
Editorial: The European citizenship and *collective* identity after the outbreak of the Eurozone financial crisis

Christina M. Akrivopoulou

Department of Political Sciences,
Democritus University of Thrace,
7th klm Komotene-Xanthi, PC 69100, Greece
and
Department of Businesses and Organizations,
Hellenic Open University,
Aristotelous 18, PC 263 35, Patra, Greece
E-mail: christina@eap.gr

Biographical notes: Christina Akrivopoulou holds a PhD and two postdoctoral titles in Constitutional Law, Philosophy and Methodology of Law and Comparative Law. She is currently lecturing at Democritus University of Thrace, Hellenic Open University and Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. She has among others edited, *Personal Data Privacy and Protection in a Surveillance Era: Technologies and Practices* (IGI: 2011), *Human Rights and Risks in the Digital Era: Globalization and the Effects of Information Technologies* (IGI: 2012) and *Digital Democracy and the Impact of Technology on Governance and Politics: New Globalized Practices* (IGI: 2013). Her main research interests concern the protection of human and constitutional rights, the protection of the right to privacy, data protection, the private-public distinction and citizenship.

In its historic evolution, modern citizenship was composed of three distinct elements:

- a a *legal* element regarding the recognition of a set of rights enjoyed only by the citizens
- b a *political* element which reflected the obligation of all polity members to participate actively in the process of self-government, thus seeking to promote the common good
- c an *identity* element.

The latter refers to all the historic and social bonds necessary for a political community in order not only to acquire a certain consistency and stability but also in the long run to develop a specific solidarity between its members and therefore to enhance the realisation of the other elements of citizenship.

The current and ongoing debate on European citizenship is inevitably linked with the question of the emergence of a European collective identity. In the relevant academic and political debate there are two understandings of citizenship, the first supporting a *thick* and the second a *thin* citizenship. According to the first one who is supported by the theorists of civic *nationalism*, European citizenship should adapt the social characteristics of the identities in the same way that they appeared in the national states. In this frame, a

European citizenship should incorporate historic, prepolitical elements of cultural homogeneity that could provide the European citizens with a sense of identification to the European institutions and solidarity for their fellow citizens. According to the second, supported by the theorists of *constitutional patriotism*, democratic identity is not primarily social but political and legal. It consists of those elements that guarantee a collective commitment to the principles of equal autonomy as the epicenter of any liberal Rechtsstaat.

Since, in our view, in Europe only the adoption of a thin citizenship is feasible as well as desirable, we should clarify that the notion of identity among the supporters of constitutional patriotism is not socially empty as many of their critics claim. The devotion to the abstract values of democracy cannot of course by itself tie a citizen to a certain polity. For the creation of such a bond, symbols, collective memory and historical narratives are required, thus identity elements that can create an emotional effect and thus shape the subjects attitudes towards a polity. However, constitutional patriotism justly claims that those prepolitic elements are not given or static. The subjects themselves, who undertake the task to review their historic past and to intervene on the existing cultural norms, altering them always in the light of the fundamental democratic values, forge them in the frame of a reflexive, communicative process. In this sense, the meaning of identity according to the supporters of constitutional patriotism is pluralistic and historically open to constant redefinition. An identity that ultimately remains permanently under construction and in the epicenter of the dialogue fostered in the democratic public sphere.

The vision of European integration expressed initially the political and economic elites of Europe effort to create via the economic cooperation a community of peaceful coexistence among the peoples of Europe. The idea was based directly on the historic memory of the disastrous consequences of the 20th century bloody conflicts. Not accidentally, the Treaty of Coal and Steel underlines that the six leading member states «... resolved to substitute for historic rivalries a fusion of their essential interests; to establish, by creating an economic community, the foundation of a broad and independent community among peoples long divided by bloody conflicts». The European project reflects one of the most deeply rooted beliefs of the liberal vision of international relations, which from Adam Smith until Rawls argues that international trade guarantees peace among nations. According to this line of thought, in the Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950, the close economic cooperation would make the war between the peoples of Europe «not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible».

During the first phase of the European integration process, the creation of a European identity was neither a plan nor a priority. The integration project evolved in the light of a genuine liberal perception and remained oriented, while limited, solely in the economic and political field. There was no question of involving any social elements in this process.

The notion of a European identity is mentioned for the first time in the ‘Declaration of Copenhagen for the European identity’ of 1973, when, during the oil crisis, the nine member states realised the weaknesses of the European community political mechanism. The declaration refers to an identity that “will enable [the members] to achieve a better definition of the relations with other countries and of their responsibilities and the place which they occupy in world affairs”.

The creation of the European Union (EU) brought forward the issue of a European collective identity. Since the Maastricht Treaty and thereafter, the transfer of a vast range

of competences from the member states to the EU institutions a range of powers could not any longer be justified in the frame of the liberal paradigm. The idea of a collective European citizenship is appearing along with an augmenting interest for the common European cultural heritage and convergence at the level of common values. In the Maastricht Treaty emphasis is given in designing the development of a common European culture on the basis of its clear demarcation from the national cultures diversity. This later became known as 'Unity in Diversity'. This emphasis cannot be considered as accidental given the EU plans for an enlargement towards the Eastern Europe at that point. Thus, according to Art. 128 of the Maastricht Treaty, "The community shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the member states, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore".

The policies of culture and education already adapted during the '80s provided the ground on which the element of common European heritage was even further high lightened. In this frame, common symbols were sought and even the adaption of a second language as an EU official language has been discussed. However, after the Maastricht Treaty, the EU took a more new liberal turn. It was therefore extremely logic that the financial institutions of the EU undertook the task of the creation of a common European identity. No other EU project has invested more to the forging of a European socio-political identity than that that the monetary union.

In the words of Wim Duisenberg, "the euro is much more than just a currency: it is a symbol of European integration in every sense of the word". Even more explicit – than those of the technocrats – where the arguments employed by the political leadership of the EU integration project. The EU Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs Yves de Silguy, considered called the single currency as 'the most important event since the Second World War' and predicted that it would foster growth and a 'real culture of stability'. Even clearer was the statement of Commission President Jacques Santer who wrote: "The euro is also a powerful factor in forging a European identity. Countries, which share a common currency, are countries ready to unite their destinies as part of an integrated community. The Euro will bring citizens closer together, and will provide a physical manifestation of the growing rapprochement between European citizens which has been taking place for the past forty year or more".

It is worth pointing out, that this conception constitutes a reversal of the conventional theoretical understanding of western money. Theorist from both the socialist and the liberal tradition, like Marx, Weber and Simmel conceptualised money as an amoral, detached from the social body mechanism, that tends to transform everything, persons, objects and activities into accountable and exchangeable commodities. In this light, the establishment of modern monetary system is pernicious for all kinds of community, based on solidarity between the social subjects.

To the contrary, monetary unification was perceived in its social, symbolic and psychological dimension as a force of social cohesion. Just as the legal category European citizenship was invented as a 'technology' for the concretisation of the idea of 'Europe's people', in the same vein, the euro was employed as technology of citizenship. Euro was considered to be an instrument for shaping the political subjects of Europe, an instrument for manufacturing citizens.

Until 2009, the new currency was considered a successful experiment. For several years, the volume of trade was increased in the Eurozone, with inflation remaining below

2%, in line with the objectives of European Central Bank and the raise of the gross domestic product reached a high level. Given the optimism that prevailed, any expressed fears, that the single monetary policy of the type 'one-size-fits-all' will favour the already developed economies, were disregarded.

These facts have had a substantial impact on the attitude of Europeans towards the EU. Social support for the Euro was widespread, while the consensus on the process of European unification reached its historic high. However, the issue of support should be differentiated from that of European identity. Even in the period of increased support, only one out of ten citizens placed their self-definition as a European in a higher or the same rank with their national identity. While more than four out of ten did not seem to have some direct socio-political attachment with Europe.

In as much as it was advanced through fiscal and market processes, the European identity demonstrated elitist features. As the integration process was moving on in particular economic, social and political fields, it was expected to cause daily interaction between people, with tangible impact upon their everyday life and identities. The opportunities, however, for such transnational contacts are not equally divided among the populations of countries. The better educated, the linguists and those working in specific sectors of the economy, the state or the educational system, are not just the main beneficiaries of the transnational market, they are also the ones, who can have the daily experience of interconnectivity.

The crisis of 2009 seems to have intercepted even this slow and partial progress of the project of European citizenship. Already in the autumn of 2012, polls showed a dramatic drop in the support and trust for the Union. With the rise of new forms of nationalism, euroscepticism turns out to be interwoven with traditional ideologies. Stereotypes among Europeans do not only survive, they are reinforced, revealing new types of cleavages between North and South.

The political rhetoric, proclaiming the Euro as symbol of a transnational social unity proved rather superficial. Since the eruption of the crisis, the political and scientific debate on monetary policy was dominated by technical and economic calculations, as if the currency is a simple commodity, a mere unit for the exchange of values, whose symbolic elements have little value for 'reality', which in fact refers only to the banking system and financial governance. Moreover, the response to the crisis showed that the neo-Keynesian rhetoric used to promote the euro as a vision full employment, growth and security was practically replaced by a neoliberal conception, whose ideal is the institutional dominance of a European Central Bank, with the competence to guarantee controlled inflation and price stability, in the gradual transition to a single open market. Whereas the project of creating a European collective identity has been driven in complete stagnation during the last years, European political elites press for further political integration, particularly in the area of fiscal and budgetary policy. Such demands tend to neglect the question of democratic legitimation in regard to the unification project.

In our view, the crisis has made visible the limitations of all attempts to build a European identity that might be based exclusively on top-down processes, initiated by the formal institutions and the elites. It is also revealing for the limited value of the slogan 'Unity in diversity'. The structural divisions between Europeans are not cultural in their substance. They are ideological, political and socioeconomic. The formation of a common identity, cannot be viewed as a search for a common European culture, the Christian religion for instance, as some seem to believe. Far more important, is to trace in

the heart of our European past patterns and symbols filled with normative content, such as the cosmopolitanism of the enlightenment and social solidarity, which inspired the early 20th century labour movement and the gradual construction of the welfare state.

In the end, it should be noted that the collective historical memory of the world wars is inadequate, not only because it is fading, but also because the effort to prevent a new war in the continent does not provide a vision that moves beyond mere economic cooperation between member states. The crisis can be utilised in the building of a present, collective experience, of the destructive effects of unregulated markets on social cohesion and democratic self-government. In this respect, the people of the South are burdened with the duty to bring to the fore such an experience, since they are the first to encounter those catastrophic consequences.