CITIZENSHIP AND IDENTITY ACROSS EUROPE.
GLOBAL VISION, NEW PERSPECTIVES[*]

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ABSTRACT

From the European research reports on the *Future of Europe* to the newest fundamental *White Paper on a European Communication Policy*, a new perception of a transnational identity is crystallized across Europe, as a different multicultural challenge that is no more national and not yet European. That is what we intend to analyze it in this study. In this context, the representatives of the European Union have come up with the initiative of some policy and strategy documents with the aim to strengthen communication between EU institutions and EU citizens, in order to clarify the perceptions on citizenship and identity issues across Europe. Thus, the *White Paper on a European communication policy* issued on 1 February 2006 was the natural sequel to another document published in July 2005 – an *Action Plan to Improve Communicating Europe* – but also to the involvement of the Commission in the debate regarding the future of Europe, materialised in what would be later called *Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate*, a plan launched on 13 October 2005. The link between all these debates and initiatives was the *Eurobarometer*, an unbiased tool of sociological measurement, which fully confirms the communication breakdown between European citizens and the institutions which represent them, but also the legitimacy of some new perspectives which were opened by those programmatic European documents.

Keywords: European Union, identity, citizenship, Eurobarometer, perception.

1. INTRODUCTION

By launching the new campaign for a communication policy in the EU, the European Commission revalues the strategic impact of all previous research studies on public opinion and perceptions in Europe, offered by the Eurobarometer unit.

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Eurobarometer's latest years results, the most relevant surveys in Europe, are alarming especially in respect to Europeans' perception on the European citizenship, also they are underlining a lack of trust towards European institutions, which have transformed significantly, due to the pressure of some important events on EU's public agenda (such as the Treaty for a European Constitution, new Member States' integration, Turkey's adhesion etc). We are addressing *sensitive* events that sometimes radically transform the previously favorable perception that the European citizen used to prove. The Eurobarometer reports that we aim to analyze in this study record all the specificities of public opinion transformations in the new communicational EU context, correlated to an emerging global vision on the European identity.

Since 2006, a new strategy of communication has been launched by EU's institutional central level. The *White Paper on a European Communication Policy* places the European citizen (and also the value added – the European citizenship) in the center of all European communication strategies and initiatives. The aim of this official document is to transform a Europe of political and economic elites into a Europe of citizens. Member states' common view is that Europe is a "cultural exception" and only by acting at the cultural level, people will begin to think and feel European. The problem is that we assist to the emergence of a "Europe of STRANGERS" (*Cf.* Bauman, 2009) where people can not have a spontaneous common perception on sharing a European identity with the OTHERS[1].

According to Walter Lippman, we argue that "the pictures inside people's heads do not automatically correspond with the world outside" (Lippman, 1954: 31), this kind of social representations acting as reference points in contemporary societies. At the same time, there is a permanent confusion between *nationality* and *citizenship*, which people tend to approach from the national identity point of view. The same difference of perception is in Europe's sight while European officials speak about an emerging European public sphere: "It is suggested that inasmuch as a media-sustained, supranational communicative space is presently emerging because of European Union integration, this is class inflected and has become predominantly the domain of political and economic elites and not that of a wider European public" (Schlesinger, 1999: 264). Starting from this approach, Philip Schlesinger identifies three fundamental dimensions of the European publics: "If we think beyond elites to a putative network that knits together a range of

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[1] For instance, an entire symbolic discursive universe of difference invades the information about Turkey's accession to the EU that we often developed in various studies, the concept of the *Other* practically being an obsessive omnipresence in the European media and political discourses, referring to this strange alien as an outsider of Europe (*the Other of Europe*). In this stereotypical category we can include an entire list of concepts pointing out the dubitable and even skeptical perspective of all actors of that discursive scene: dysfunctions, difficulties, late, turning points, democracy, totalitarianism, women, veil, liberty, Islam, sense of Europe, identity, culture, population, territory, European apartness, mistakes, domination, empire etc. The most quoted attribute defining Turkey is also "*non European*".

European publics, typically these would be composed of *transnational citizens* who have *a.* an equal and widespread level of communicative competence, *b.* relatively easy access to the full range of the means of communication, and, *c.* a generalized communicative competence that embodies sufficient background knowledge, interest, and interpretative skills to make sense of the EU and its policy options and debates" (Schlesinger, 1999: 274). The above are all challenges that Europe currently needs to address and Schlesinger study gives us a good starting point.

Thus, this study will focalize on Eurobarometer Standard and Special Reports according to the *White Paper on a European Communication Policy*, launched in 2006, being known that, in the last five years all the official initiatives of the EU were reserved to revitalize cultural and social approaches on identity matters.

2. CITIZENSHIP AND IDENTITY ACROSS EUROPE

According to the Eurobarometer's surveys, the three most quoted values that European citizens accept are peace, the Euro currency and the unique marketplace. For Europeans, peace is the fundamental human value and the other two are key elements for economically defining the European Union.

Our preliminary remark is that European official discourse tries to overcome the social and psychological divisions that Europeans show when it comes to citizenship and identity. EU requires a cultural approach for a sustainable construction, considering that the European citizenship is the result of a political decision introduced by the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. While citizenship is the political dimension of identity, nationality is defining the cultural approach of identity.

The economic crisis has changed the terms of the European debate, considering that the negative perspectives reinforced by the rejection of a European Constitution, for instance, points out to the permanent division of public opinion in Europe, separated between an economic perspective that could be considered comfortable, and the uncomfortable cultural identity perspective, especially due to the accepted incapacity of defining its limits. In this context, "the condition for success is a real ownership by European leaders and institutions. Our new agenda requires a coordinated European response, including *with* social partners and civil society. If we act together, then we can fight back and come out of the crisis stronger. We have the new tools and the new ambition. Now we need to make it happen"[2].

In order to explore the challenges linked to an emerging European public sphere[3], we have chosen to emphasize several graphs that will illustrate the actual
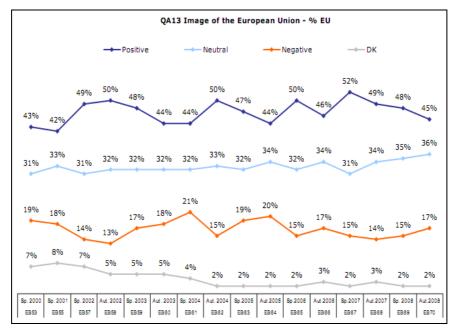
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[2] Barroso, J. M., *Preface* to the *Strategy Europe 2020*, March 2010.

[3] In J. Habermas perspective, "By «the public sphere» we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. They then behave neither like business or professional people transacting private affairs, nor like members of a constitutional order subject to the legal constraints of a state bureaucracy. Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an

social representations of public opinion in Europe on some important issues such as the image of the EU, the European cultural identity and the active European citizenship.

2.1. IMAGE OF THE EU

The following graph illustrates the evolution of positive, negative and neutral dimensions of the public image of the EU between 2000 and 2008, according to sixteen Eurobarometer reports during this period, with respect to a methodologically reiterated question of all those surveys: *QA13: In general, does the European Union conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image?*

Source: Standard Eurobarometru 70 (December 2008), p. 47.
http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70_first_en.pdf

On this issue, some observations are relevant:
a. The total number of Don't Know answers registers a significant 5% decrease in Spring 2004 Report up against Spring 2000 Eurobarometer Report, and sets up to an average of 2% with insignificant variations between 2004 and 2008.

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unrestricted fashion – that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions-about matters of general interest. In a large public body this kind of communication requires specific means for transmitting information and influencing those who receive it." In Habermas, Lennox, Lennox, 1974: p. 49.

This can denote that the European public opinion does not ignore this issue, especially as from 2004.
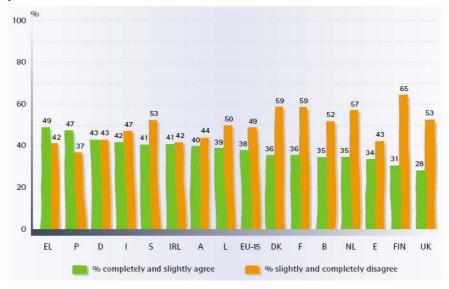
b. In general, the negative image of the EU remains representative for less that 20% of European citizens, except from two important gaps: 21% in Spring 2004 Report – the moment of the most significant enlargement wave with ten new member states –, and 20% in Autumn 2005 – while the European public sphere was dominated by divergent debates on the Treaty for a European Constitution. However, the negative perception remains statistically significant, registering, at the same time, an increasing trend with the economic crisis.

c. The neutral perspective is chosen by 36% of European citizens in autumn 2008, against an average of 32% in the mentioned period. This is an important issue that confirms the fact that lots of European citizens still decline their competences to EU matters.

d. Finally, the positive image of the EU registers a top of 52% in Spring 2007 (while the EU had already twelve new Member States, generally positive to this supra-national structure), the decreasing trend being obvious starting with this period with a gap of 45% in Autumn 2008.

2.2. NATIONAL VS. EUROPEAN IDENTITY

The first research studies on this issue were focalized on the geographical and psychological attachment that European citizens prove about Europe. According to a synthesis report published in 2001, the most interesting differences of perception on the European level referred to a potential European identity shared by all the European citizens:

Source: Eurobarometer 52.0 – Fieldwork: October–November 1999.   Percentage 'don't know' not shown.

As we can see, this graphical representation is revealing: in the vast majority of the fifteen countries that the research report included, the general trend is rather to consider that there is not a cultural identity shared by the European citizens, only two countries presenting favorable answers on this matter. Starting from January 2007, twelve other Member States added their different individual and collective perceptions and attitudes on European identity.

2.3. PERCEPTIONS ON EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP

In 2001, the Eurobarometer published a promotion brochure[4] dedicated to European citizens to present the perceptions on themselves, which was an overview on how Europeans share common values, beliefs and ideals within a common framework: the European Union. The data was taken from various reports and studies done over time by the Eurobarometer unit, and the analysis allows us to gradually approach this studies purpose – to identify the breaking levels and layers that have set the foundation of communication between the EU and its citizens. The concept of European citizenship, which is still a central focus point of the larger European debate, brought by various political decisions and European treaties, will require, as we have seen in recent years, a campaign which will promote the national values within the European diversity framework.

The brochure cited above paved the way for sociological expectations in the new European context (2001: 15 members, 13 candidate countries, 10 of which were to be integrated in 2004 under the biggest wave of enlargement Europe and two in 2007): "One of the main objectives of the European Union is European citizenship. The concept was first introduced by the Maastricht Treaty which states: 'Every person holding the nationality of a Member State shall be a citizen of the Union'. The 1997 Amsterdam Treaty clarifies the link between European and national citizenship. It states unequivocally that 'citizenship of the Union shall complement and not replace national citizenship'. Furthermore, the Amsterdam Treaty gives every citizen of the Union the right to write to any of the EU institutions in one of the 11 languages of the Treaties and receive an answer in the same language" (9).

The first study devoted to the "sensitive" issue of European citizenship was led by Special Eurobarometer in the spring of 2006. The first contextual indicators considered in this study were: the satisfaction felt by Europeans on their personal and professional life in the country where they live, their difficulties, European citizenship and the level of interest in national and European policy. The second part of the report focused on Europe's image, while the third part focused on the "Future of Europe" (based on expectations of Europeans), European citizenship, attitudes towards globalization and European enlargement. The study showed a

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[4] *How Europeans see themselves. Looking through the mirror with public opinion surveys*, 2001.

"happy Europe", with people having a happy family life and being pleased by their profession. Individuals were satisfied where they lived, bought national residents and immigrants. Most difficulties were seen mainly in the economic sphere as, for example, an average of 37% of EU citizens recognizes that they have difficulties to pay their bills at the end of the month (with a peak in Portugal of 61%, compared to 12% in Sweden).

Three indicators were used for emphasizing European citizenship, as shown in the table below:

	« In the last 12 months… »		
	Has visited another European Union country	Has read a book, newspaper or magazine in a language other than the mother tongue	Has socialised with people from another European Union country
UE25	**37%**	**23%**	**43%**

15 to 24 years old	38%	41%	50%
Finished education at the age of 20 or over	53%	39%	60%
Manager / Director	61%	40%	68%
Inhabitant of a big town	39%	28%	49%
Regular Internet user	54%	38%	47%

Source: *Special Eurobarometer 251* (Mai 2006), p. 12.
http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_251_en.pdf

The results speak for themselves: participation in "European activities", from these general indicators defining European citizenship, is still minor. In addition, 52% of Europeans surveyed are not interested in European business issues, and the percentage is much higher for women than for men. We can see the same reaction among young people and those who have left school early or for vulnerable social groups.

3. UNITED IN DIVERSITY: A MATTER OF RECOGNITION

European integration policies raise specific topics related to identity. Even if not everyone is aware of it, European citizenship has become a "social fact" since the Maastricht Treaty. The fact that European identity is not based on consensus is probably sufficient to question its existence. We find it difficult to explain that although desired by many and implied by the European Union, European identity slips away just when it should emerge. The normative concept of *unity in diversity*

aims to the common identity to be built without sacrificing the inherited identities of national states and traditional communities. The strategies of European integration face the claims imposed by individual rights and freedoms of European citizens, but also with identity claims.

Charles Taylor argues that the non-recognition of identity is as oppressive as the non-recognition of human rights. "Non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm; can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being" (Taylor, 1992: 25).

The notion of recognition is essential as far as identity is concerned, both at the personal and collective levels. "Be it the constitution of one's own identity through the experience of self-recognition in the mirror or the recognition of the other through the experience of communication, the process of recognition is the foundation for the symbolic dimension of identity" (Lamizet, 2002: 20). This need always existed, but it has become more acute with the emergence of modernity, because identity, which is not based on hierarchical position, relies even more on the recognition of others. Identity and recognition are different (e.g., not-recognized identities), but linked. Identity appears first, followed by the question of its recognition, but that recognition is part of the definition of that identity, since it 'materializes' this identity. So, recognition completes identity. There is a natural correlation: identity becomes complete through recognition. That is why Taylor defines it as the "condition for a successful identity".

Recognition of the other implies that he is different and that similarities stem first from the fact that everyone is different. So recognition is not eliminating the difference and assimilating the other with the same, but it is rather an accepted otherness. According to this perspective, equality of rights does not mean reduction of the other to the same. On the contrary, it includes the right to be different. The equal remains different, which means that equality is different from sameness. Universality is not what remains once differences have been removed (because, in this case, there is nothing left), but it is something that feeds on differences and particularities. Since human nature always appears under multiple modalities, human identity is never one, but it is always differentiated.

In the general context of fading points of reference, the nation-state is no longer successful in integrating groups, nor in recreating social ties. It no longer provides members of society with a feeling of unity, with a purpose in life or death i.e., a reason to sacrifice one's personal interest, or even one's life to a reality or a notion greater than one's own individuality. It appears to be an abstract, bureaucratic structure, removed from real life. This evolution encourages all kinds of particular affirmations. The need for identity tends to become stronger (and more disjunctive than in the past) since it has become obvious that the nation-states have failed in their roles of producers and providers of identity. National identities are disintegrating in favor of other forms of identity. The more "national identity" is weakening, the more societies look for alternative communities providing identity.

Above all, identity has become a political problem. Since the goal of recognition is to be recognized by all, the public sphere alone is able to provide the right environment. Identity then combines all actions and practices, which allow political recognition in the public place. That is why the protection of those identities (cultural, linguistic, religious, sexual etc.), plays such an important role in current social and political conflicts.

The goal of this demand for recognition is to escape from a situation where differences are relegated to the private sphere, where therefore, it inevitably becomes dominated by public power. It expresses the desire to inscribe into the space of communication and sociability an identity, which has hitherto been denied the capabilities and powers of a political entity. "Identity only has relevance and, respectively, institutional credibility, if it gains recognition and accreditation in the public space: its institutional value comes from the authority of a signifier" (Lamizet, 2002: 58). So, the definition of public space as a space of *in distinction* is unequivocally being challenged by requests for identity. Such demands suggest replacing a "neutral" public space, which does not recognize specific relations, by a new public space, which would be structured by them. At the same time, such demands show egalitarianism to be hostile to differences as it renders a standardizing vision of the world, which in turn is nothing else but a cultural principle disguised as a universal principle. Requests for identity no longer contend with a moral and political universalism, which has too often been the forefront for undisclosed practices of domination. We should incorporate a true policy of recognition of the differences into the organization of society, because this recognition represents the foundation of social ties. The path to social justice leads not only through redistribution, but also through recognition (Honneth, 2002: 43–55). It calls for a policy of recognition from the authorities (*Cf.* Gutman 1992; Taylor 1994; Honneth 1995).

In contemporary societies, identity claims are often treated as a reactionary phenomenon, as an irrational desire to return to the past, a return to a step that was considered definitely exceeded. The presence of identity groups is problematic in the context of contemporary liberal democracies. The recognition requested by these groups appears in popular opinion as a threat to the public order and to the freedom of individuals. It is accepted as a normal situation that man adheres to forms of community life without sacrificing his freedom. For this reason, the identity groups and inherited identities are discredited while the interest groups and chosen identities are recognized as legitimate. The hostility to the traditions and identity of belonging also stems from the fact that the founding values of these are not negotiable, while the interest is. Identity groups should not be confused with interest groups. An interest group can be functional even if there is not a mutual identification among its members. For an individual point of view, a group of interest must share the same interest as fundamental instrument with other groups' members. Identity groups can also defend the interests of their members, but this

activity is not the purpose of the group and is not a necessary consequence of its existence. In this case, the interest is not the founder, but only a derivative of the group's existence. Amy Gutman summarizes the difference between these two groups as follows: "a paradigmatic perspective, the politics of identity groups is linked to an idea of what people is, while politics of interest groups is linked with the idea of what people want" (Gutman, 2003: 15).

The European identity to be built is more like identity interest groups, but we must not forget that what binds man is now a common future, not only a common past. It seems that the unity in diversity ideal that should characterize the European identity to be built will be realized by the market economic mechanisms rather than by the loyalty to local cultural traditions.

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