the other hand, responded as if the answer were self-evident, saying that since she has a European passport she is European. Similar answers and justifications were offered by other respondents in the German, British, and Spanish cities where I conducted my interviews. One may argue that respondents focused on political dimensions because the interview had been about the European Union and because the question on identification with Europe followed a similar one referred to national identification. Had the interview centered on culture, for instance, respondents might have provided different answers. Nonetheless, answers such as the ones referred to

above, suggest that for individuals to identify as members of a polity, they must first think of this polity as 'real'. Citizens for whom the European Union has achieved a sufficient level of political reality thus find it easier and even self-evident to identify as Europeans whereas respondents for whom the European Union is not yet a reality react in ways that reveal that they find the question absurd. In a nutshell, one can conclude that individuals identify as members of a category to the extent that they perceive that they can be and are classified as such. This perception in turn depends on the concreteness, or even tangibility, of the category of identification.

To illustrate the power of classification, one can refer to the religious category "Catholic". Spain has been traditionally classified as a "Catholic" country. In fact, Álvarez-Junco provides a brilliant historical account of efforts undertaken by conservative groups to make "Catholicism" one of the defining characteristics of Spanish national identity. Spanish laws still privilege the Catholic Church: Art. 16 of the Constitution, for instance, states that "Public powers will take into account the Spanish society's religious beliefs and therefore maintain appropriate cooperative ties with the Catholic Church and other religions." On top of this, the majority of Spanish citizens still abide by Catholic rites of passage, whatever the meaning they may assign to these rights. Therefore, most Spaniards are baptised and receive the first Communion before they are old enough to be able to decide what they want. In sum, the category Catholic has an objective character for Spaniards that transcends the emotional and behavioral dimensions of religiosity. The implications of this objectivity are that when Spaniards are asked whether they are Catholic, many find it difficult to answer, simply because they are confronted to objective facts as those listed above (a power often reinforced by how one is classified by others). They may thus ask themselves: "Does the fact that Spain is depicted as a Catholic country make me a Catholic?", "My parents baptised me; does this make me a Catholic". Overwhelmed by the power of classifications, many individuals may in the end answer "Yes, I am a Catholic" irrespective of their actual religious feelings or practices. The same happens with identification with Europe, except that in this case the political category "European" is much less established in European citizens' minds. This lack of habituation to being called European is displayed in the following quote from a female respondent from Girona: "I don't know; I do not feel very European. I don't know, as a child you are told that you are Spanish; you are not told that you are European. This is not something that one changes so easily."

### “Structural position”

Another influence on people's identification as members of a category is the structural position of this category with respect to other meaningful categories. It is important to distinguish between identities that stand in a horizontal relationship to other identities and identities that stand in a hierarchical or nested relationship to other identities. The literature suggests that nested identities are easy to integrate. Brewer, for instance, points out that higher level identities meet the individuals' need for inclusion in a larger community whereas the lower-level ones meet the individuals' need to differentiate themselves from other individuals (1993). Identities that stand in a horizontal relationship to one another, however, because of representing exclusive categories in a classification, are by definition incompatible. The problem, however, is that both categories of identification and their structural status of categories of identification are largely social constructions. This is especially true when we consider the structural relationship between European and national identities. Taking our cues from geography, many people might take it as self-evident that in the European geographical space, national identities are nested in the European one. This is how we scholars tend to position these identities. Travel to Britain, however, and it becomes quite clear that European identity has been socially constructed as standing on a horizontal plane with British identity. Thus, a woman in Falkirk offered the following answer to my question on identification with Europe: “Stronger with Britain than with Europe, ‘cause (sic.) it’s two different countries, two different communities altogether” (Falkirk, 30-50 yrs. old, <High school education). When one asks Britons whether they identify as European, it sometimes feel as like asking a person who appears to be a man whether he identifies as a woman. Some will say yes, but by doing this, they are also saying that they are not members of the alternative category. When they say that they are European they are simultaneously saying that they are not British. Lest one reads this argument as tautological, let's clarify that I am differentiating between society's classifications and how individuals position themselves in these pre-existing and transmitted classifications. Britons, Germans, Spaniards, become socialized in societies where categories of classification are already structurally organized. In Britain, the categories British and European, as I learned through my interviews and through analysis of cultural products such as novels or history textbooks, stand as exclusive categories,

whereas in Germany and Spain, these categories generally stand as nested categories<sup>1</sup>. This is one reason why many Britons experience Europe as a threat to their national identity whereas Germans and Spaniards generally do not and why in some countries the correlation between the levels of national and European identification is negative whereas in other countries it is positive (see Díez Medrano and Gutiérrez, 2001). The trauma of adopting a European identity is therefore greater in a place like the UK than in a place like Germany. In some cases, it means to give up the national identity; in others, it means to actively challenge the dominant classification structure in which one has been socialized. Needless to say, although the explanation I propose for why citizens of certain countries find it more difficult to see themselves as members of the category of identification "Europe" is not tautological it still begs the question of what historical processes determine how are classifications constructed and how they change. For reasons of space, I will not address this issue here but I do so in the book *Framing Europe*.

Marilynn Brewer's theory about the double function of identification--inclusion and differentiation--can also be used to interpret another process underlying identification with Europe, which is the tendency among some people to substitute a European identity for a national identity that they reject. In culturally homogeneous states, national identity probably functions as the identity of differentiation whereas European identity functions as the identity of inclusion. In some plurinational states, however, regional identities already fulfill a strong differentiating function. National and the European identities could possibly function as identities of inclusion. The choice of one or another, or both, will depend on many factors, individual and social, including the ones already invoked above, i.e. the salience and structural position of these identities. What one finds in culturally distinct regions (e.g. Scotland, Catalonia) is that regional nationalists proclaim their identification with Europe in order to signify their rejection of the national identity. It is not a simple choice between two independent categories of identification that these individuals make; their choice for Europe is a choice against the state identity, another form of assertion of the regional identity that is central to this people.

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<sup>1</sup> There are, of course, exceptions in Britain, such as a middle-aged, university-educated respondent from Northampton who, implicitly arguing against other Britons, eagerly told me: "I don't see why you can't be British within Europe".

One should not jump to conclusions, however, and expect that individuals who identify with sub-national communities identify more frequently with Europe than do those who identify with the state national community: Empirical research shows in fact that in Spain at least, and controlling for individual variables, the positive relationship between identification with Spain and identification with Europe is stronger than is the relationship between identification with a sub-national group and identification with Europe. Many of those who identify strongly with their region do so out of fear that national and supranational forces will destroy their culture and they therefore reject both national and European identities. There are some, however, for whom adopting a European identity is another way of expressing their rejection of the national identity. In Catalonia and in Scotland, identification with Europe can work this way because for segments of the national society in which these regions are embedded Europe has historically symbolized the 'anti-nation' (e.g. Anti-Britain, Anti-Spain). In Britain, this social construction can be described as hegemonic, with Britain and Europe being horizontally related as two exclusive identities, whereas in Spain, this understanding was historically proposed by some conservative intellectual currents and later on constructed by the Left and peripheral nationalists as characterizing the Right's entire national identity project. In Scotland, to say that one identifies as European is a way of buttressing one's distance vis à vis British identity. Meanwhile, in Catalonia, to say that one identifies as European is a way of stressing the modernity, progressive character of Catalonia and its people compared to the parochialism and isolationism of the rest of Spain. Since modernity and a forward-looking spirit are in fact uniformly valued in Spain, the simultaneous rejection of identification with Spain and the embrace of identification with Europe works as a symbolic strategy through which some Catalans attempt to question the rest of Spain's claim to modernity. This interpretation receives some support from the empirical finding that Catalans who categorize themselves as European often like to add that other Spaniards generally do not identify as Europeans and *are* in fact less European than are Catalans. In sum, whereas for many Scots identification with Europe is another way of saying "We are not British", for many Catalans identification with Europe is another way of saying "We are not Spanish and we are better, because more modern, than they are."

“Heterogeneity”

So far, the factors determining ascription to a particular category of identification that I have mentioned concern concreteness and structural position with respect to other

categories of identification. A third dimension of categories of identification that individuals consider when deciding whether they identify with them is the degree to which they consider themselves similar to the category's other members. The importance that people assign to in-group similarity when choosing identities means that, generally speaking, categories of identification that are constructed as heterogeneous will necessarily attract few people. This is clearly the case in connection with European identity. A good number of respondents in my ethnographic sample justified their reluctance to identify as Europeans based on the strong cultural diversity that exists in Europe: "I don't think anybody is really European. Very few people... I mean Germans are still Germans. They are Germans and then they are Europeans. And the French, they are the same. We live in Europe, and we are British, and European, British first. And Germans are Germans first..." (Northampton). This justification amounted in fact to denying the existence of Europe itself as a category of identification. Of course there is no objective basis for this assertion. Perceptions of homogeneity or heterogeneity are social constructions. This is demonstrated by the fact that I heard these comments much more often in Britain than in Germany and in Spain. In *Framing Europe* I further substantiate the socially constructed nature of these perceptions with primary and secondary sources related to dominant political cultures in the three countries. The cultural singularity of Britain and the perception of the world as comprising countless cultures, even in Europe, are central themes in Britain's dominant political culture.

The perceptions that one's national culture is distinct and that Europe's cultures are highly diverse are related to the construction of identities as situated on a horizontal plane, as described above. There is a theoretical explanation for this, which is that, as social identity theory tells us, members of horizontally related groups tend to simultaneously exaggerate the similarity between themselves and the differences with out-group members. The analytical connection between the conceptualization of identities as horizontally or vertically situated and the conception of cultures within a category of classification as homogeneous or diverse finds empirical backing in Britain, where the notion that British and European identities exclude one another and require a choice coexists with the notion that European cultures are too different.

The discussion above questions the European Commission's and some scholars' wisdom when they push a characterization of Europe's identity "Union in diversity". Although it is commendable idea, it is doomed from the start. At the very least, it will

be a difficult concept to sell. First of all, to ground European identity on diversity is to go counter people's psychological predisposition to see in-group categories as homogeneous. Second of all, the concept of "Unity in diversity" gives fixity to the constructed notion of Europe's cultural diversity and thus exacerbates the first problem. Against the European Commission, one could challenge the description of Europe as extremely heterogeneous. There are many ways in which contemporary European cultures can be constructed as strikingly similar, especially when compared to other non-European cultures. One just needs to consider values. Inglehart's work shows very clearly that, despite some regional contrasts, most European value-systems tend to cluster together and distinguish themselves from those in other parts of the world. The similarity and convergence between Europe's political cultures (see Rother and Díez Medrano, 2007) is in this sense particularly significant, for consensus on the values that sustain a polity is the foundation for a republican rather than an ethnic political community. It is a sign of the growing ethnicification of national identities in recent decades that when it comes to choosing identities Europeans focus on ethno-cultural differences rather than on political culture similarities. This makes it all the more urgent, both in political and identity-policy terms, that the EU and EU member states stop pushing the idea of "unity in diversity" and emphasize instead the similarities one finds across Europe.

#### “Up-rooting”

Ironically, the social construction of Europe's countries as culturally heterogeneous, with language at the center of this heterogeneity, explains the impact of one last factor on identification with Europe. This fourth factor is the extent to which individuals see themselves as mastering this diversity. That is, those who feel that the category of identification "Europe" suits them are often not individuals who think that Europe is culturally homogeneous but, rather, individuals who have acquired the resources to move more or less comfortably amidst this perceived diversity. These are generally people who, as Fligstein convincingly shows (2008), speak foreign languages and have travelled to or lived in other countries. Travel abroad, especially, seems to be a source of disengagement from one's national identity. Suddenly, people no longer feel at home in their own country, as a Labor party Councillor in Northampton told me:

"You know, I'm a Scot, but it's thirty years, forty years, since I left Scotland! I'm Scot by birth, that's all; I share some cultural values but I've lived in England most of my

life. I don't feel particularly English. I don't feel particularly Northamptonite; I've lived here for nearly 25 to 30 years I guess. I like the town but it could be any town, I have no great..., I love it because I've been living here, I've got a lot of friends here, I've got a network of friends but I could have lots of friends, I think, in any town, anywhere I would go; and I came to Northampton for economic, among other, reasons. I mean, Northampton happened to be where my wife was born, so we came here. But I, but I don't hold myself to be a local patriot, I don't think. I mean, it's a good town and as a local politician you argue for your town against all others, but I would do that I think for any town I've lived in and put my roots down in, but my roots wouldn't have to be in England, or Scotland, or Wales, or Ireland, or France or Germany. I think it's a question of identity. You see, hmm, I, I sometimes, I would say I'm a European more often now actually; I say 'I'm a European'. When I have to define myself--'cause I find it very narrow to say 'I come from Britain'. I find it even narrower to say 'I come from England'; I may come from it, but I don't feel of it, in any particular sense."

For people like the respondent above, European identity functions as a substitute identity for when they come to realize that they no longer fit in their community of origin and that they do not fit in their community of residence either. Travel contributes to the disenchantment of the culture of origin and those having travelled suddenly find it difficult to communicate with those at home. At the same time, however, as Favell shows (2008) those who travel rarely come to feel a part of their host community. These people thus define themselves as Europeans by default.

One observes a variant of the process that leads individuals with foreign languages and experiences abroad to define themselves as Europeans in countries like Spain, where Europe, as a cultural category, has a definite positive meaning. As the twentieth century advanced, both the Spanish Right and by the Spanish Left came to construct Europe as Spain's mirror. For the Right, it represented prosperity; for the Left it represented political and cultural modernity. Therefore, the accreditation of Spain as a country like other European countries became an obsession that conditioned and still conditions Spain's internal and foreign affairs policies. At the microlevel, the implication of Europe's mythical status is that the identity 'European' has entered the struggle for the accumulation of symbolic capital. One thus finds individuals who display their identification with Europe as a claim for superior status and individuals who in subtle ways treat European identity as a status to which only those in possession of rare qualities—e.g mastery of foreign languages, travel experience, residence in other

countries—are entitled. This connection between European identity and claims for distinction appears quite clearly in the following excerpt of an interview with a young, educated, respondent from Girona: “I identify with Europe quite a bit, because I’m fortunate to speak three additional languages, and I have lived in Germany for three months, with a scholarship, and also in England, and so on. I’m a person who rapidly gets used to live in another place. But it’s certainly fortunate when one is fluent in three languages; one does not feel so foreign.” Europe’s mythical status in Spanish culture allows these individuals to use their self-proclaimed European identity to further dignify their rare skills and experiences at the same time as they transform European identity from an object of choice into an honor.

### Conclusion

European identity has been at the center of discussion in recent intellectual debates on European integration. While some think that Europe does not need an identity nor an intense feeling of membership in a European community by its citizens, others think it does both. This paper remains agnostic on this debate. Instead, it contributes to better assessing the extent to which Europeans identify as such. This exercise is theoretically important because it will allow for a more precise understanding of the relationship between state-building processes and the emergence and transformation of identities. The results of this qualitative analysis should be received as good news by those who oppose European integration by claiming that the citizens do not identify with Europe. They show indeed that the low percentage of self-proclaimed Europeans obtained in public opinion surveys in fact overestimates the percentage of the population with some emotional investment in the idea of membership in a community of Europeans. In general, the percentage of people who identify as Europeans merely speaks to the extent to which the category “European” has diffused among the population as a meaningful category of membership. This is important, because Social Identity Theory tells us that in-group bias and positive emotions follow from categorization. If most people do not yet see that they are part of the category “Europe”, it is difficult to see how they could develop positive emotions toward Europe. Furthermore, many citizens claim to identify as Europeans, when in fact, what they want to say is that they do not identify as members of their national state, either because they identify with a nation within the state in which they live or because they have travelled so much, literally or figuratively, that they do not feel at home anywhere.

The discussion above also provides clues as to some factors that prevent the development of a European identity among the population. One of these factors is the misperception among the population of the European Union's actual political significance. Although it is far from becoming a state, the European Union plays a much greater role in its citizens' lives than these are able to recognise. Explanations for why this is so go from the lack of visibility of the European Union institutions and actors in the public sphere to the European Union's to the fact that states retain still many of the competences that are most responsible for the citizens' feelings of material and physical security (e.g. social security, armed forces, welfare institutions and policies). Another factor that contributes to why many citizens do not see the category "European" as applying to them is that states and the European Union itself insist in defining the European Union with the slogan "Union in diversity". The odds that such a policy would work are rather low or they would require far many resources than the European Union and its supporting countries are willing to invest. Most likely, this slogan will give a fixity to national identities that will prevent the development of a strong emotional commitment to other nationals in Europe. Finally, the paper shows that whether individuals see Europe as an identity at a level above national identity or as an alternative to their national identity results from processes of social construction. Whether one or another construction prevails is consequential for the compatibility between European and national identities, as the contrast between Spain and England illustrate.

Historically, successful state-building and consolidation have to some extent hinged on the possibility of fusing state and nation. This does not mean that states where the fusion has not occurred have necessarily disintegrated. Unless an overlapping sense of membership has developed, like in Switzerland, however, nationalist politics have been at the center of politics and the political stability of such states has required constant negotiation and re-negotiation of the contractual terms that make union possible. The historical record shows that the European Union faces many of the same problems that afflict plurinational states, with the peculiarity that the component states have much greater resources at their disposal to prevent the development of a culturally-based feeling of belonging to Europe among the citizens. European integration thus requires a new foundation. The above discussion suggest that the development of a feeling of commonality among Europeans requires that the European Union increase its profile to the level of its competences rather than remain

invisible so that nobody accuses it of being or becoming a superstate. Furthermore, it needs to abandon the idea of unity in diversity and decisively stress all that unites Europeans. Still, this may not be enough against the forces of nationalism. More than anything, Europe's new foundation requires that its proponents underplay identity and instead combine the old idea of a common project, developed by intellectuals like Ortega y Gasset in the 1930s, with a Republican conception of the nation, understood as willed community.