



This paper is taken from

*A Europe of Many Cultures
Proceedings of the fifth Conference of the Children's
Identity and Citizenship in Europe Thematic Network*

London: CiCe 2003

edited by Alistair Ross, published in London by CiCe, ISBN 1 85377 369 7

Without explicit authorisation from CiCe (the copyright holder)

- only a single copy may be made by any individual or institution for the purposes of private study only
- multiple copies may be made only by
 - members of the CiCe Thematic Network Project or CiCe Association, or
 - a official of the European Commission
 - a member of the European parliament

If this paper is quoted or referred to it must always be acknowledged as

Berg, W. (2003) Identity Policy, in Ross, A. (ed) A Europe of Many Cultures. London: CiCe, pp 419 - 423

© CiCe 2003

CiCe
Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University
166 – 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
UK

This paper does not necessarily represent the views of the CiCe Network.



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained herein.

Acknowledgements:

This is taken from the book that is a collection of papers given at the annual CiCe Conference indicated. The CiCe Steering Group and the editor would like to thank

- All those who contributed to the Conference
- Cass Mitchell-Riddle, head of the CiCe Coordination Unit
- London Metropolitan University for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The SOCRATES programme and the personnel of DGXXII for their support and encouragement.

Identity Policy

Wolfgang Berg
Fachhochschule Merseburg (Germany)

Why promote European identity?

The European Union has legislative power which influences the economies and societies of current member states directly: these powers also influence both prospective member states and those states which formally stay outside the EU but which are involved in practical ways - in summary, all the states of Europe. However, EU legislation lacks both transparency and legitimacy - the legislative power (the European Parliament) does not initiate the legislative procedures, there is no clear majority-minority distinction, no majority which creates the government, no responsibility towards the Parliament and therefore no responsibility towards the electorate. If a decision is supported by the votes of MPs from one political party and from other states (though different parties), to whom can that decision be attributed and who is accounted to? Who can be blamed for that decision and who has to be aware of sanctions at the next elections?

The election to the European parliament in June 2004 will be based once again on political parties in the nation states, offering lists of candidates who can be voted for in one country only. As a result, representatives will be elected in each of the (possibly) 25 states according to the national election systems and each will be effectively travelling on a national ticket to Strasbourg to take a seat in a European Parliament.

Among politicians and political scientists this situation is not in any way problematic. Most explain it using two types of argument:

1. We do not face a lack of democracy, but we do not have a European *demos*. Without a European electorate you can not have European elections. As long as public opinion and published opinion (in the media, for example) are organised in terms of nation states, as long as there are no European-wide political parties, lobbies and pressure groups, national politics are needed to organise the European political process.
2. The EU has to fulfil particular, restricted tasks, e.g. the deregulation of an internal market. For this task, the nation states have delegated legislative competence to the EU, which is not expected to do more than the member states allow it to do. The EU is not like a state and never ought to become a type of state. There is no European *demos* people, and none is needed.

I will take issue with both of these arguments. To start with the latter, it is necessary to consider the speed with which Europeanisation has been achieved. With the exceptions of social policy, education, and defence there are few policy areas which remain within the compass of the nation states. When national (or regional) governments argue in favour of re-nationalisation of policies (e.g. agriculture, regional development), they do so because they fear that the EU is going to dominate those member states whose main task seems to defend national interests in a multilateral decision-making process. Empirically we are facing many spill-over effects. Originally the EU was supposed to (de-)regulate the market for products and services, but logically social services and existential services cannot be excluded in the long term, nor the protection of the consumer. EU legislation,

for instance, has tried to prohibit advertisements for tobacco products - the legislation failed because it referred to health protection which is not within the remit of the EU - but effectively the same legislation will be set in force, authorised by the internal market and consumer protection.

It is evident that there need not be, and probably never will be, one European people in terms of *ethnos*, but it is unarguable that a European people as *demos* is the only one which can give legitimacy to a pan-European political system. In the long run such legitimisation must be necessary, as the polity EU is not just legislating in order to establish a single market, be it by deregulation or regulation, but is deciding on transfers between member states, regions, and social groups. For instance, it is the German or Dutch taxpayer who is financing the new airport in Milan, the subventions for Greek olive processing industries and the modernisation of a highway from Sofia to Plovdiv. What is the basis for such solidarity unless there is some type of community/identity?

We know that the national economies of some current EU member states, namely Germany and Austria, will profit from the enlargement of the EU: it is necessary to convince people in old Europe that it is reasonable *and* morally good to support 'other Europeans'. The acceptance of any transfer (or profit) to any place in Europe will be the higher, the more people deem it to be some type of in-group solidarity.

How to promote European identity?

In general there are two approaches. The first might be termed the cultural approach, although I prefer the term substantialist. This considers European identity as the identity of Europe: it is a type of construction, supported mainly perhaps by scholars from various disciplines (history, art, law, culture, theology), and this construct is of Europe as something which can be characterised by common features, classically a mixture of Greek philosophy, Roman law, German enlightenment, French revolution, British parliamentarianism and so forth. It is a widespread approach and can be summarised briefly: Europe is our common history (although a 'common history' is logically impossible or a banality). As a construct this Europe is highly selective (consider Arab sciences, Chinese medicine, Turkish coffee, not to mention feudalism, capitalism, wars, fascism, Stalinism). The construct is an ideal, a system of values, and we have to take into consideration that reality differs from the ideal, and that there are many differing ideals: for instance sometimes constructivists insist that Europe is Christian, and that therefore a Muslim country such as Turkey does not belong in Europe: others claim that it is very European to have state and church separated from each other, although Russia is lacking this tradition as are several current EU member states. Personally I doubt whether systems and structures such as states can have an identity and suggest that identity is not a function of things but something people are living (with/from).

The second approach examines our problem as follows: under which conditions do people conceptualise something like Europeans, and under which conditions do people feel committed to a collective of Europeans?

Everybody would agree that there are hundreds of million people living in Europe: but are they a casual aggregation of people, or Europeans? Only if there is something they have in common, preferably a formal entitlement, which proves their 'citizenship'. But for many minorities in multicultural societies it is clear despite formal 'citizenship', living in X does not make a person an X-ean. There is a loose form of Union citizenship derived

from citizenship of member states, but 'Europeans' do not exist unless people consider themselves or others as 'Europeans'. It is a type of self-definition, an auto-stereotype or attribution which is more a feeling or sentiment than an empirical fact. (I do not forget the fact that those who support a substantialist view of European identity (see above) are contributing to such a self-definition.)

However, I would like to argue that two other processes are more important for the identification as Europeans.

Labelling

Social psychologists might suggest more theoretical detail, but it is evident that any event or experience can be perceived in different ways. An example is two events transmitted by (or only existing because of) the media. In one, tourists from different countries disappeared in Algeria and were either reported as 'three Austrians, one Dutch, one British, two Canadians' or as 'five *Europeans* and two Canadians'. In another, a report of the American Academy Awards 2003 referred to a *European* movie that was judged best non-US-production. Some reports focus on the 'Europeanness', and some chose other categories (nationality, gender, age, etc.).

This seems to be inadequate in cases of an actually established European framework such as a competition or championship. The European song contest is highly loaded with nationalist energy ('Again Germany was represented by a lousy song'). Each country has to assess the others, to give points, but the result can be summarised by saying: 'The best European song for 2003 was performed by XY (he/she lives in Riga, by the way)': the point is that the winner is a European song. To quote another example: among European football players it is the Scottish team (just an example!) which is going to perform most successfully, i.e. we expect them to win the European championship. So for sports and other competitive activities there is a point of reference which is European.

Such points of reference can be introduced best by establishing a championship or festival or – which is an important function of any EU policies – any type of programme which is supported by EU funds, so that 'Europe' is perceived at commercial centres, highways, aqueducts and waste water cleaning stations - because there are large targets indicating that these projects are being funded by the European Union. This fits nicely with what political scientists call output legitimacy: Europe as a political system is accepted and supported as far as it promises to increase private or collective welfare.

Participation

It is axiomatic that the more individuals participate, the more they are committed to a community: they are part of the decision-making process. This relationship is true in both directions (although there might be persons who are highly affiliated to a community but in a consumerist passive way and also persons who are participating with bad, destructive intentions (negative commitment) and there are other instruments which increase the individual commitment to a collective, like strong leadership, i.e. dictatorship, or (putative) threat from outside, but these are not interesting under the democratic way).

The collective or community of 'Europeans' is large and suffers from a lack of direct communication between people. There is plenty of communication and experience in Europe, both cross-culturally and cross-nationally. There is business, academic mobility,

tourism - millions of people move within Europe - but in Germany, for example, tourists may go abroad (even overseas) but no distinction is made between European and non-European destinations. Our students from Merseburg like to have placements in England or Romania, but they definitely do not want 'to make European experiences'. Even institutionalised, publicly supported programmes like the German-French Youth-Exchange are legitimated on a bilateral agreement. These personal, direct experiences are not perceived as somehow European.

Social psychologists have demonstrated clearly that contacts between people from different cultures/countries does not necessarily lead to learning processes, or even positive outcomes - member states and the EU Commission paid attention to that from the very beginnings of European integration and established national, bilateral and multilateral mobility programmes. Among them 'Youth for Europe' aims to get average young people involved and guarantees a sort of pedagogical concept. Scholastic exchanges are important cross-national activities, but the impacts are still very often measured in terms of foreign language acquisition. It can be fascinating for the pupils, parents, teachers and the entire community to make sure that particular links and partnerships do merge into a European network, but we need to avoid any pedagogical claim that particular methods such as exchange organisations are crucial.

What has to be done?

Many changes need to be made by politicians concerning the decision-making process within EU relating to its transparency and its legitimacy. As soon as the member states agree to change the election procedure, perhaps requiring that only those political parties can seek election if they are active in more than five member states and operate with a single manifesto, then the horizon of both politicians and the electorate will widen. Transparency might be the outcome of the diverse reform processes within the EU, not least of the constitutional convention which is supposed to clarify the range of competences for every level of political structure.

Greater transparency would also benefit all types of associations, pressure and interest groups which need to change their strategies and start to lobby as European organisations: this is already taking place where the corresponding policy-making area is occupied by the EU, for example in consumer affairs and environmental concerns. It is to be expected that the process of Europeanisation will lead to more participation as the lobbies organise themselves Europe-wide in order to address the appropriate Commissioner or Task Force.

Traditionally, participation is the instrument for influencing legislation and other decisions within the political system. However, participation is not only a type of structural response to the state, but a means of self-organisation. More and more, civil society is the way people organise themselves beyond the market and without the state and not only in a private or family context: civic engagement may be partly a response to the neo-liberal state which tends to neglect not-marketable and non-popular interests or needs.

Cohesion in society is more and more dependent on civil society, as the economy, the state and individuals highlight individualism, private consumption and the 'pursuit of happiness'. Motivation, personal background, the range and duration of volunteering may have changed in the last decade, but in general voluntary civic engagement is not decreasing, and it remains true that volunteers feel committed to their communities,

which are mostly local ones. However, the Fire Brigade, the Red Cross, Sports Clubs, the Scouts could all be seen as similar in groups all over Europe. The European Voluntary Service, in which volunteers are organised into and work for a year in groups committed to general objectives like the promotion of regenerative energy or protection of nature, has become very popular.

Insofar as civil society develops a commitment to Europe, the *demos* is creating European identity. A European identity can grow thus, if it is 'labelled' sufficiently clearly. The European Union as a political system must be reformed in favour of transparency and participation in any case, and the European *demos* should be ready for that.