

The Eurozone Crisis and the European Union's Multiple Identity Crises

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ABSTRACT:

Several commentators of the Eurozone crisis have observed that the EU is not only going through a financial and economic crisis, but also an 'identity crisis', or even an 'existential' one. This article argues that the concept of European identity is a multifaceted one that contains numerous dimensions and goes on to explore at least four distinct, yet interrelated ways of interpreting the current identity crisis of the EU. The first concerns the international standing of the EU as a proclaimed and exemplary global agent of peace, democracy, welfare and prosperity, which is undermined by its inability to provide these goods to its own citizens and close neighbours, let alone the rest of the world. The second kind of identity crisis relates to the EU's qualitative direction in the economic domain, centred on the question

Introduction

The European Union, the European identity, and the Eurozone crisis

During the previous century, Europe was marked by the terrible experiences of two world wars, the harsh recessions that followed them, totalitarianism and murderous regimes, the continuing impulse of imperialism and colonialism, as well as the long-standing division of the Cold War (Garton Ash 2012; Guibernau 2011). These experiences severely damaged not only Europe's unity, peace, prosperity and well-being of its populations, but also its self-understanding and external image (Garton Ash 2012; Guibernau 2011). In an attempt for Europe to overcome these challenges and reinvent itself, especially after the events of the second world war, an elitist movement of intellectuals and political leaders sought to build what became known as the 'United States of Europe', a political and economic federation of European states that would ensure the avoidance of war and impoverishment and create an equilibrium international power between the United States and Russia (Garton Ash 2012; Guibernau 2011).

However, the 'federal dream', promoted simultaneously at the economic, political and cultural levels, was repeatedly met with several obstacles and substantial resistance by both political elites and reluctant populations who feared economic and power inequalities between member-states, the loss of national sovereignty and possibility of cultural homogenisation (Alesina and Perotti 2004; Hudson 2000; Jones and Subotic 2011). These fears have often resulted in expressions of nationalism and Euroscepticism, two ideologies that have been seen as intimately related (Cinpoes 2008). As a result, the unification of Europe progressed in more modest increments over the years, focusing predominantly on intergovernmental patterns and economic integration (Cinpoes 2008; Guibernau 2011), seen by many as a 'second-best solution' to political and cultural union (Hooghe and Marks 2009).

The galvanising events of the late eighties and early nineties, such as German unification, the 1989 Revolutions and the end of the Cold War, pushed integration forwards and led to the creation of the Single Market and the transition to a European Union (hereafter EU). This time also signalled the prioritization of identity issues in the EU's policy agenda and a corresponding increased interest in research on European identities (Camia 2010). Beyond the lack of political will to proceed to full-blown federalism at several points in time by various national leaders (i.e. see de Gaulle in the sixties, or Thatcher in the nineties), the particularly economic focus of European integration was also potentially based

on rationalist, materialist and realist assumptions (Guibernau 2011; Manners and Whitman 2003), additionally prompted by the idea that the benefits of economic integration would eventually generate political and cultural unification by 'spill-over effects' (see e.g. Haas's neo-functionalism, 1958) and long-term acculturation and socialisation of Europeans (Shore 2000). However, these latter processes have often been seen either as subject to future materialisation, rather than existing reality (Sassatelli 2002), as being in a fragile state (Garton Ash 2001) or even as a matter of impossibility (Toplak and Šumi 2012).

All these preoccupations are intimately related to a variety of normative ideas about the EU, such as its degree of legitimacy, as well as state of confidence and trust, both domestically and internationally, and are jointly encapsulated by the conception of 'European identity' (Kaina and Karolewski 2009). The conventional understanding of European identity as the construction of a commonly shared, transnational collective identity came to be seen as the 'political glue' that would legitimise and sustain the European project, by being a remedy for a perceived 'democratic deficit' induced by the absence of an active European demos, and an antidote to nationalism and Euroscepticism, the latter widely defined as lack of support for European integration (Kaina and Karolewski 2009; Taggart 1998; Toplak and Šumi 2012). This Europeanist spirit became particularly normative with the recognition of the 'post-Maastricht blues', the decline of public support after the Maastricht Treaty (Eichenberg and Dalton 2007).

Today, the effects of the global financial crisis, the subsequent sovereign debt crises around Europe and the accompanying systemic Eurozone crisis, pose considerable challenges on European unity and solidarity by giving rise to nationalist movements, popular discontent and resistance towards the EU (Garton Ash 2012; Laquer 2012; Serricchio *et al.* 2013). An attempt to define the Eurozone crisis would necessarily need to take into account all three levels of financial channels ranging from the global to the European and finally the national. In this sense, the Eurozone crisis can be defined as the European manifestation of the global financial crisis initiated in 2008, exacerbated by inherent weaknesses of the Eurozone's architecture and by serious shortcomings of various national economies that made them more vulnerable in this crisis context and more dysfunctional in the Eurozone.

In many respects, the Eurozone crisis has been described as a 'chronicle of a crisis foretold' (Garton Ash 2012) because of the various inherent inequalities and contradictions of joining extremely different economies with disparate growth and exporting capacities, as well as deficits and debt rates, under a single currency

of whether we now face a more technocratic EU, rather than a democratic and social one. In a third sense, the rise of nationalist sentiments, undiplomatic exchanges between EU citizens based on cultural stereotypes and sharp divides between North and South have contributed to the reconfiguration of perceived prototypical meanings of both national and European identities, undermining their pluralist and gracious visions. Ultimately, all of the above culminate in the fourth dimension of identity crisis which relates to the internal consistency of the EU wired through the ever-present quest for public support and legitimised through the notions of unity and solidarity.

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with no fiscal union, lack of sufficient supervision and absence of substantial stabilising mechanisms (Garton Ash 2012; Hadjimichalis 2011; Lucarelli 2012; Müller 2012). All of the above have made the Euro particularly vulnerable to the financial crisis and have triggered a multiplicity of disagreements and debates across Europe and the world.

Although the crisis is primarily financial and economic it contains an enormous political component since the management of the crisis produces a variety of political debates and consequences. For example, in terms of debates the decisions concerning the economic origins and recovery of the crisis are often described as a clash between different politico-economic ontologies and corresponding camps, such as the Neoliberals, the Ordoliberalists, the Keynesians or the Marxists (i.e. Dullien and Guérot 2012). In an interrelated monetary system like the EU, debates over the intervening role of the state in the national economy quickly become debates over the intervening role of the EU in national economies and politics. This in turn invites questions of the degree of federalism that would be acceptable in the EU with all the resistances that this is met. As far as consequences go, the differing micro or macro lenses used to evaluate the dynamics of the crisis and to form decision-making and management policies have direct and indirect impact on citizens' everyday lives.

The overall result is that the EU is faced with a multiplicity of hard existential questions and prolonged identity dilemmas anchored around the crisis of its very being and quest of becoming. Pertinent questions arise of what kind of union the EU aims to be or should be, towards which directions it is headed and how actions of today will echo in the future. Given the previous overwhelmingly economic focus of the EU and the current failures at the economic register of European integration, it may only be a politics of solidarity and a cosmopolitan culture of mutual responsibility that could hold the EU together (Garton Ash 2012; Laquer 2012). All of these create an urgent need for reflection on European identities as these are shaped inside the crisis. However, it is argued here that this crisis of being and as a consequence of identity is not expressed through a monolithic system of existence or a simplified social reality but rather through a multiplicity of domains and as such, corresponding *identity dimensions*.

Following from this, the present article aims to explore the question of how can we theorize the contemporary possible identity crisis in the EU as this unfolds in different domains? Which domains present us with special importance?

Why are they important? The purpose therefore of this article is twofold: first, it endeavours to lay out a theory of the multiplicity of European identities and their dimensions, and second, to reflect on the different ways that the EU may be experiencing a crisis of identity in these specified identity dimensions. This article will start by briefly conceptualising the multidimensionality of European identities before reflecting on the EU's perpetuated state of 'crisis' as shaped before and after the Eurozone crisis, as well as the meaning of crisis itself. It will continue with presenting four distinct yet interrelated ways to interpret the EU's multiple identity crises, based on different dimensions of the concept of European identity which include the international, the socio-economic, the pluralist and the political dimensions. The ultimate aim of the article is to sketch out possible routes of exploration for future research on European identities with reference to the Eurozone crisis. As such, it is beyond the scope of this article to extensively test and prove the claims made in each section of identity formation, but rather to provide indications drawn from expert and lay discourse that alert us to the existence of identity crises in the EU. For these purposes academic texts and data from the Eurobarometer surveys will be used.

Identities and crises in the EU: a theoretical framework

Multiplicity of identities and identity dimensions

In the literature, the multiplicity of European identities is most often exemplified by the theoretical and empirical example that individuals have multiple identities that range from the local to the regional, to the national and beyond, i.e. the continent or the world (Hooghe and Marks 2009). In this sense, a single individual can simultaneously be a Glaswegian, Scottish, British, European, and an aspired 'citizen of the world'. Terminologically, this links to the well-known debate in identity research whether these aspects are separate domains or components of a single identity or multiple distinct identities as such (Vignoles *et al.* 2012). In the European identities research area, especially in EU related identifications, the crucial point is how different group identities relate to each other and how they are mobilized in debates (Hooghe & Marks 2009). In other words, what matters is how the relationship between, for instance, national and European identities is constructed in public debate and experienced by citizens. Are these identities comparable and peacefully coexisting or incommensurable and conflictual?

Another way of looking at the multiplicity of European identities is by posing the question of who or what carries this identity? Is it the individual citizen, the collective nation, or the institution of the EU itself as a whole? In the European identities research area it has been all of above depending on different research questions and corresponding projects, which has made it possible to be able to speak of a European citizen who identifies closely with the EU or Europe, a Eurosceptic nation that has traditionally expressed in disidentification with the EU or Europe through its foreign policy, or the domestic image and international identity of the EU as this is born by the institution itself and projected inside and outside its borders to its own citizens or to other global observers. This latter part points out the internal and external dimension of European identities as a form of institutional identity. Finally, all of the above illustrate the *multiplicity of identity subjects*, that is, subjects that bear the European identity.

Moving on into the content and meaning of European identities, the concept of 'European identity' is a highly normative one that touches upon notions of the 'ideal' and can be understood as a complex concept that is subject to multiple interpretations and as such, carries multiple normative meanings (Camia 2010; Jiménez Lobeira 2013). In this sense, the term European identity can have different meanings to different people or capture many meanings simultaneously, even contradictory ones. For example, a disenchanted EU federalist could possibly contrast between the ideal identity of the EU and the perceived as less than ideal actual identity of the EU, or someone could claim that it is the political identity of the EU that should form the basis of collective identifications instead of its cultural identity. However, it would be important to take into account that these different normative understandings constitute coexisting aspects of the same phenomenon, rather than mutually exclusive entities (Jiménez Lobeira 2013).

In terms of various normative meanings of European identities, authors have spoken in the past of cultural, ethno-cultural, heritage-based, civic, legal, constitutional patriotic, economic, international, cosmopolitan, pluralist, and many more (Camia 2010; Jiménez Lobeira 2013; Vujadinović 2011). Since these interpretations of identity exist simultaneously and can be reasonably defended as separate domains that interact with each other, the concept of European identity can be better understood as one that contains a *multiplicity of identity dimensions* whereby we can talk about the international or cultural identity dimension of the EU. A brief exploration of the EU's official documents can demonstrate the ways that different dimensions of European identity were emphasized over time, since

the formal institutionalisation of the concept back in the seventies.

For example, in 1973, the 'Declaration on European Identity' (EC 1973) attempted to stress the importance of internal European unity and the purposeful role of Europe in the world as an agent destined to bring peace, democracy and economic development. As such, it highlighted the political and international identity of the EU, talking of unity and role outside the EU borders. The concept of European identity was also mentioned in the Maastricht Treaty (EC 1992) in the common foreign and security policy section (Art. B: 5), indicating that in 1992 the focus was still on Europe's international identity.

After the suggestion of Vaclav Havel that the EU should newly reflect on what might be called 'European identity', the 'Charter of European Identity' (EC 1995) was drafted. The Charter moved beyond the previous focus on international identity and described Europe with reference to its destiny, values, living standards, economic and social policies and global responsibilities, aiming to stimulate public debate and to make its citizens 'proud to be Europeans' (EC 1995: 8). Consequently, this text also incorporated economic and cultural dimensions. Furthermore, the Charter argued for a federal structure and recognised the need for citizens' support and participation as a legitimizing factor for the deepening process of European integration (EC 1995: 5), projecting political identity dimensions. The 'Udine Declaration' on regional identities attempted to address issues of cultural identities in the EU, multiculturalism and increasing migration flows, and to reconcile the tensions between heterogeneity and homogeneity (AER 2007).

The present article chooses to focus on four identity dimensions of the EU's identity: the international, the economic, the pluralist and the political. The first is defined as the image and role of the EU outside its borders, the second one as the economic qualitative direction of the EU, the third as the accommodation of difference in the EU, and the last one as the capacity of the EU to facilitate and inspire action in concert based on unity and solidarity. As will become apparent aspects of these dimensions overlap with each other, yet constitute distinct dimensions. Before moving on to analysing each one of the identity crises in these dimensions, a theory of crisis needs to be presented.

Identity crises in the EU

Traditionally, there has been a widely-shared public discourse of politicians and academics supporting that the EU suffers from a 'crisis of identity' (Jenkins 2008).

Over time this crisis has been attributed to a variety of issues, such as the latest enlargement, the pending Turkish membership, the disarray of the European Constitution, the lack of mythical and emotional investment in EU identities or fear of immigrants from inside and outside the EU (Delanty 2008; Guibernau 2011; Jenkins 2008). It has been questioned whether this ambiguity of Europe is truly a 'crisis' and that the ambiguity of Europe is 'completely routine' and 'chronic', part of a 'normal situation', which includes the possibility of 'crisis' either as an endemic element of the EU project or as a pattern of recurring crises, prompted by the size of the European project itself, the historical past of Europe and the uneven economic development of its countries (Jenkins 2008).

While this argument makes an important point if only for the continuous alarmism of academic, political and media discourse around the EU as a fragile entity always at the verge of a breakdown, it can be argued that the Eurozone crisis may be a unique and unprecedented example of crisis that is truly consequential and capable of unravelling previous achievements, such as the monetary union and political solidarity or support for further integration. Moreover, in the Eurozone crisis context the EU has once again been said to undergo not only an economic and political crisis, but also an intense 'identity crisis' (Ntampoudi 2014; Tekin 2014). Some have even characterised it an 'existential crisis' (Garton Ash 2012; Giddens 2012; Pagoulatos 2013; Sally 2012), because the ability and potential of the EU to survive as a 'recognizable entity' and to reaffirm its purpose and sense of destiny are questioned (Giddens 2012).

But what do we mean when we say 'crisis'? How do we define it? Turning towards the meaning of the word 'crisis', the Greek word 'crisis' (κρίση), in its most widely known sense stands for sudden occurrences of disruption, sense of danger and upcoming catastrophe, as well as conditions of profound disorientation, confusion and fragmentation. However, in Greek language, 'crisis' also stands for judgement, choice and decision (Dalakoglou and Vradis 2011). This resonates with the logic that moments of crisis that are characterised by abrupt disorder, precariousness and the sense of imminent disaster, necessarily demand decisions and the preferably wise and artful handling of dilemmas and indecisions. Furthermore, this meaning of 'crisis' follows the reasoning that crises are often seen as turning points and decisive moments of change.

In the case of the EU in the Eurozone crisis, political life has been disrupted by defensive nationalisms and antagonisms across the EU, such as those between Greece and Germany (Ntampoudi 2014) and polarised debates often vacillate between

undoing integrative accomplishments by going back to strict intergovernmental arrangements and progressing to full blown federalism and deeper integration. If anything, the Eurozone crisis has made salient the problem of the hybrid nature of the EU, standing between the intergovernmental and the federal, exemplifying that the pre-existing paradigm of operation has become dysfunctional. In this sense, the meaning of the Eurozone crisis may be closer to Gramsci's (1999: 556) idea that 'the crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear'. Similarly, in the case of the EU, the old semi-federal entity is dying, but the new fully integrated one cannot be born yet; and it is precisely this liminal state of borderline identities in uncertain dilemmas and undecided transitions that constitute the peculiarity of the EU's identity crisis.

Europe's multiple identity crises

I. The crisis of the EU's international identity

One of the multiple dimensions of European identities is their international one, which allows to speak of the international identity of the EU as this stands in world politics (Manners and Whitman 2003). This external international identity concerns the efforts of the EU to diffuse its visions of collective identity beyond its own borders (Karolewski 2011). The bearer of this identity is the institution of the EU, thus we are dealing with an 'institutional identity' comprised of procedures and regulations that become transplanted in other countries (Karolewski 2011). The notion of the 'international identity of the EU' was first introduced in the nineties aiming not to be synonymous to 'foreign policy' or 'external relation' but to speak of the EU's greater global role as a whole (Manners and Whitman 2003). As can be understood, the international identity of the EU relates to the ways the EU is seen outside its borders and its ability to act as a powerful and leading global political actor and an inspiring role model for other regions and countries.

In the context of the Eurozone crisis, there is a variety of dynamics that exacerbate a European identity crisis, in this international dimension. For example, it has been argued in academic discourse that the EU is now taken less seriously than before because Russia and China lose their respect for it, the United States routinely scold the Europeans for 'not getting their act together', and European elites themselves have abandoned any pretence that the EU could act as a role

model for other world regions (Müller 2012; Sally 2012). Indeed, while the USA has moved on from the financial crisis and has shown signs of recovery and stability, the EU continues to exhibit an image of discord and inability to resolve the economic problems within the Eurozone and its respective national economies.

This additionally needs to be contextualised in the immediate pre-crisis climate when some had already argued that since China – and Asia more generally – was foretold to be the next economic superpower and the global multilateral trading regime is vacillating, 'being Asian may be more desirable than being European' (Lee and Bideleux 2009: 170). In terms of European citizens' opinions, during 2011 and 2012 there was a considerable decline in public perceptions of the political influence of the EU compared to countries such as the USA, China, Brazil, India and Japan, while more than half Europeans expect the EU's role to be weaker in 2020 compared to that of the USA or China (EC 2014a). As such, there are indications that the public belief in the EU's ability to play a protagonistic role world affairs has been shaken during the economic crisis.

In this sense, there appears to be a dissonance between the EU's desire to play a significant and leading role in the global scene and its capacities to fulfil this role in a changing global context. Furthermore, Europe's image of itself as the global agent of peace, democracy, equality, welfare and prosperity is undermined by its inability to assist in providing these goods to all of its own citizens (Garton Ash 2012), let alone the rest of the world. As indicated by recent research, in nine member-states of the EU, among them Greece (87%), Bulgaria (74%), Portugal (70%), Italy (65%) and Cyprus (63%), the majority of the people have difficulties paying their bills at the end of the month (EC 2013). This inability of the EU to forcefully deliver the promised standards of living constitutes a sense of loss of purpose and direction, which disturbs the sense of European identity internationally, as much as it does domestically. Finally, this last argument relates to the next dimension of EU's identity crisis anchored around the crisis of the proclaimed European social model.

II. The crisis of the EU's economic identity

The various elements of the 'European social model' concept can be understood as rhetorical resources that are intended to legitimise the politically constructed and identity-building project of the EU institutions (Jepsen and Serrano Pascual 2005). Back in the eighties, Jacques Delors contrasted this presented as particu-

larly European model to the US-led form of 'pure market capitalism' (Jepsen and Serrano Pascual 2005: 234). In other words, the European social model construction has acted as a distinguishing identity marker for the EU's economic identity. The basic idea of the European social model dictated that economic development should ideally go hand in hand with social progress and economic prosperity which should be strongly allied with democracy (Jepsen and Serrano Pascual 2005). Some of its normative and regulatory practices included the establishment of welfare regimes for the provision of social assistance to the needy, universal provision of education and health care, social insurance and social services to ensure social protection and equal opportunities for all, comprehensive and legally sanctioned labour-market institutions, respect for human and labour rights as well as an intention for a more equal wage and income distribution compared to other parts of the world, solidarity with weakest members and the resolution of social conflict by consensual and democratic means (Ferrera et al. 2001; Jepsen and Serrano Pascual 2005).

To this respect, in the Eurozone crisis context, academic discourse has often suggested that we now witness a more technocratic and economically obsessed EU, rather than a political and socially-friendly one (Marconi 2011; McGiffen 2011). This constitutes yet another layer of European dilemma that risks alienating European citizens by the negative implications of the instrumental economic logic on their immediate micro-conditions and the lack of democratic legitimacy technocratic solutions entail (Delanty 2012; Hughes 2011). For example, Giddens (2012: 26) has commented that the 'saviours of the EU' and the implanted 'technocrats' in the more problematic economies of the European south, like Greece and Italy, largely bypassed democratic decision-making processes and led to the paradoxical contradiction of an organization like the EU, being so eager to promote democracy around the world and simultaneously experiencing a severe democratic deficit within itself.

In terms of public opinion, the majority of Europeans perceived the EU as being over-bureaucratic, responsible for austerity, unfair and ineffective in tackling what they feel are two key issues, namely employment and purchasing power (EC 2014b: 104). Delanty comments (2012) that in this uncoupling of democracy and capitalism, democratic identities are more resistant to embrace a technocratic and elite driven EU, which is paradoxical in the sense that these democratic identities are in part products of the European project itself. To be sure, the view of the EU as a 'technocratic, managerial, top-down' project (Shore 1998: 48) predates the

economic crisis, although we can evaluate that this image may have now been intensified in the eyes of some citizens.

Finally, severe austerity measures, imposed more intensely in the European south, and rising rates of unemployment with numerous Southerners moving to the European North in search for better life conditions, reduce any form of possible social protection and economic security, and reveal transnational social cleavages marked by Northern xenophobia and diminishing human capital in the South. Eurobarometer surveys have illustrated that some EU citizens, most often Eurosceptics, tend to complain that open borders result in citizens of other EU countries coming and taking jobs or taking advantage of social benefits without contributing to the local society (EC 2014c). This last point is played out against the background of the next identity crisis of the EU which is related to North/South divides and prototypical perceptions of European identity that undermine the EU's pluralist vision.

III. The crisis of the EU's pluralist identity

A third dimension of identity crisis relates to the bitter and tactless dynamics that have been created among Europeans, in the form of circulations of negative national stereotypes and narratives of blaming, most often articulated through a sharp divide between the North and the South of Europe (Ntampoudi 2014; Tekin 2014). As such, if in the past, the new-born Eastern-European democracies that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007 were seen as Europe's economic, political and cultural 'internal others', research of media and elite rhetoric indicates that the predominant fault line has now moved towards 'othering' the European South with representations of it as not truly belonging to Europe and having a European character or identity thereof (Ntampoudi 2014; Tekin 2014).

This has created a newly intensified interpretation of European identity understood as adherence to a normative 'European way of being' anchored around neo-liberal economic values such as respect for the market economy and its rules, rather than political ones such as cosmopolitanism and solidarity (Ntampoudi 2014; Tekin 2014). Furthermore, these dynamics have produced a prototypical understanding of European identity and the in-group that bears this identity in the sense that countries that better adhere to the above prerequisites are now seen as more authentically European, since market values are viewed as identity indicators (Ntampoudi 2014; Tekin 2014). In this context, Greece for example, has been

discursively constructed by EU elite discourse as not truly belonging to Europe because of its Mediterranean way of life, necessarily full of laziness, corruption and bribery, and its obstructive, unreliable and abusive political culture (Tekin 2014).

However, the same discriminating process has occurred with the North and member-states such as Germany have been constructed as less than European (Ntampoudi 2014). For instance, in Germany's case, its European identity was questioned by a number of critical accusations that reckon that Germany has been the greater winner of the Eurozone because of large exports, has been late, ignorant and ineffective in the management of the crisis, has exhibited a stubborn and narrow-minded foreign policy, has shown a nationalistic and Eurosceptic face by focusing on German interests and norms (Lucarelli 2012; Hübner 2012; Young and Semmler 2011). Critics of German politics have also added that Germany has profited from the crisis of others and was keener in punishing Greece rather than helping it, while accusations have extended to arguing that Germany aims to dominate the whole of Europe by economic means (Jones 2011; Hübner 2012).

In other words, both the North and the South have been constructed as less than European during the crisis, triggering an often implicit and rather problematic search for the prototypical European nation that satisfies economically and politically the EU ideals, a normative understanding that obscures the EU's pluralist identity, as this is exemplified by the motto 'United in Diversity'. Additionally, these dynamics have created perceptions of power inequalities between EU member-states. For example, recent research indicates that respondents in Southern (i.e. Portugal) and Central-Eastern Europe (i.e. Poland) believe that the story of Europe is written by the economically strongest European countries and that this economic imbalance may also mean that the future of the EU is not decided by all member-states (EC 2014c). To this respect, in the same survey, a German respondent voiced the idea that Germany may be suppressing other countries (EC 2014c), which indicates how national identities have also been adversely affected by citizens having negative national self-images.

At the same time, Eurobarometer reports show that many Northern Europeans in Germany, Denmark and Finland contest the reasons that advanced European economies should transfer their surpluses to deficit, poorer regions or be slowed down by Southern limping economies (EC 2014c), while uncharitable anti-German rhetoric has been evident for example in Greece through demands for World War II reparations. Although it may be difficult to clarify the degree and manner that

national stereotypes and prototypical understandings of European identities feed into foreign policy and grassroots cross-cultural relations, suffice to say that these divisions relate to the next kind of EU identity crisis at the most political levels of common action through unity and solidarity.

IV. The crisis of the EU's political identity

Ultimately, all of the above culminate in the fourth dimension of identity crisis, related to the internal consistency of the EU understood as unity and solidarity, facilitated through elite and citizen support for continuous and deeper integration and practically expressed in common action and cooperation that inspire a shared sense of destiny and direction. The perceived declining international standing of the EU in global affairs, combined with the vivid degradation of the European social model and the reproduction of national stereotypes between member states, can be said to have hindered the public sense of European togetherness. For most Europeans, the economic and financial crisis is perceived to have overwhelmed the overall European narrative and to have re-created divisions between different member-states (EC 2014c). Moreover, some Europeans expressed their concern over the lack of a united and authoritative response to the Ukrainian crisis (EC 2014c), which shows that the projection of a united front outside the EU is perceived as weak by its own citizens. As an extension, the unity dimension of European identity appears to have been influenced.

In terms of solidarity, the acceptable degree and nature of it appear to be rather controversial and the very meaning of the term is publicly debated across the EU. As indicated in recent research produced by the EU, the issue of solidarity between member-states was predominantly seen in terms of financial assistance and was the subject which proved most divisive among respondents (EC 2014c). Majorities of respondents in Southern member-states like Italy and Portugal supported that if any member-states are in trouble they should be helped by others as a matter of principle, while some respondents in Poland and Denmark felt that this was a matter of obligation (EC 2014c). Solidarity was mostly seen as conditional primary in Germany, but also in many other countries (EC 2014c). Naturally, there are burdens and compromises posed by a solidarity regime that amount to acceptance of ethical duties, compliance with the common good and mutual responsibility (Borger 2013; Kantner 2006). Consequently this translates into reforms and consistent commitments over adjustments in challenged economies in the South combined with stronger solidarity across the EU (Pagoulatos

2013). Eventually, consensus over solidarity is important for future concerted action and resolution of the crisis.

Additionally, the unity and cooperation dimensions of the EU's identity can be further argued to have been affected by the circulation of various speculative scenarios for future direction. For instance, the vivid disparities between the European core and periphery led to observable disintegrating tendencies and revitalised the old proposal of a 'two-speed Europe' going back to Schäuble and Lamers's 1994 paper on Kerneuropa, which would allow core and periphery to integrate separately at different paces, but was seen by some as problematic for both economic regions (Jones 2011; Young and Semmler 2011). Furthermore, several discussions entertained ideas about exits from the Eurozone, whether these would come from the North with Germany departing possibly taking with it other core countries, or from the South with most notably Greece departing, voluntarily or not, and possibly other Mediterranean countries (Featherstone 2011; Lucarelli 2012).

More recently, the prospect of a Brexit, the referendum on UK's EU membership only adds another layer of exit scenarios to the escapist mood around the EU. Although public opinion in the EU supports the idea of more cooperation, research has revealed that in some countries, such as Germany and Denmark, the experts did not agree with the idea of increased cooperation between EU Member States and wished for less cooperation (EC 2014c). All these proposals and the often vehement ways they have been discussed exposed the intense unity and cohesion deficits that the crisis unleashed. However, the most important issues of the crisis management are not the rescue mechanisms or the legal adjustments, but rather the political unity and solidarity gaps and the support of the people (Borger 2013; Laquer 2012).

Conclusions

Throughout this article a series of theoretical arguments were made and a number of propositions for future research on European identities were discussed. The intellectual journey of this article started with a presentation of a brief and concise history of the European Union and of the process of European integration. In this section driving events and hindering factors of unification were mentioned. Through this short exposition it was communicated that the history of European integration is as much one of big leaps forward as one of huge withdrawals, delays

and setbacks, played across different domains of integration, such as the economic, the political and the cultural. It was argued that the focus of integration has been predominantly economic without addressing adequately the symbolic and existential dimensions that politics and culture entail. These dimensions relate intimately with the conception of European identity that has been traditionally seen as the political glue that would legitimise and sustain the project of European integration. It was further suggested that the Eurozone crisis brought the primary channel of integration, the economy, in a profound state of disruption with various political consequences. As such, it was argued that the Eurozone crisis is not only a financial and economic crisis, but also a political crisis that can be read as a crisis of the identity of the EU, or as some authors have termed it for good reasons, an ‘existential crisis’ (Giddens 2012; Pagoulatos 2013).

The first theoretical argument of the article concerns the character and nature of European identities. In the relevant section, it was argued that although it is often stated and accepted that European identities are multiple identities, the nature of their multiplicity is rarely reflected upon or theoretically developed. Consequently, an exposition of the different ways we could think about and theorise the multiplicity of European identities was offered, explaining that besides the traditional and conventional argument that people hold multiple and simultaneous identities, ranging from the local to the regional, and from the national to the European and beyond (Vignoles et al. 2012), European identities are multiple because they can be carried by multiple subjects and they can have multiple normative meanings. It was then suggested that rather than treating these different elements as mutually exclusive or incompatible, it would be more useful to treat them as multiple dimensions of the same phenomenon that although they constitute distinct conditions, they often overlap with each other in the complexity of social life. A brief exploration of the discursive development of the concept of ‘European identity’ in the EU’s official declarations was presented at this point to illustrate the multiplicity of dimensions and meanings employed over time.

In the next section a theoretical reflection on the meaning of crisis was outlined. At first the argument that crisis is a normal situation of the condition of the EU and of European integration with chronic and recurring features was looked at and was partially accepted due to the continues alarmism of both academic and media discourse that often constructs the EU as a fragile entity always in danger of collapsing. However, this view can be deceiving because it trivialises the existence of crisis and underscores its negative implications. It was then suppor-

ted that the Eurozone crisis presents us with an unprecedented and exceptional example of pure crisis in the history of the EU because it threatens to unravel previous achievements and unleashes various worrisome political phenomena. As such, it was suggested that it is more fruitful to think of crises as disruptions and turnings points whereby ruptures appear and change is occurring gradually. For this reason, crisis is argued to be transitional, albeit towards unforeseen directions. In terms of identity crisis it was suggested that the problems occur at the borderline of being where uncertainty lies and decisions on future direction and becoming either not answered or met with dissonance between the desired and what is perceived as the actual.

In the remaining article, four dimensions of identity were proposed for future research on European identities with reference to the Eurozone crisis, namely the international, the economic, the pluralist and the political. These four dimensions were analysed in terms of empirical indications drawn from expert academic discourse and lay public opinion that suggest that the EU is experiencing adverse consequences in each one of these identity dimensions. In terms of the international dimension of the EU’s identity, it was argued that the international image and standing of the EU were undergoing a crisis because of the gap between the desired role that the EU declares for itself and wishes to fulfil, and the way it is perceived by various observers inside and outside the EU that diagnose a state of inefficiency and loss of power in the global scene. In the economic dimension of the EU’s identity, the proclaimed European social model with its focus on welfare and democracy was analysed as an important identity marker of the EU and indications were provided that it has received severe blows all over Europe and across numerous national economies due to technocratic choices and austerity policies. Next, the pluralist dimension of the EU’s identity was judged to have suffered greatly during the Eurozone crisis because of the sharp and stereotypical divisions between the North and South of Europe and the implicit struggle over the prototypical European nation. Finally, the political dimension of cooperation, unity and solidarity expressed in the desire for common action and shared destiny as integral parts of European identity was evaluated by some evidence to have suffered symptoms of crisis during the last few years because of various exit and separation scenarios, profound disagreements over solidarity and unwillingness to work together.

The contribution of the present article lays in its theoretical engagement with the multiplicity of the concept of European identities and the clarification of different

domains that act as identity markers for the EU's identity and address different dimensions of a complex and often elusive concept in the literature. Furthermore, the theoretical argument benefits from its involvement with the empirical reality of the Eurozone crisis and the ways that various identity dimensions of the EU have been adversely influenced. Although discursive indications and selected pieces of empirical data were used to illustrate the above points, it is strongly suggested and hoped that further research establishes more clearly and more elaborately in the future how European identities and their multiple dimensions have been affected during the Eurozone crisis.

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