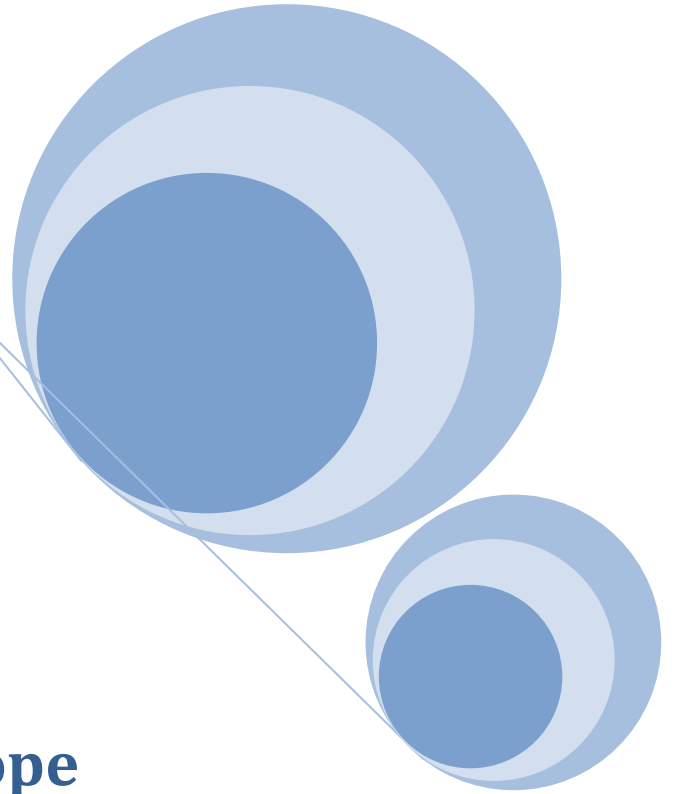


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## Youth and Europe

A comparative perspective of the perception of students from Romania and Turkey on the European identity

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## ABSTRACT

**Keywords:** *identity, European identity, civic European identity, cultural European identity, European Area of Higher Education, Romanian students, Turkish students,*

The organization, now existing at European level, has far exceeded its original design, extending into areas such as environmental protection, research and innovation, employment, climate change etc. Confronted with a fragile support from its citizens, with the difficulty of national political leaders to reach a consensus on the future of this organization and with a single currency threatened by instability, the European Union has revealed its vulnerable side and had to be reformed.

The emotional detachment of individuals from the European project was not considered a significant problem in the past, as long as the so-called "permissive consensus"<sup>1</sup> has given national and European political elites the opportunity to develop the European Community. Today, however, European space has expanded considerably, and the process of integration has reached a level where the unification's progress is likely to remain at the European public's mood. There can be mentioned, in this regard the EU projects rejected by the population's vote: the Maastricht Treaty in Denmark (1992), Norway's EU accession (1972.1994),

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<sup>1</sup> Leon N. Lindberg, Stuart A Scheingold (1970) - *Europe's Would-Be Polity: Patterns of Change in the European Community* apud. Victoria Kaina, Ireneusz Karolewski (2009) – „EU Governance and European Identity” in *Living Reviews in European Governance*, vol. 4, nr.2, p.6, available at [www.livingreviews.org](http://www.livingreviews.org), date of access 08.06.2010.

the Nice Treaty in Ireland (2001), the introduction of euro in Sweden (2003), the European Constitutional Treaty in France and the Netherlands (2005), and the Lisbon Treaty in Ireland (2008)<sup>2</sup>.

The development of a European consciousness has thus become a topic of primary importance on the EU agenda. In this way it can be broadly explained the increasing interest of the officials from the central level of the Union for a European identity, built as a "top-down"<sup>3</sup> mechanism which implies that the Europeans will become receptors of this collective identity, through the policies concretized by their national and European leaders.

At the academic level the concern for defining and capturing the essence of the European identity concept is translated through the publication of several papers on this topic, covering a wide range of areas of social sciences and humanities. Nevertheless the above-mentioned concept continues to be a challenge for researchers, especially from a methodological perspective, considering the fact that due to its multidisciplinary usage the term has lost its analytical precision.

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<sup>2</sup> Victoria Kaina, Ireneusz Karolewski (2009) – „EU Governance and European Identity” in *Living Reviews in European Governance*, vol. 4, nr.2, p.3, available at [www.livingreviews.org](http://www.livingreviews.org), date of consultation 08.06.2010.

<sup>3</sup> Florian Pichler et al. (2012) - *Have Surveys Really Lost in Research on European Identity*, p.3, paper presented at the *workshop European Identity in Times of Crisis*, organized by the European University Institute, Florence, 06/2012, available at <http://www.imaging.eu/workshop/papers.html>, date of consultation 12.08.2012.

The typology of research on this subject is as varied as the meanings of the term they are studying, but over time there have been three main directions in this regard:

1. factorial analysis of the process of forming a sense of community among the population;
2. investigation socio-psychological dimension of the availability of individuals to be considered members of the European Community;
3. examining the correlation between the position of European citizens towards the integration and their degree of identification with the European Union and Europe.

Following the third line of study, the research that we propose starts from the theory of social constructivism, which constitutes the framework for the theoretical analysis of the concept of European identity. This school of thought considers identity as a significant component of international relations. From this perspective, ideational or normative structures are as important as the material ones, so the supporters of this paradigm argue that shared ideas, beliefs and values have structural characteristics and can exert a strong influence on social and political activities both nationally and internationally. In this way the EU institutional rules affect the identities of the Member States and their citizens.

Based on these principles, we tried to frame European identity in the context of the relations between the European Organization and Member States, especially between the first and citizens of the European space. The younger generation was

targeted because she does not keep alive the memory of the two World Wars and she builds her image of European Union on social and economic considerations.

### **Research objectives:**

According to the theory formulated by Henry Tajfel, in the formation of a personality, individual identity plays an important role only alongside social identity. Social identity is defined by the author as "part of an individual's self-concept which derives from the awareness of his status as a member of a social group together with the value and emotional significance that he gives to this status"<sup>4</sup>.

Starting with this definition and studying data from previous research, we considered that analysing the conception that Romanian and Turkish students have about what it means to be European can contribute, on one hand, to emphasize the effects of European policies directed towards them and, on the other hand, to shape the similarities, but also the differences that exist between the images that young people from the two countries have on the European Community.

The option to select graduate young people relates to the fact that they are the target group of many programs undertaken at European level, but also to the results of the Eurobarometer from the last years, that indicate a certain consistency of the degree of this age category`attachment towards the institutions and values of the organization European. Unlike the older population of the

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<sup>4</sup> Henri Tajfel (1981) - *Human Groups and Intergroup Relations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 225.

Member States, which still perceive the European organization through its original purpose, that of maintaining peace on the continent, young people have detached themselves from this view and relate to the European Union and Europe as a whole.

Choosing Romania and Turkey as the environments for the comparative study is supported by the fact that both countries, Turkey as well as Romania, have a special history regarding their relations with the European Union. Both countries have built their process of developing looking towards the West, especially Europe, and if in 2005, when Turkey began negotiating regarding the integration in to the European organization, and Romania signed the Accession Treaty to the European Union, were among the states with the highest level of optimism over the European project, today the support of their population has decreased, more visibly in Turkey, where the government has moderated, in recent years, its pro-European enthusiasm.

But Turkey, alongside Romania, is are also among the targeted states in implementing European programs in education. The Turkish Republic signed the Bologna Declaration in 2001, and although not yet a member of the European Union, it makes efforts, like all the signatory states, to achieve the standards of the European system of higher education. In this regard the Council of Higher Education, the institution responsible for the implementation of the Bologna Process in Turkey, oversaw all reforms in this direction, so that the Turkish system of higher education comprises today three cycles of study: undergraduate, master and doctoral, emphasizing on student mobility, lifelong learning and on starting and improving procedures of credit transfer.



And in Romania, which is among the 29 countries that signed the Bologna Declaration on June 19, 1999, universities were integrated into the European educational project, which increased the mobility of students and teachers, the aim being the establishment of continuing education and professional horizons opening for the beneficiaries. Thus the choice of these two areas of study, Romania and Turkey, is related to two main aspects:

1. high level of support for the European project, shown by the young people in the two countries, compared to the average of the European states, according to the Eurobarometer conducted in 2010<sup>5</sup>;
2. large number of young people from both countries, who benefit of European educational exchange programs, that put Romania and Turkey among states in eastern and south-eastern Europe, with most students learning on another European university center<sup>6</sup>.

The question of starting of this research is: *To what extent and under what conditions Romanian and Turkish students feel European? Can we speak of common elements of perception with*

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<sup>5</sup> Comisia Europeană (2010) – *Eurobarometer 74 Public Opinion in European Union*, Brussels, European Commission DG Press and Communication, p.9, available at [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb\\_arch\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_arch_en.htm), date of consultation 12.02.2011.

<sup>6</sup> Comisia Europeană (2010) – *Erasmus – Facts, Figures and Trends. The European Union Support for Student and Staff Exchanges and University Cooperation in 2009-10*, p. 21, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, p.23, available at [http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus/doc/stat/erasmus1112\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus/doc/stat/erasmus1112_en.pdf), date of consultation 12.03. 2013.

*higher education in Romania and Turkey on the European identity?*

Thus the main objective of this paper is to highlight the vectors that can lead to activation of this type of identity, and the elements that have certain constancy in the picture revealed by the interviewees, when talking about the European Community and about the idea of belonging to it.

The research was structured on two levels: the first level focuses on comparing the degree of European identification of the young people in Turkey and Romania, with other age groups or categories of study, in order to set off the position of young people in this regard, and the second level includes highlighting, where appropriate, the patterns of perception of European identity, which both Romanian and Turkish students appeal to when they declare themselves Europeans. The second research plan consists of three dimensions, which comply with the elements that compose the concept of European identity, namely:

1. highlighting the degree of knowledge among students of the two countries, regarding on European educational programs and institutions with decision-making power in this respect (cognitive side);
2. interpretation of direct experiences lived in other European countries or with other EU citizens (evaluative side);
3. highlighting the way in which participants in the study relate to European Union and the Europeans community in general (affective side).

Thus questions that we searched for an answer are:

1. Is it different the level of European identification of Romanians young people to that of young people in Turkey? (Q2)
2. Are there differences between the level of European identification of young people aged between 15 and 24 years and the citizens over the age of 55 years? (Q3)
3. Young people with higher education, in both countries, have a level of European identification higher than youth with secondary education? (Q4)
4. Romanian students identify more with the European Union and Europe than the Turkish ones? (Q5)
5. Are there common elements of the perceptions that Romanian and Turkish students have on the European identity? (Q6)

Therefore the quantitative research hypotheses are:

1. *Young people, aged 15-24 years in the two countries, identify more with the European Union and Europe than people aged over 55 years.*
2. *Young people with higher education, in the two countries, identify more with the European Union and Europe than those with secondary education.*
3. *The identification degree of educated young people in Romania with European Union and Europe is higher*

*than that of young Turkish people in the same category of study.*

And to give an answer to the question Q6 we built the following hypotheses, verified through data collected in the focus groups held in universities from Iasi and Istanbul:

1. *Participants in both countries perceive the difference between civic and cultural component of European identity.*
2. *There is a similarity between the way Romanian and Turkish students relate to European Union and Europe.*
3. *There is a pattern which young people, from the two studied environments, respect when declaring that they are feeling or not Europeans.*

#### **The approach used:**

In order to grant an adequate answer to these questions, we used a mixed methodology research, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques in order to capture all aspects of the context in which a European consciousness can be formed among young people. This type of methodology is increasingly approved among specialists in social sciences, because it has the merit of being able to combine the statistical precision of quantitative methods with the depth of the qualitative techniques.

Thus, to give an answer to the question Q2, we analyzed data from the Eurobarometers conducted between 2005 and 2012 to establish the position of young people, in both countries, on civic and cultural structure of their European identification,

classification made by Michael Bruter<sup>7</sup>. In this regard, we chose from the questions included in the Eurobarometers surveys, those which refer to the confidence of the respondents, aged between 15 and 24 years, on European institutions, the image (positive or negative) that they have about EU, on their perception of the benefits that entails membership of the European Union for their country and their degree of attachment to Europe. The next step consisted of an analysis of statistical data, obtained in these types of surveys, in order to interpret the way young people of the two countries relate to the institutions, policies and values in Europe. In this way we were able to extract the items, needed to create questions for the interview guide, required for the next stage of research.

The qualitative approach to the topic being studied was used to distinguish items that have a certain consistency in participants' statements on the European project, the European space and the community of Europeans, as a whole. Participants to these grouped interviews were selected according to faculty profile and by the years of study. Through this procedure we aimed at highlighting the different perspectives that interviewed students have on the European identity, their openness to European values and their ability to engage in social and political life of Europe.

### **The thesis structure:**

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Bruter (2005) – *op.cit.*, p. 103.

This paper is divided into five chapters, including: conceptual analysis of European identity, the theoretical framework of the concept` formation, the role of European System of Higher Education in promoting European awareness, considered an important instrument of identity politics at Community level, and comparing the perception that young people, especially those with higher education, the main beneficiaries of European educational programs, have on the European Union and the idea of being European, last chapter being devoted to conclusions and future research directions.

In the first chapter it is carried out an analysis of the concepts that substantiates this research. Therefore the first step is to outline the terms "identity" and "collective identity", to emphasize their epistemological development, to create the necessary framework for the analysis of the of European identity concept, widely used lately, but very difficult to define, due to the multitude of meanings and attitudes that it encompasses. This difficulty of structuring the European identity is reflected on the report, which should be established between it and national identity in general public conception. Preoccupation with the nature of this relationship has led to a split into two groups of researchers in the field of European studies. So there are those, like Iver B. Neumann<sup>8</sup> and Gerard Delanty<sup>9</sup>, who argue that an emphasis on culture or common symbols may lead to a conflict

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<sup>8</sup> Iver B. Neumann (2006) – „European Identity and Its Changing Others” în revista Norwegian Institute of *International Affairs Working Paper*, nr. 710, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Gerard Delanty (2002) - „Models of European Identity: Reconciling Universalism and Particularism” în revista *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, vol. 3, nr. 3, p. 350.

relation between the two types of identities and those, such as Michael Bruter<sup>10</sup> and Greciuhin Violeta<sup>11</sup>, who believe that the European identity is complementary to the national one, through the amplification of interaction space between European citizens and the promotion of tolerance and plurality of values.

The second chapter is devoted to outlining the theoretical framework of the formation and the study of European identity. Thus there are highlighted the assumptions from which debate on this topic is beginning, namely those set off by social constructivism, one of the most appropriate theoretical perspectives, which may capture both the supranational level of political actions directed towards the formation of such an identity, as well as the plan of individual conceptions and ideas underlying common European consciousness. In this respect the structure and influence of the European system of higher education on promoting and shaping a European identity is especially important as proved to be one of the main institutional instruments with significant results in this direction.

Thus the third part of the paper focuses on the description of the system of higher education in Europe. The transformation of simple provisions on cooperation between Member States in the field of vocational training stipulated in the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community, adopted in 1957, into a European educational policy with a complex

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<sup>10</sup> Violeta Greciuhin (2005) – „Euro-identitatea: integrare sau asimilare” în Gabriela Pascariu (ed) - *Modelul european în dezvoltarea României*, Iași, Editura SedCom Libris, p.220.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Bruter (2005) - *Citizens of Europe? The Emergence of a Mass European Identity*, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 115.

structure, was the result of efforts at EU and national level and led to the creation of collaboration between governmental and non governmental institutions.

The importance of initiating programs in this area is proven by increasing their annual beneficiaries, but their effects fail to appear on the high level of youth unemployment. This issue continues to occupy a central place on the political agenda of the European institutions and has major influences on the younger generation tendency to feel part of the community citizens.

The fourth chapter presents the applied research, which is divided into two levels, using the advantage of a mixed-methodological approach. The first phase of the study includes data processing collected through Eurobarometer surveys, conducted at the initiative of the European Commission, in the interval 2005-2012, these seven years are the ones who can show attitudinal changes in the population of the two countries, Turkey and Romania, on the European project and to Europe as a whole. The main objective of this procedure was to outline the degree of identification of the higher educated young people with the European Union and Europe, compared to other age groups in the studied countries. The data used were taken from the site of the Leibniz Institute for Social Sciences<sup>12</sup>, where all the Eurobarometers databases are archived, and were processed by applying the Mann-Whitney U test, through which we aim at

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<sup>12</sup> GESIS – *Data archive for the Social Sciences*, Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences, available at <http://zacat.gesis.org/webview/index.jsp?mode=documentation&submode=catalog&catalog=http://zacat.gesis.org/obj/fCatalog/Catalog6>



establishing whether there are statistically significant differences between investigated age, education and nationality groups. The Mann-Whitney U is part of non-parametric methods for the verification of the relationship between two variables and helps to analyze the differences between the medians of the two sets of data<sup>13</sup>.

After processing the data and analyzing the results, we have shown that, in Romania, the respondents' age influences the degree of their European identification, so that young people aged 15-24 have more confidence in the EU and have a positive image of Europe, compared with people aged over 55 years. In Turkey's case these differences are not statistically significant, so they could not be analyzed. The education variable also has an effect on European identification of young Romanians and Turks, but more on those with secondary education than on the respondents in this age group with higher education. And when the comparison is made between higher educated participants within the two countries, the link between nationality variable and other four tested dependent variables is an inversely proportional one, indicating that young Turks tend to identify more with Europe, through the attachment which they declare towards the community of Europeans, than young people in Romania.

To deepen these findings, we organized a series of focus groups in universities from Iasi and Istanbul, in order to highlight the way young people here relate to the European organization and the community of Europeans.

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<sup>13</sup> Gregory W.Corder, Dale I. Foreman (2011) – *Nonparametric Statistics for Non-Statisticians, A Step-by-Step Approach*, New Jersey, John Wiley & Sons Inc., p.57.

Analysis of data collected by organizing these focus groups highlighted a number of factors that influenced the way interviewed young people perceive the European Union and the feeling of belonging to Europe. These factors are: sources of information about the European problem, the collage profile, the experiences lived in other European state and cultural and historical knowledge about Europe. Thus all these determinants have contributed to shaping a positive or negative image of the participants on the European Union and Europe as a whole.

Finally we were able to highlight the existence of three categories of young Romanians and Turks perceptions of European identity: the category of students that emphasized a civic aspect of their European identity, the category of those who indicated a cultural dimension of their European identity and the category of young people who do not consider themselves Europeans. The category of young people, which indicated a predominantly civic aspect of their European identification, is based on the commitment expressed by the respondents to the political structure of Europe, represented by the assembly of the institutions, rights and laws that govern political life of the European community. Thus students who have defined the European Union primarily from an economic perspective are those who have indicated that they wish to practice their profession in another European state, due to financial and social benefits, which this change would give to them.

In the category of European cultural identification there were framed mainly young people who said they were Europeans by the fact that they share European cultural values that belong to the great European family.

The third category encountered in the context of the organized debates in Turkey and Romania, it was that of the students who do not consider themselves Europeans, because they did not experience the benefits of this status, because they display a high level of distrust in the future of the European project and in the political European leaders' ability to provide citizens of the Member States with adequate living standards.

The last chapter is devoted to conclusions and the description of future research directions.

### **Conclusions:**

Far from being complete, the "painting" of European identity perceptions of young people in Romania and Turkey, which we have tried to outline in this paper, has the capacity to incite to reflection. The results of the research, both quantitative and qualitative revealed the effects of European educational programs on interviewed young people. The positive or negative nature of these images is given by the interiorization of the national-European report particularities.

Thus the lack of closeness of the European political representatives towards the younger generation area of interests and the delay in motivating involvement in issues that concern the European Community, create irreversible effects on cohesion and development of the European civil society and implicitly on the foundation of legitimacy of actions taken at the supranational level. The evolution of the European project is closely linked to the development of young Europeans capacity to consciously and consistently assume the status of European citizens.

