Chapter 17

Dynamics in European Political Identity

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1. Introduction

This paper deals with one core question: whether and to what degree the citizens of the European Union share a common political identity, and if so, what the most recent wave of enlargement of the EU has done to it.[1] The existence of a collective identity is generally seen as one of the central preconditions for EU democracy (e.g. Scharpf 1999). A collective political identity constitutes a political community. The idea of a political community, in turn, is intimately linked with the concept of citizenship. The creation of a citizenry, i. e. the codification of the rights and duties of individual citizens, was a core element of the process of nation-building (Kuhnle 1993). This citizenry, at the same time, is the source of authority of any democratic government: the principle of democracy requires that powers and executive competencies must originate in, and be justified by, the citizens subjected to them.

European integration started out as an alliance of nation-states. It concerned first and foremost economic issues. Economic integration reached a peak with the realization of the Single European Market when member-states transferred important policy-making competencies to the European Community. The Maastricht Treaty, which codifies this transfer of competencies, is actually said to have shifted the balance of European Union

government from a formerly predominantly intergovernmental to a now mainly supranational mode. In policy areas where intergovernmental decision-making was replaced by supranational decision-making, the position of the European Parliament as the representative body of EU citizens has been strengthened.

The increasing role of supranational, as opposed to intergovernmental, decision-making and the establishment of a European citizenship might have promoted the development of a political community of the European Union. But the growing together of a political community depends at least as much on people's self-perception and identification as on the provision of rights of citizenship or on predominant modes of government. Therefore, the central question of this paper can be reformulated as follows: do EU citizens identify themselves as such? Do they perceive their fellow EU citizens to be alike? Have European citizens developed a 'sense of community' that unites old and new members alike?

2. The common European heritage

History has shown that the emergence of a sense of belonging and community and related attitudes such as perceptions of identity and solidarity takes a long time. Compared to the time that nation-states took to consolidate, the history of European integration is still rather short. Feelings of identity and solidarity can hardly have fully developed during these brief periods of history. But, of course, centuries of common European history elapsed before European integration began. Are there traditions in European history upon which perceptions of a political community could be based? Is there a European tradition of unity? Is there something like a historical European identity?

The tradition of the Greek *polis* and the Roman Empire influenced in similar ways the development of institutions in the legal system, the armed forces,

and the administration of European nation-states. Later, family relationships of the nobility and aristocracy created alliances above and independent of national borders. The Catholic Church established Latin as a universal language, created a continent-wide network of monasteries, and founded the first universities. All over Europe, the same sequence of reference cultures came into force: first Greek and Roman, then (during the Renaissance) Italian, and German and Austrian during the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Likewise, Europeans used to refer to common cultural achievements (literature, music, architecture) and to common European symbols: Roman monuments, the victory over Islam, the Crusades, the French Revolution (Pfetsch 1997: 104–5). Last but not least, Europeans consider themselves to be a community of values and ideas. The idea of liberty, of democracy, of the modern nation-state, individualism, human rights, freedom of speech, rationality, the political republic, and the separation of Church and State—all this is considered to be genuinely 'European' (Mintzel 1997: 325–6). However, these characteristics have become central elements of a world-wide political culture and are no longer distinctly European. As a result, they probably cannot provide much cement for a European political community because the existence of distinctive properties is a central prerequisite for the evolution of any community and common identity (Lübbe 1994: 111).

3. Sources of conflicts and diversity

Europe is not characterized only by its common heritage. There is as much diversity and conflict as there are common roots. Three religious cleavages are at the basis of distinct socio-cultural areas on the European continent: the division between Latin and Orthodox Christianity, that between the Christian and the Islamic world, and finally the division between Catholics and Protestants. In addition, Europe exhibits a great variety of languages which has become even more distinctive with the development of the nation-states in the nineteenth century. It is against this background that some think of

Europe as a huge ‘multicultural society’ composed of a variety of religious, national, and regional cultures (Mintzel 1997: 332–6).

European diversity, of course, also has political aspects. Starting with the break-up of the empire of Charlemagne, Europe’s history has consisted of divisions and violent conflicts. Throughout, fellow Europeans have waged wars in changing coalitions on the European continent. Examples are the Hundred Years’ War between France and England; the rivalry between France and Habsburg with Spain, The Netherlands, and Austria about European prevalence; the bitter confessional wars between Catholics and Protestants preceding the Pax Westfalica; the Holy Alliance of Restoration against the Revolutionists in the nineteenth century; the Entente Cordiale against the European middle states in the First World War; the German–Italian axis against most of the rest of Europe in the Second World War; and the ‘cold war’ between Western democracies and the communist bloc after 1947 (Pfetsch 1997: 102–3).

4. A European political community?

This short review of the history of Europe suggests that the traditions of diversity, division, and conflict are at least as strong as the common cultural heritage. This history of diversity has not necessarily inhibited the evolution of a European political community. However, the sheer existence of nation-states based on a century of cultural and political autonomy constitutes an obvious obstacle. First of all, these nation-states are linguistic communities which guarantee the communicative competence of every citizen.2 European Union citizens, by contrast, are confronted with an immense linguistic variety. As a result of this apparent Babel, a European public has not yet really emerged, more or less segmented national publics are perpetuated, and there is very little communication that covers the whole EU. Moreover, a genuine EU system of opinion formation and interest intermediation has not yet fully developed (e.g. Schmitt 2005). As a result, processes of legitimizing

EU government still depend on the effectiveness of the respective national (sub-) systems. This might suggest that objective conditions for the development of a European political community have been fulfilled only to a small degree.

However, there are other factors that might have promoted the development of a European political community. Not least among them is the obvious economic success of the process of European integration. Also, the greater permeability of national borders after the agreement of Schengen as well as the ever-increasing frequency of contacts between European citizens as a result of progressing economic integration might have promoted perceptions of community and mutual solidarity among EU citizens.

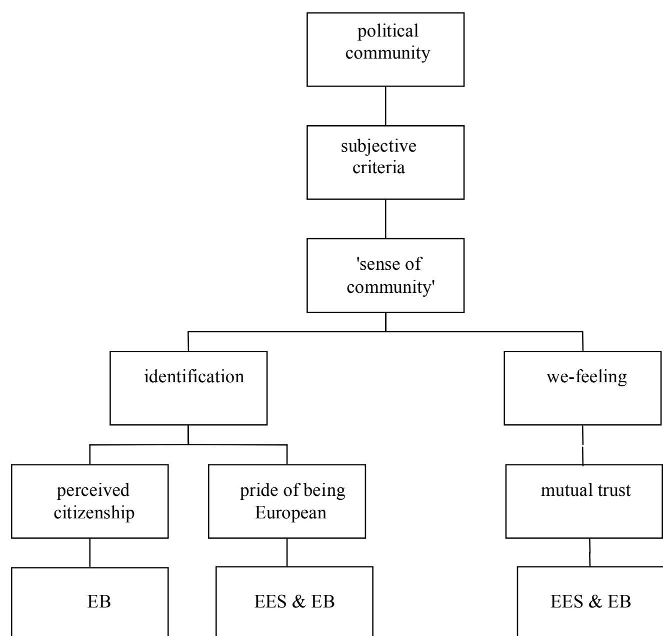
The prime purpose of this paper is to determine the degree to which the European Union has developed into a political community. After this brief review of objective conditions, we will now turn to both a more subjective and empirical view. According to Easton (1965: 177), a political community exists when members show some readiness or ability to work together to resolve their political problems. That a European political community in such terms exists is unquestionable, but we are interested in knowing whether European citizens, during almost half a century of European integration, have developed a European 'sense of community'. The existence of a political community does not necessarily require that its members are aware of it — i. e., the prior existence of a sense of community. However, the more strongly developed is such a sense of community, the greater are the system's stress-reducing capabilities (Lindberg 1967).

This concept *sense of community* was first introduced by Karl Deutsch. He defines it as 'a matter of mutual sympathy and loyalties; of "we-feeling", trust and mutual consideration; of partial identification in terms of self-images and interests; of mutually successful predictions of behaviour, and of co-operative action in accordance with it' (Deutsch et al. 1957: 36). Easton

(1979) follows Deutsch in his conceptualisation of the ‘sense of *social* community’; in his view, cohesion emerges between people regardless of the type of political regime they live in. He therefore distinguishes this ‘sense of *social* community’ from a more specific ‘sense of *political* community’. In his typology of political support, the latter represents the highest (i. e. the most basic and enduring) category of diffuse support for the political system.

Our empirical investigation of the sense of a European community distinguishes two basic dimensions. *Identification* refers to the citizens themselves: do they consider themselves as European citizens and are they proud to be European? *We-feeling* refers to fellow citizens: do European citizens consider their fellow Europeans to be as trustworthy as their countrymen? Figure 1 illustrates this conceptualization and specifies the operationalization strategy pursued in this chapter.

Figure 1: Concepts, indicators, and data sources



These notions of *identification* and *we-feeling* are compatible with modern theories of inter group relations. Their starting point is the distinction between in-groups and out-groups. Minimal differentiation is sufficient to

give rise to an in-group/out-group distinction. This is reinforced by overstating intra group similarity and out-group differences. In-group membership is an important factor in the formation of personal identity. In-group–out-group relations are driven by social processes of categorization, comparison, competition, and conflict. As a result of these dynamics, perceptions of in-groups are biased toward homogeneity, and the attitudes towards out-groups and their members are characterized by stereotyping and hostility.

In this view, the evolution of a sense of community among EU citizens is the result of in-group formation. Shortly after World War II, inter group conflict between European societies was still extremely high. One of the central aims of the founding fathers of the European Union was to reduce this conflict and overcome the hostility between European societies by creating a new, superior in-group that would lead eventually to the development of European identification and we-feeling. This chapter aims at measuring the success of European in-group formation after half a century of economic and political integration, and after four successive waves of enlargement. The data that are used for this purpose are from the European Election Study 2004 plus selected Eurobarometer trends. The indicators are discussed one by one, in the sequence suggested by the analytical scheme above.

4.1. Identification

The aim of this section is to monitor the evolution of European identification. First, mass perceptions of European citizenship are tracked over a period of twelve years (1992 to 2004). Secondly, the pride in being European is compared.

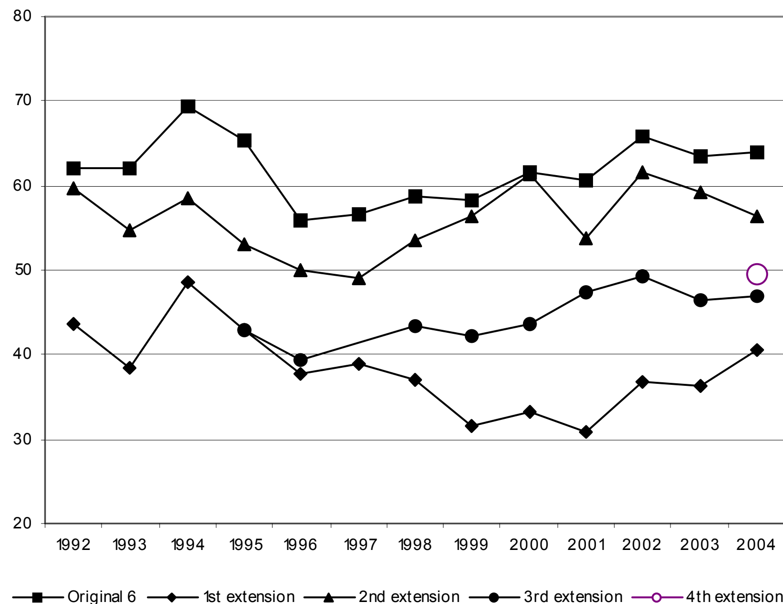
Perceived citizenship

Eurobarometer have used two different instruments for the analysis of European identifications. The first was fielded eleven times between 1982–1992, and is repeated in the European Election Study 2004. This question

asks whether people, in addition to their national citizenship, also consider themselves as European citizens.3 The second instrument started a new Eurobarometer time series in 1992 when the first was discontinued. In 18 surveys between 1992 and 2004, people were asked to think about their future political identification.4 The two measures are not strictly comparable. In this paper, we concentrate our analyses on the second because it offers the longer time series.

Detailed results are documented in Table A1. These figures report, country by country, proportions of respondents who think of themselves as European citizens. Here, we concentrate on average proportions for five country groups—the original six plus the countries of the four successive expansions (see Figure 2). This presentation of the data follows the expectation that duration of membership has a positive impact on identification levels: the longer a member, the higher the identification. We expect to find a pattern similar to the one identified for the development of general EU support (see e. g. Schmitt and Treiber-Reif 1990; Dalton and Eichenberg 1991, 1992; Eichenberg and Dalton 1993; Bosh and Newton 1995). This expectation, however, is not fully borne out by the data. While citizens in the original six member countries are consistently the most “European”, the first and oldest expansion (adding the UK, Ireland, and Denmark to the Community) brought in more Euro-distant publics. Contrary to this, the second expansion (adding Spain, Portugal, and Greece) integrated distinctly pro-European publics; these citizens consider themselves almost as “European” as those in the founding member-countries. The third expansion of the Union (adding Austria, Sweden and Finland) is somewhere in between: fewer “European self-perceptions” than in southern Europe, but more than in Britain, Ireland and Denmark. The latest and largest expansion of the Union — adding in 2004 eight post-communist countries of central and eastern Europe plus Cyprus and Malta — brought in surprisingly European-minded citizens: One in every two citizens of the youngest member-countries thinks of herself as a European citizen.

Figure 2: Those who think of themselves as European citizens (percent "only European", "European and national" & "national and European")



Source: Table A1.

The duration argument also implies that European identification should more or less steadily grow over time. This expectation is again not fully in accordance with empirical evidence. The general pattern is not one of linear trends. Rather, we observe fluctuations that affect the different publics in more or less the same way. Tentative explanations for these ups and downs refer to two factors: first, the change in basic economic conditions (recession), social welfare (cutbacks), and security (dissolution of the communist bloc and war in former Yugoslavia) and, second, the increasing importance of EU policy-making for everyday life (Niedermayer 1997). In addition, in the early Nineties, the debate on European Monetary Union in particular may have depressed European identifications (Lilli 1998). While these irritations were quickly overcome in most of the Union, they lasted much longer in the UK, Ireland and Denmark.

Pride in being a European Citizen

Pride in being European is another indicator of European identification.5 When we test the dimensionality of European pride and self-perceptions as a European citizen, we find that both attitudes indeed originate in the same latent attitudinal construct (Table 1). This is so everywhere, though in some countries it is somewhat more pronounced (e.g. in the Netherlands) than it is in others (e.g. in Greece).

Table 1: Mokken scaling of European pride and identifications as a European citizen

	H-value
Netherlands	.77
Finland	.76
Northern Ireland	.74
Cyprus	.69
Estonia	.69
Italy	.66
Latvia	.66
Czech Republic	.65
Austria	.64
Slovakia	.64
Ireland	.60
Belgium	.58
Britain	.53
Denmark	.53
Hungary	.52
Slovenia	.52
Poland	.49
France	.46
Luxembourg	.46
Portugal	.46
Germany	.43
Spain	.42
Greece	.41

Source: EES 2004. Mokken scaling tests for the unidimensionality of a set of items. A H-value > .30 indicates a weak scale, > .40 a medium scale and > .50 a strong scale.

This is not to say that the two indicators are equally distributed if it comes to country patterns (Table 2). Other things being equal, southerners seem to be prouder than citizens in the northern member countries. To be sure, geographical location provides a poor explanation for political attitudes. Whether this "southern" pattern has to do with economic factors (the South is a major receiver of transfers from the structural fund) or with cultural factors ("Latin Europeans" are arguably more expressive than others if it comes to

emotions like pride) cannot be answered at this point. In addition to geography, the duration of membership seems matter somewhat more here, with younger non-southern member-countries' citizens being less proud than others.

Table 2: Pride to be a Citizen of the European Union (percent 'very proud' or 'fairly proud')

	EES2004	Flash 1995	2004-1995
Luxembourg	76	70	6
Ireland	74	64	10
Portugal	74	64	10
Cyprus	74		
France	73	65	8
Spain	67	66	1
Italy	64	80	-16
Greece	61	47	14
Belgium	60	60	0
Hungary	52		
Germany	49	42	7
Poland	46		
Britain	43		
Denmark	43	49	-6
Slovenia	42		
Austria	40	46	-6
Slovakia	37		
Finland	37	41	-4
Northern Ireland	31		
Czech Republic	29		
Netherlands	26	45	-19
Estonia	25		
Latvia	24		
Sweden	23	37	-14

Source: EES 2004 and Eurobarometer Flash 47 (1995), weighted data.

If we move on to dynamics, we see signs of a growing gap between proud and non-proud national publics over the last decade. In 2004, we find an even spread of between three quarters and one quarter of our respondents being proud of their European citizenship, both in old and new member countries. Significant decreases are notable in the Netherlands (-19), Italy (-16) and Sweden (-14), the steepest increases are diagnosed for Greece (+14), Portugal (+10) and Ireland (+10).

4.2. We-feelings

Our operational definition of 'sense of community' distinguishes two dimensions: identification and we-feelings. In this section, we turn to the second and investigate whether EU citizens trust their fellow Europeans. Mutual trust is a fundamental condition for the development of a sense of community. It is expected to grow with growing experiences of positive conduct of fellow citizens. So, here again, duration of membership should play an important role. Moreover, the existence of a common enemy is a factor potentially contributing to the development of a sense of community. For most of the post-war period, the communist threat was an external reference point that might have fostered perceptions of a common bond amongst the people of the European Union. Actually, since the collapse of the Soviet Empire, observers had been complaining about the return of nationalism, and fears had grown that the community may fall apart without the Eastern threat. This did not happen, however, as we now know. Rather, the European Union was able to integrate a major part of the former communist bloc. How successful this integration was in terms of we-feelings remains to be seen.

Trust in people of various countries has been measured repeatedly in Eurobarometer surveys between 1970 and 1994 using a four-point scale.6 As the list of member- and candidate-countries became longer, another instrument with a dichotomous answering scale proved to be more suitable.7 Earlier work on mutual trust has shown that trust between EU member-countries is generally higher than between members and non-members, and that mutual trust between the EU member-countries is growing over time (Niedermayer 1995). We rely on the question with the dichotomous answering scale and analyse for every country how much its peoples are trusted by people from the other member-countries. First descriptive results are in Table 3.

Table 3: Mutual Trust (figures are percent)

	2004 EU25	2004 EU15	1995 EU15	Diff EU15 2004-1995
Swedes	83*	86	84	2
Danish	79	82	81	1
Finns	79	81	81	1
Luxembourgers	78	82	84	-2
Dutch	78	81	80	1
Spaniards	77	80	71	9
Belgians	75	78	82	-4
Portuguese	73	76	68	9
Germans	71	73	65	8
Austrians	70	73	75	-1
French	67	70	63	7
Irish	66	73	71	1
Italians	66	68	61	7
Greeks	66	66	62	4
Maltese	59	61		
Hungarians	59	59	56	3
Czech	56	55	50	6
Estonians	51	53		
British	51	50	66	-15
Latvians	50	52		
Cypriots	50	48		
Lithuanians	49	50		
Poles	47	48	46	2
Slovenes	47	46		
Slovacs	46	44		
Bulgarian	35	35		
Romanian	28	29		
Turks	26	26		

Source: Eurobarometer 45 (1995) and European Election Study 2004; trend distributions based on weighted data. Note that this question was not asked in the Belgian, British, Lithuanian, Maltese and Swedish survey of the EES 2004. * Read: in 2004, 83 percent of all non-Swedish EU25 citizens considered the Swedes to be trustworthy.

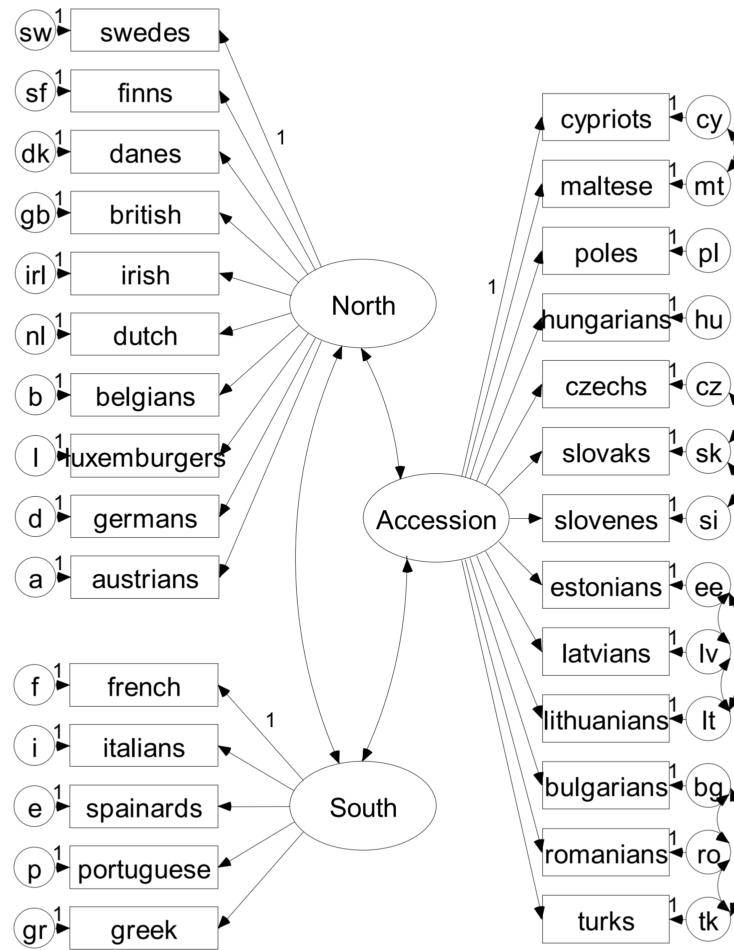
In 2004, the people from all but one of the 'old' member-countries are trusted by a two-third majority of fellow Europeans. Only the British miss this threshold. They are down at 51 percent and have actually lost 15 percentage points of trust over the past decade.8 Considering the rather stable levels of trust (compared to the rather volatile pride figures in Table 2, for example), this is a major drop indeed. What could have caused such a dramatic downfall? The only likely reason we can think of is the role that the UK played and continues to play in the Iraq war. It seems that the close alliance of the British with the Americans in this case has severely damaged the trust they can rely on among their fellow Europeans.

The other major finding with regard to the level of trust among EU citizens is that there are indeed three classes of countries—old members, new members, and present candidate countries, with old members enjoying highest trust, new members somewhat less trust, and candidate countries only little trust. With the exception of the case of Britain, these three classes are accurately sorted one after the other. We also note that it does not make much of a difference for the levels of trust whether we analyse opinions of citizens in the old EU15 or include the samples from the new member countries.

Another way of analysing these data is to identify the dimensionality of mutual trust among EU citizens. The question we are asking, in other words, is: what are the stereotypes in peoples' minds that guide them in deciding whether they do or don't trust the British, the Greeks, the Poles, etc. This perspective helps us identify the mental map of European citizens. It is based on a pooled confirmatory factor analysis of the EES 2004 data sets. As in our previous analysis, the country list that was presented to the interviewees included the members of EU25 plus the current candidate countries Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey. In a few surveys, additional stimuli were asked — like Norway, Switzerland, etc. — but these are not considered in our dimensional analysis. The results of this final analytical step are presented in Figure 3.

This figure identifies in bold lines the mental map of mutual trust among Europeans. European Union citizens look at people significantly differently depending on whether they are from Northern Europe, Southern Europe, or Eastern Europe. In the latter category, there are a few sub-categories that deserve a mention: people from Cyprus and Malta are judged very similarly, as are people from the two states former Czechoslovakia plus Slovenia, the three Baltic states and from the not-yet member-countries Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey. This rather parsimonious structure fits the data quite well as is indicated by a GFI value of over .9.

Figure 3: Dimensions of Mutual Trust Among Europeans (results from a confirmatory factor analysis)



GFI (Generalised Fit Index) = .926

5. Summary

Over the past centuries, the common cultural and political roots of the people of Europe could seldom prevent long-standing hostilities from erupting violently. It was only after World War II that political elites started to initiate the process of European integration, which deliberately aimed at creating a common framework of social and political identifications. The political–

institutional success of these efforts is obvious, but how about its social basis? Have the people of Europe grown together into a political community; is there a 'sense of community' among EU citizens?

The general answer is yes. Over half a century after World War II, a majority of EU citizens identifies with the new political community European Union.

Lacking pertinent and comparable survey information for most of this 50-year period, we cannot determine when and how these identifications came into being. However, based on our findings from the analysis of available data, we must assume that they have been growing slowly. Over the last decade or so, there was not much of a secular change in European identifications; seasonal effects prevailed. Would we draw a map of European Union identification in the early 2000s a centre–periphery picture would come to the fore. The highest level of identification exists in the six original member-countries, closely followed by European South; the farther away from this core of the Union one gets in geographical and/or temporal terms, the weaker identification becomes.

Majorities of EU citizens trust the people of other member-countries.9 The people of the new member countries in central and eastern Europe, however, are somewhat less trusted, and those from the candidate countries Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey are trusted least.

Not only do majorities of citizens identify with the Union and trust their fellow Europeans; they also have a rather clear-cut mental map of the Union, a shared understanding of who is alike and who is different. Most different are the new Eastern member-countries; it will take a while for them to be fully integrated and accepted. An additional but somewhat minor difference is commonly seen between people from the North and the South of Europe.

Notes

1. This is an updated and revised version of a chapter that was originally published by the first author in Schmitt & Thomassen (1999).
2. This is not to say that states must be linguistically homogeneous; Belgium and Switzerland are obvious examples of nation-states that are not. However, in order to meet democratic requirements, every citizen must be able to communicate with state authorities in his or her own language (BVG 1993: 438). This implies that in places there is more than one official language (such as three in Belgium and four in Switzerland).
3. 'Do you ever think of yourself not only as a [nationality] citizen but also as a citizen of Europe? (1) often, (2) sometimes, (3) never.'
4. 'In the near future do you see yourself as (1) [nationality] only, (2) [nationality] and European, (3) European and [nationality] or (4) European only?'
5. The relevant question wording is: 'European Union Member States are "European Citizens". Are you personally proud or not to be a "European Citizen"? Would you say that you are (1) very proud, (2) fairly proud, (3) not very proud or (4) not at all proud?'
6. The following question was asked: 'I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in people from various countries. For each, please tell me whether you have (1) a lot of trust, (2) some trust, (3) not very much trust, or (4) no trust at all.'
7. The following question was asked: 'Now I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in people from various countries. Can you please tell me for each, whether you have a lot of trust of them or not very much trust. If you do not know a country well enough, just say so and I will go on to the next. How about the Austrians: do have a lot of trust of them or not very much trust? …'

8 In order to avoid distortion through composition effects, over-time changes are calculated on the basis of EU 15 countries only.

9.

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Appendix

Table A1: Those who consider themselves as European citizens ('only European', 'European and national' and 'national and European')

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Belgium	58	65	66	61	50	47	53	56	56	52	62	54	62
France	67	65	75	68	63	64	64	59	62	63	65	63	68
Germany	55	54	66	60	47	48	49	49	54	57	60	61	61
Italy	69	70	71	73	62	63	68	71	73	66	77	72	65
Luxembourg	69	63	76	75	71	73	67	72	73	75	74	74	66
Netherland	56	59	65	60	57	57	57	56	57	54	58	54	59
Denmark	51	50	51	46	42	44	49	44	47	59	62	62	58
United Kingdom	43	37	48	42	37	38	35	30	31	28	34	33	38
Ireland	46	49	58	53	47	47	45	44	47	43	53	47	53
Greece	60	56	54	47	38	46	46	40	44	41	49	48	43
Spain	60	55	61	55	54	52	60	63	70	59	67	65	61
Portugal	58	52	55	53	46	39	37	47	48	47	53	49	51
Austria				46	44		47	51	48	52	55	48	51
Finland			59	47	40		45	38	41	40	44	42	42
Sweden				38	34		39	37	40	48	47	47	46
Cyprus (South)													69
Malta													66
Poland													54
Czech republic													42
Slovakia													61
Hungaria													35
Slovenia													55
Estonia													54
Latvia													51
Lithuania													43
Bulgaria													54
Romania													53
Turkey													28
Cyprus (North)													48
Croatia													63
Original 6	*62*	*62*	*69*	*65*	*56*	*57*	*59*	*58*	*62*	*61*	*66*	*64*	*64*
1st extension	*44*	*39*	*49*	*43*	*38*	*39*	*37*	*32*	*33*	*31*	*37*	*36*	*41*
2nd extension	*60*	*55*	*59*	*53*	*50*	*49*	*53*	*56*	*61*	*54*	*62*	*59*	*56*
3rd extension				*43*	*39*		*43*	*42*	*44*	*47*	*49*	*47*	*47*
4th extension													*50*

Source: Eurobarometers, figures based on weighted data (national weight for country figures, EU-weight for country groups).