

Reflection of National and European Identity in the New Millennium

FACTSHEET NO. 2

THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION OF IDENTITIES
SINCE 1989



1 Project and Objectives

The project brings together partners from Germany, the Czech and the Slovak Republic to compare their experience with education in the realm of European and national identity and to learn about the state-of-art development, which can be used by university teachers and teachers at secondary schools. The long-term aim is the participation of young people in active EU citizenship. The particular aim is to teach the above-named topics at university level in a highly innovative way with the use of information and communication technology (ICT). For instance, the various perspectives on national and European identity are brought together in learning opportunities on the virtual 3D-platform 'Kitely'.

This second factsheet initially describes the overall development of identity in Europe since 1989 before the specific contexts and transformations in the countries Slovak Republic, Czech Republic and Germany are presented.

2 Europe and European Identity



From a cultural-sociological perspective, European identity is defined as “anspruchsvoller Spezialfall jeglicher ‘kollektiver Identität’” (Forchtner and Eder 2017:79) (Engl. “challenging special case of ‘collective identity’”). The term refers to “jene Geschichten, die EuropäerInnen über sich selbst erzählen. Es sind Erzählungen, mit denen sie sich selbst beschreiben, abgrenzen und ihre Umwelt wahrnehmen” (ibid.) (Engl. “those stories that

Europeans tell about themselves. These are stories through which Europeans describe and distinguish themselves and perceive their environment”). Cerutti (2009) deems European identity necessary for the legitimation of the European Union (EU). However, the establishment of such an identity is accompanied by various difficulties, ranging from the EU’s low ‘visibility’ in everyday life to the division of e.g., legislation between the EU and the member states or political communication structures and the EU’s framing in the national context (Cerutti 2009) to matters of loyalty (Carey 2002).

Beginning in the 1980s, some major projects contributing to a more consistent political structure of the EU had been carried out, e.g., the Schengen Agreement (1990), the introduction of the European Single Market (1986) and, later, of the Euro (1999/2002).

Nevertheless, initially these led only partially to a broader formation of European identity. Around the turn of the millennium, it was mainly people from higher social strata who tended to identify more with the EU. In 2004, only 12.7% of EU citizens identified themselves as primarily European. Another 43.3% identified primarily with their national identity, but at least partially as European. (Fligstein, Polyakova and Sandholtz 2012). A new publication by the European Commission illustrates developments regarding identification as an EU citizen between 2010 to 2021. Although the change is slow, the trend is upward: While in 2010 62% of respondents perceived themselves as EU citizens in whole or in part, by the winter of 2020/21 this figure had already risen to 74%. Nevertheless, still only 60% of the respondents felt connected to the EU, compared to 92% who felt connected to their home country (European Commission and Kantar 2021). Thus, European identity has not replaced national identity, but in many cases the two coexist to a certain extent.

3 Contexts and Developments in the Individual Countries

Different developments have taken place in the individual countries, depending on the country-specific contexts and circumstances. These are discussed below for the project participants Slovakia, Czech Republic and Germany.

3.1 Slovak Republic



Lášticová and Bianchi (2003) identify the fall of the communist regime in 1989, the separation of Czechoslovakia and the formation of the Slovak Republic in 1993 as well as the EU accession in 2004 as important socio-political factors which have affected the transformation of identity in the Slovak area since 1989. Much of the literature dealing with transformations of identity in the Slovak area since then refers to the 1990s and 2000s.

Studies from the 1990s and from around the turn of the millennium show that a European identity had not yet emerged at that time; people tended to identify with local, regional, and national entities. Back then, the Slovak data was mostly compared to data on the Czech Republic. Hardly any differences could be identified between the two countries. Instead, most differences were intergenerational. The strongest identification with supranational entities (Europe, world) was found among young people under 25 years old, who predicted a stronger tendency toward it for future generations (Bačová and Výrost 1996; Frankovský 2000; Frankovský and Bolfíková 1996). The level of education also seems to have had some effect, with university graduates tending to identify more with macrosocial units (Frankovský 2001).

Furthermore, research on European identity focuses on young generations; for them, differences between countries as well as between the Slovak majority society and minorities are highlighted (Borecká and Pflchtová 1998; Homišinová 1999; Pflchtová 1991). For example, in the 1990s Bačová and Ellis (1996) conducted a study on perceptions of nation and ethnicity among school and university students in Slovakia and the United Kingdom (UK). They conclude that members of the Slovak majority society perceive 'nation' as particularly positive, establish a close connection between state and national identity, and, like the Hungarian minority, place high value on language. In 2002/03, the project 'The Orientations of Young Men and Women to Citizenship and European Identity' (SÚ SAV 2002-2004) conducted research on European identity among 18- to 24-year-olds in several countries. It shows that Slovak participants from Bratislava attach a higher value to EU citizenship than the comparison group from Prague/Czech Republic and have high hopes of living in the EU. In a more recent study, Nikischer (2013) deals, among other things, with the relationship of Slovaks to territorial entities. He suggests that three levels of territorial identity intersect: supranational (EU), national (Slovakia) and subnational (regional, local).

The process of identification with Europe was complicated in the 1990s by political processes, especially the disintegration of the bipolar world system and Czechoslovakia and an accompanying upsurge of nationalist ideas. EU accession, border freedom and generational shifts are now leading to changes in identities, especially toward larger social units. These assumptions need to be tested by further research.

3.2 Czech Republic



As in the case of Slovakia, the most significant events for the Czech Republic in terms of identity and its development since 1989 have been the fall of the communist regime in 1989, the division of Czechoslovakia and the creation of the Czech Republic in 1993 as well as the country's accession to the EU in 2004.

In modern history, Czech national identity has mainly been under German, Slovak and Russian influence and has been formed through relations with them. It is constituted from various aspects. To be considered a 'Czech', one must meet some criteria. Among the most important are being born and living in the Czech area, having Czech parents, speaking Czech (as a mother tongue) and holding Czech citizenship (Vlachová und Řeháková 2004a:16ff). Even people to whom all other criteria apply, but who live permanently abroad, are no longer considered full-fledged Czechs (Kandert 2000). An important part of Czech national identity is the identification with the Czech national territory (Vlachová und Řeháková 2004a:20f). National

pride as part of national identity, which people can develop in relation to their country based on individual and national successes – for example, in the fields of politics, science, economics, sports, art and literature – is felt by Czechs only to a lesser extent (Vlachová and Řeháková 2004a:22–25; Vlachová and Řeháková 2004b).

Regarding European identity, Hubálek, Lincényi and Staněk (2018) find out in a study on attitudes of Czech and Slovak students and teachers that Czech participants in most cases have less positive attitudes toward EU citizenship and European identity, are less proud of their EU citizenship, and are more sceptical of EU activities than the Slovak comparison group. On the other hand, Czech participants are overall very proud of the Czech Republic's membership in the EU and of the country's activities within it. Thus, more intensive education of Czech students in the field of EU citizenship could lead to a more positive attitude towards it and European identity.

3.3 Germany



For the development of identity after 1989 in Germany, the reunification in 1990 and the way it was carried out have been formative. The reunification was realized in the form of the German Democratic Republic's (GDR) accession to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). The political, economic, and social structures were adapted to those of West Germany, which meant a period of adjustment for the East German population. This was made more difficult by the economic crisis: One consequence of the restructuring was mass layoffs (Herbert 2017:1147). With work, a part of social life also fell away because in the GDR as a working society social life was partially organized through work. With the loss of security and stability, the identities of former GDR citizens became devalued and fragile; European identity did not play a role. The West German population perceived this phase differently: For them, hardly anything changed. The perception of reunification was often linked to the solidarity surcharge; however, a crisis was not noticeable. In the West, the complaints of East Germans were perceived as whining ('Jammerossi'; offensive West German nickname for East Germans analogously translatable to 'whining East Germans' in English); in the East, on the other hand, people felt patronized, even disenfranchised ('Besserwessi'; offensive East German nickname for West Germans analogously translatable to 'West Germans who think they are something better' in English) (Herbert 2017).

In a study on 'Generation 1975', 26 contemporary witnesses from Berlin, Brandenburg, and Baden-Württemberg, who were 14 years old when the Berlin Wall came down, were interviewed. It becomes clear that the beforementioned different perceptions have changed

little regarding the generation in question. The identities of the interviewees have continued to be influenced by their own different perceptions as well as by their parents' experiences (Bertram 2020).

A project of the Körber-Stiftung (2020) deals with East and West German 'post-transition children' born between 1989 and 94. The 30 participants paint a different picture: The assignment to East and West Germany still plays a role, but its importance is declining. Having grown up in a unified Germany, the focus is on commonalities and the term 'Generation Gesamtdeutschland' (Engl. 'generation all Germany') is preferred. They perceive their own identity as regional or European; national identity is less important. It must be noted, however, that this is an elite project: All participants took part in a history competition in their childhood, most have studied on university level and are employed. The picture drawn here contrasts with other identities that coexist in Germany.

4 Conclusion

Overall, it becomes clear that national identity is an important factor in the development of European identity and that it plays a huge role in explaining attitudes towards the EU. A study by Carey (2002) shows that when a citizen of an EU member state has developed a strong national identity, support for European integration and a European identity is lower. A conflict of interests and questions concerning independence are the reasons for this: The EU has adopted some characteristics, which historically belonged to nations/states, like for example a flag, national anthem, currency, national bank, parliament, and laws. National as well as European identity is very complex; one cannot exist without the other (Delanty 1998; Kersbergen 2000). If the three countries are looked at in detail, differences at the national level can be noticed in that a more pronounced European identity can be found in Germany than in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. However, if we look at the individual countries with qualitative designs, it becomes clear that the status of minorities or majorities, immigrants or 'long-established,' rulers or oppressed are also important features influencing the formation of collective identities.

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