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Power, identity, and belonging: A mixed-methods study of the processes shaping perceptions of EU integration in a prospective member state

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Abstract

What is at stake, psychologically, when a nation considers joining a supranational body such as the European Union? This article addresses this question from the perspective of power, identity, and belonging vis-à-vis superordinate groups. Taking a mixed-methods approach, using focus group (N = 67) and survey (N = 1,192) data, we explore the psychosocial dynamics that shape perceptions of European Union (EU) integration in a prospective member state, Serbia. Findings from the qualitative study highlighted the role of power imbalances in triggering concerns of compatibility in the present, and in shaping the expected consequences for national identity continuity in an EU future. The survey functioned to explore these relationships further, enabling the testing of two moderated mediation models. The first showed that perceptions of national powerlessness predicted lower perceptions that Serbia was representative of Europe, and this was associated with weaker identification as European. In the second model, perceptions of the EU as a hierarchy-enhancing union predicted heightened fears of Serbian identity discontinuity in an EU future, which in turn had downstream consequences for support for working toward EU accession. Both indirect pathways were stronger among high national identifiers, yielding insight into when national and supranational identification can work in harmony. This mixed-methods study sheds light on the importance of social psychological processes concerning hierarchy and groups in understanding citizens' attitudes toward prospective large-scale political change.

KEYWORDS

EU integration, identity compatibility, identity continuity, mixed-methods research, power

1 | INTRODUCTION

As the European Union (EU) bids farewell to one of its largest countries, it turns toward ensuring continued enthusiasm for its supranational project among its remaining, and prospective, member states.

Whereas previous drives toward expansion were underpinned by claims regarding the economic benefits open to new member states, contemporary population ambivalence seems to centre on less tangible issues such as belonging, identity, history, and perceived power. Political slogans such as "Take Back Control" (from the official Vote

Leave campaign in the UK) and "Austria First" (from The Freedom Party of Austria) illustrate how perceptions of national undermining, and attempts at restoring declining national sovereignty, have become rhetorical tools for anti-globalist political mobilization.

In this article, we argue that a focus on identification with the group, seen through the lens of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and subsequent models developed from it, becomes an important avenue through which we can understand public attitudes toward EU membership. We focus in particular on how power links to identification processes, examining how power can act as a potential resource for helping nations face the challenges brought on by political change. While most research on attitudes toward the EU as a group has tended to focus on existing member states (e.g., Sindic et al., 2019), we consider it crucial also to explore these dynamics in a prospective member state, where political transformation is ongoing and salient, and where European identity and belonging is particularly precarious.

To begin, we review key social psychological perspectives on identity and power. Keeping in mind the focus on psychosocial dynamics in contexts of political change, we divide the literature review into two sections based on the key identity processes brought to the fore. First, we examine how the question of compatibility in superordinate group contexts is addressed and theorized. Second, we consider the literature on continuity and how threats to continuity have implications for attitudes toward integration. Key insights from both sections are drawn on to inform the design of a mixed-methods study. We use qualitative and quantitative data to examine (a) if, and how, identity concerns emerge in citizens' discussions around political change, and (b) how these identity-related phenomena in turn relate to each other in a quantitative manner. By focusing on a prospective EU member state, the data enable us to consider these processes in a temporal context, looking both at perceptions of compatibility and continuity in the present, and at their perceived enhancement or attenuation in the future.

1.1 | Compatibility: Superordinate group membership and dual identification

The first challenge facing a divided EU is that of staying true to its claim that strong identification with one's nation can exist in tandem with strong identification with the supranational union. This form of dual identification invokes a focus on the social psychology of compatibility between subgroup and superordinate group identities. Two key models that address this challenge are the Common Ingroup Identity Model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) and Ingroup Projection Model (Wenzel, Mummendey, & Waldzus, 2007). Both models are rooted in the work of Turner and colleagues' (1987) self-categorization theory, but rely on different mediating processes in explaining when, and how, superordinate identities become either conflicting or compatible with subgroup identities.

The Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM) draws on the concept of "recategorization" to argue that subgroup boundaries can

be reconsidered and shifted through the introduction of a new, inclusive superordinate group. As part of this process, perceived outgroup members are categorized as members of a new, common ingroup. They are subsequently seen as more similar to oneself, and are therefore more positively perceived than previously. While the creation of a common ingroup means focusing on one (shared) group identity, the CIIM also argues that it is possible for people to have a "dual identity" (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Hopkins, 2011). As Dovidio, Gaertner, and Saguy (2008) explain "[a] dual identity involves the simultaneous activation of original subgroup identities and a common ingroup identity." (p. 301). An emphasis on "dual identity" alleviates the potential distinctiveness threat that can arise from only emphasizing one single identity (e.g., "American"; Crisp, Stone, & Hall, 2006), especially among subgroups who might perceive their distinct characteristics as being unrecognized in the "one-group" representation (Brown & Zagefka, 2011; Hopkins, 2011).

In contrast to the CIIM, the Ingroup Projection Model (IPM) sees subgroups as inherently in tension with one another as part of a larger superordinate group. The IPM draws on the concept of "prototypicality" which defines a prototype as a person within a specific group that best represents, or embodies, the goals, values and norms of the group, and is therefore seen as an "ideal-type" member in a given context (Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1998). The IPM extends this concept to superordinate groups by arguing that subgroups will tend to project their own image onto the "prototype" of the superordinate group, closely aligning their subgroup's values with those seen to be representative of the superordinate category (Wenzel et al., 2007). Rather than considering superordinate identification as an outcome, the IPM tends to see superordinate identification as a factor that affects prototypicality, which in turn enables the achievement of identity compatibility. Because of this, unlike the CIIM, the IPM theorizes more explicitly the potential tensions that different subgroups face when trying to achieve compatibility with a superordinate group, in which claims regarding superordinate group prototypicality are key.

What factors determine superordinate group prototypicality? The IPM emphasizes that ingroup projection is affected by reality constraints such as historical intergroup relations, status, and power which can lead to one group being regarded as more prototypical than another (Alexandre, Waldzus, & Wenzel, 2016; Waldzus, Mummendey, Wenzel, & Boettcher, 2004; Weber, Mummendey, & Waldzus, 2002). When considering these contextual constraints, and in line with most research in the social identity tradition, the IPM has focused more explicitly on addressing questions of status than of power. Yet power plays a crucial role in shaping how superordinate belonging is negotiated, and the consequences this has for the psychological well-being of the individuals experiencing change (see Jetten, Iyer, Tsivrikos, & Young, 2008). Power is particularly salient in contexts where superordinate group membership has not yet been established, and disproportionate control over the potential expansion of the superordinate group is in the hands of particular subgroups. The expansion of the EU clearly fits this description, as influential countries within the block can use their power to block

or facilitate the accession of new countries, as has occurred in the Serbian case (Lašas, 2013). As such, while acknowledging the distinction between power and status, we maintain a focus on power throughout this article.

Concerns about sub-superordinate group compatibility permeate both the above theoretical models. According to the CIIM, we might expect compatibility to be achieved if national identities are seen as contributing to the richness and diversity of a new European identity. However, taking the more conflictual approach of the IPM, we might expect that this attempt at creating a diverse and inclusive representation of a European identity is constrained by asymmetries in the power to dictate who belongs more or less in Europe (Alexandre et al., 2016). Identity compatibility matters as it opens up the opportunity for low power subgroups to identify with a superordinate group without letting go of their distinctive identity. More than this, it may enable what we term *harmonious dual identification*: the situation in which subgroup and superordinate group identification are positively correlated, thus mutually reinforcing each other, rather than merely coexisting in parallel. Dual identification is rarely studied by directly analysing such correlations (though see Sidanius, Brubacher, & Silinda, 2019), as researchers have instead relied on subjective judgments of harmony between group identities (see, e.g., Huynh, Benet-Martínez, & Nguyen, 2018).

In addition to focusing on power and raising the bar for dual identification, we go further than extant research on superordinate identification by reflecting the lived experience of citizens of a subgroup facing prospective membership. We consider this context of "potential" superordinate group membership to be just as important, if not more so, to understanding the social psychological dynamics at play when thinking about future group relations, as here there is even more scope for imagined threats to identity and power to distort attitudes (Danbold & Huo, 2015). As new members of a superordinate group become integral in promoting its agenda, understanding the link between power and superordinate group commitment is critical (Amiot, Terry, & Callan, 2007; Fischer, Greitemeyer, Omay, & Frey, 2007; Gleibs, Noack, & Mummendey, 2010). If, because of low perceived power, subgroup members are unable to feel a sense of compatibility between their subgroup and the superordinate group, they may ask: Can and will prospective membership allow us to maintain a sense of continuity with our distinct national identity in the future?

1.2 | Continuity: Superordinate group membership as enhancing or undermining of a subgroup identity

A second challenge facing subgroups as prospective members of a superordinate group is how to ensure continuity of important elements of a subgroup's identity while simultaneously implementing socio-political or organizational changes that affect the group. This dimension of identity has received less attention in the literature on superordinate identity models, partly due to a focus on already existing, rather than potential, subgroup members.

Yet concerns for the collective continuity of an ingroup matter, as they have been found to fuel resistance to change (Jetten & Hutchison, 2011) and a heightening of attitudes favoring, protecting or strengthening the ingroup (Danbold & Huo, 2015; Gleibs et al., 2010; Wohl, Branscombe, & Reysen, 2010). These reactions can be seen as strategies aimed at restoring the group's sense of distinctiveness vis-à-vis relevant others. Research on mergers, as a form of subgroup to superordinate group transition, shows how a sense of continuity impacts identification with the superordinate group, and, in turn, commitment to change (Rosa et al., 2020).

Complementing research within organizational settings, research on the Scottish–UK relationship, drawing on Social Identity Theory, has illustrated how heightened feelings of Scottish *identity undermining* in the context of membership in the UK led to stronger separatist attitudes (Sindic & Reicher, 2009). Identity undermining refers to whether groups perceive themselves as "able to live by their social identity within the superordinate group", a key antecedent of which is perceptions of powerlessness vis-à-vis other subgroups (Sindic & Reicher, 2009, p. 116). Research on mergers has also found support for this, showing that low-power subgroups experience less identity continuity as part of a superordinate group (Van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, Monden, & de Lima, 2002). As EU integration entails continued reforms and changes, it becomes important to consider the extent to which Serbs believe they will be able to continue to live by their national identity if they join. Thus, in the case of a prospective EU member, identity undermining can be seen as a proxy for identity discontinuity, and is critical for understanding population responses to political change (Obradović, 2018).

Given its recent history and economic standing, Serbia is likely currently seen by both Serbs and other Europeans as relatively low in the power hierarchy of Europe. What reason might Serbs have to believe, however, that power asymmetries between national groups will continue to matter once Serbia is a fully-fledged member of the European club? Here, what matters is whether that supranational club is seen to be genuinely working toward greater equality among its member states, or whether, on the other hand, its actions effectively entrench the inequalities that have always existed (Petkanopoulou, Sánchez-Rodríguez, Willis, Chryssochoou, & Rodríguez-Bailón, 2018; Sindic et al., 2019). Indeed, another prominent approach that builds on the social identity tradition—Social Dominance Theory—uses precisely this perception of the implicit hierarchy-related function of a superordinate group to predict the extent to which subgroups see their identities as supported versus threatened by their membership of that larger group (Sinclair, Sidanius, & Levin, 1998). Whether a superordinate group is perceived to be hierarchy-enhancing (i.e., working toward greater intergroup inequality), or hierarchy-attenuating (i.e., promoting intergroup equality: see Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) has implications for sense of belonging among low power subgroups (Sidanius et al., 2019; Sidanius, Levin, Van Laar, & Sears, 2008). Such perceptions of the egalitarian versus anti-egalitarian direction toward which a superordinate group is oriented should thus shape the extent to which subgroups anticipate national identity discontinuity in an EU future.

1.3 | Present research

How are the above social psychological perspectives on identity and power informative for making sense of prospective members' identification with, and attitudes toward, EU integration? Focusing on Serbia, a country facing accession to an EU dominated by higher power countries (see Chryssochoou, 2013), we examine the processes enabling and constraining the vision of the EU: to maintain a sense of national identity alongside an affiliation with a supranational union.

We adopt a mixed-methods approach due to its ability to capture the lived experience of citizens as they face political change, and its potential to overcome some of the limitations of single methods and result in a more synthetic research product (Power, Velez, Qadafi, & Tennant, 2018). We first draw on qualitative data to examine if, and how, identity dynamics emerge in citizens' discussions around political change concerning Serbia's place in Europe. We then use the insights gained from the qualitative analysis to quantitatively assess how such identity-related phenomena are associated with each other. Therefore, in Study 1 we ask:

> What are the lay understandings of superordinate integration in the context of Serbia joining the EU, and how do these relate to identity and broader intergroup dynamics?

2 | STUDY 1

In order to explore lay constructions of social categories and the politics attached to them, we considered it most suitable to utilize a qualitative approach that elicited interactive data (Wilkinson, 1998). To do so, we opted for focus groups rather than interviews, to draw on a research context that encourages "sharing and comparing" (Morgan, 2012). Namely, using focus groups we could examine both what participants think and why, but also how the knowledge around the topics introduced becomes co-constructed, and how sense-making around political change is a collaborative effort (Wibeck, Dahlgren, & Öberg, 2007).

2.1 | Methods

Nine focus groups were conducted in Serbia between 2015 and 2016. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling, targeting Serbian citizens living in different cities, both urban and rural, across the country. For each focus group, one initial participant was contacted via telephone and (if they accepted) served as the point of contact for that particular city, helping the first author to organize a setting in which to conduct the focus group and also to gain access to other potential participants (with the main criteria being that they were not related to other invited participants). The first

four focus groups were conducted in 2015 and the remaining five were conducted in early 2016. The rationale behind the sampling of these individuals was not to reach statistical representativeness or generalizability, but rather to explore the diversity in beliefs and opinions expressed by a larger pool of individuals (see Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999, p. 7).

2.1.1 | Participants

Sixty-seven individuals participated in this study (27 females and 40 males; See Table 1 for participant demographics). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 57 ($M = 34$). Each focus group was composed of 5–9 participants whose occupations ranged from full time study to employment in the public and private sector, with eight participants unemployed at the time of data collection. All focus groups took place in "natural" settings such as cafes, participants' homes, or reserved rooms in local libraries.

2.1.2 | Procedure

Prior to the focus group, participants were given an information sheet conveying the aims of the study, and a consent form to sign. The same topic guide was used for all groups, with a total of six questions covering themes of Serbia's relationship with, and potential future in, the EU, as well as the nation's history within Europe and questions of how domestic politics would be influenced by the EU. The topic guide was piloted on four individuals from the capital city, Belgrade, two months prior to data collection, and minor changes were made to the wording of three questions based on their feedback. The first author moderated (and analysed) all focus groups. Moderation focused on minimal interference and probing, and the introduction to the discussion, made clear that participants were encouraged to engage in a conversational style of interaction. Probing was only done in contexts where more dominant voices took over in answering a particular question, in which case the moderator encouraged other participants to add to the conversation (following Smithson, 2000). Each focus group lasted between 21 and 77 min (mean = 61 min). To ensure participant confidentiality all names and identifiers were modified during transcription.

2.1.3 | Analysis

The audio-recorded sessions were transcribed verbatim and a thematic analysis was conducted following the guidelines outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). A hybrid approach to thematic analysis was taken, where the theoretical insights from the social psychological literature on identity shaped how the data was read, while simultaneously allowing for data unrelated to identity to be coded as well. All transcripts were coded using NVivo 11, a qualitative data software program. After five of the transcripts were coded, a

TABLE 1 Focus group participant demographics

Participant	Gender	Age	Occupation	City
1	Male	55	Business owner	Belgrade (New Belgrade)
2	Female	28	Student (PhD)	Belgrade (New Belgrade)
3	Male	27	Insurance Agent	Belgrade (New Belgrade)
4	Female	28	NGO Employee	Belgrade (New Belgrade)
5	Male	25	Engineer	Belgrade (New Belgrade)
6	Male	29	Student	Belgrade (New Belgrade)
7	Male	26	Engineer	Belgrade (New Belgrade)
8	Male	27	Journalist	Belgrade (New Belgrade)
9	Male	28	Unemployed	Niš
10	Male	30	Unemployed	Niš
11	Female	27	Retail Worker	Niš
12	Female	24	Student	Niš
13	Female	27	Unemployed	Niš
14	Female	24	Student	Niš
15	Male	28	Electrical Engineer	Niš
16	Male	26	Medical Technician	Niš
17	Female	50	Office clerk	Niš
18	Male	31	Architect	Novi Sad
19	Female	35	Architect	Novi Sad
20	Male	31	Accountant	Novi Sad
21	Male	31	Taxi Driver	Novi Sad
22	Male	30	Unemployed	Novi Sad
23	Male	28	Lawyer	Novi Sad
24	Male	34	Waiter	Novi Sad
25	Male	30	Military Employee	Vranje
26	Female	28	Military Employee	Vranje
27	Male	36	Unemployed	Vranje
28	Male	57	Self-employed farmer	Vranje
29	Female	55	Casino Employee	Vranje
30	Male	47	Lawyer	Vranje
31	Male	28	Military Employee	Vranje
32	Male	28	Military Employee	Vranje
33	Female	28	Secondary Teacher	Surdulica
34	Male	28	Unemployed	Surdulica
35	Female	35	Secondary Teacher	Surdulica
36	Female	28	Librarian	Surdulica
37	Male	36	Farmer	Surdulica
38	Male	35	Lawyer	Belgrade (Old Town)
39	Female	35	Lawyer	Belgrade (Old Town)
40	Male	36	Lawyer	Belgrade (Old Town)
41	Female	34	Lawyer	Belgrade (Old Town)
42	Female	32	Lawyer	Belgrade (Old Town)
43	Female	38	Lawyer	Belgrade (Old Town)
44	Female	50	Veterinarian	Čačak
45	Male	49	Electrical Engineer	Čačak

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Participant	Gender	Age	Occupation	City
46	Male	57	Agricultural Engineer	Čačak
47	Female	52	Secondary teacher	Čačak
48	Female	53	University Professor	Čačak
49	Female	58	University Professor	Čačak
50	Female	47	Unemployed	Čačak
51	Female	22	Student	Belgrade (Vračar)
52	Female	23	Student	Belgrade (Vračar)
53	Male	22	Student	Belgrade (Vračar)
54	Female	24	Student	Belgrade (Vračar)
55	Male	22	Student	Belgrade (Vračar)
56	Male	22	Student	Belgrade (Vračar)
57	Male	22	Student	Belgrade (Vračar)
58	Male	23	Student	Belgrade (Vračar)
59	Female	32	Teacher (University)	Belgrade (Vračar)
60	Female	34	Lawyer	Paraćin
61	Male	32	Economist	Paraćin
62	Male	30	Archaeologist	Paraćin
63	Male	31	Unemployed (lawyer)	Paraćin
64	Male	30	Economist	Paraćin
65	Male	32	Small-business owner	Paraćin
66	Male	31	Legal Aide	Paraćin
67	Male	30	Computer Engineer	Paraćin

codebook was developed and applied to the remaining transcripts. The first round of coding led to 42 codes. These were then revisited, and some codes were removed (due to irrelevance to the research question), or merged with similar codes after re-reading the coded sections. The final codebook included 38 codes, ten sub-themes and three main themes (see Figure 1 below). In order to ensure reliability, a sample of six translated pages was given to a fellow researcher, along with the codebook and code descriptors. Further, in order to ensure the language barrier in coding was overcome, the same sample of six pages was given to a Serbian researcher from Belgrade, along with the codebook and code descriptors. In the former case interrater reliability was 85%, and in the latter case it was 90%.

2.2 | Results

As summarized in Figure 1, the thematic analysis brought to the fore three main themes which permeated the discussions around Serbia's relationship with the EU: (1) the EU as a source of civic improvement; (2) the EU as a source of inferiority; and (3) political change as rupture to collective continuity. In presenting data below, all names have been changed to either W or M (indicating female or male participant) followed by a number (assigned through order of speaking in the group).

2.2.1 | Theme 1: The EU as a source of civic improvement: changing structures, not people

An important theme across group discussions was unpacking what the benefits of EU membership were, and which sectors of Serbian society were in need of change. Emphasis on the structural benefits of integration was common as participants believed that Serbia would "become more organized if it joined the EU, particularly in relation to laws" (M6, Novi Sad). In these discussions, participants collaboratively managed the conflict between critiquing the lack of progress made by Serbia vis-à-vis EU countries, and situating the blame for that lack of progress.

Excerpt 1: Vranje

W1: [Joining the EU would bring] safety, legality, order, some normalcy, certainty that you'll be able to live a normal life tomorrow, a humanitarian life, and to live and expect a normal retirement with a pension and that everything is covered by the law. We currently don't have that.

M2: But that needs to start with us. The EU can't come and now it's like "oh, it's going to change my mentality". No. We have to start with us, that is, everything depends on you and me.

W1: No, I'm saying that I expect that because they [EU] would probably have some influence, or allow for a new generation of

EU as a source of civic improvement	EU as a source of inferiority	Rupture to collective continuity

Benefits of EU integration
    EU has better laws
    EU entails possibility to leave
    'dysfunctional' nation
    EU entails more freedom of trade
    EU represents national progress
    EU standards of living desirable
Limits to Serbian self-improvement
    Incompetent political leadership
    Lack of accountability for the past
    Public powerless in political
    decision-making
	Feeling subordinate & stigmatized
	    Negative views of Serbia in the EU
	    Internalized stigmatization
	Negotiating accountability for stigma
	    In-group criticality
	    Institutions causing corrupt behaviour
	    Institutions censoring criticism
	Power asymmetry within the EU
	    EU exploits incoming members
	    Hierarchy of countries within union
	    Serbia dependent on EU aid
	    Serbia implementing changes mindlessly to
	    please EU
	Rationalizing lack of progress
	    Ideological shift from communism to
	    capitalism
	    Institutional instability over time
		Choosing a political 'side'
		    Historic ties with Russia
		    EU enforces common foreign policy
		    EU unstable as a union
		    The West support Albanian expansion on
		    Serbian territory
		    Serbian politics bridging East & West
		Everyday-level change
		    EU means changing mentality
		    EU places limits on banal practices of
		    nationalism
		    Fears of identity loss
		    Loss of collectivist values
		    Serbia incompatible with EU way of life
		    Inability to imagine the future
		Losing national sovereignty
		    EU makes decision for new members
		    Losing territory over time
		    The importance of national borders
		The political status of Kosovo
		    Historical significance of region
		    Kosovo 'parasite' on Serbia
		    Kosovo is de facto independent
		    Kosovo is only 'temporarily' lost
		    Resistance to de jure recognition of
		    Kosovo

FIGURE 1 Overview of thematic analysis: each box illustrates a main theme and its subsequent sub-themes and codes

politicians […] if someone makes you do the right thing, I think there is some logic to that…

Excerpt 1 illustrates that there is a tension in relation to who is responsible for bringing about change in Serbia, but also regarding what exactly needs to change. Underlying this is a deeper ambiguity in regard to whether the "problem" of Serbia lies in its system (i.e., institutions and political leaders) or its people (i.e., the mentality of Serbs), indicating an initial articulation of potential incompatibility. The implications of problematizing the Serbian "psyche" and constructing it as if at odds with the EU can be seen more explicitly below;

Excerpt 2: Čačak

W4: I think that the EU can bring one very good thing for us, and that is its laws, regulations, rules and generally all procedural matters […] We're a people where "oh it can be done this way, oh or maybe that way it doesn't matter", but there [in the EU]

M3: No I don't agree, the Germans are no better people than us, they just have to respect the laws, and we would be like Germans if we respected the laws –

W4: we cannot be like Germans –

M3: We can, we can

W4: We aren't

M3: When the law would force you, yes you would

A seemingly circular argument emerges in the discourse of participant M3, where improvement entails respecting the laws, which can

only be done if the law in turn forces you to do so. Interestingly, M3 uses Germany as a synonym for the EU, projecting the identity of an outgroup onto the superordinate category. Throughout the focus groups, countries such as Germany, France, and the UK (noting that data was collected before the British "Brexit" referendum) were often mentioned as the "prototypes" of a European identity, echoing previous findings (Chryssochoou, 2000), this time in a non-Western context. This can be seen to serve an instrumental function, where seeing other subgroups as more prototypical can serve to sustain political attitudes against integration, by heightening incompatibilities between "us" and "them" (Sindic & Reicher, 2008). Consequently, in both excerpts above, the emphasis on positive civic change is countered with arguments of psychological incompatibilities, which hinder the "Europeanization" of Serbia, illustrating how the political becomes embedded within the socio-cultural (McLaren, 2002).

2.2.2 | Theme 2: EU as a source of inferiority: the importance of "others" in superordinate groups

Two interrelated discussions featured within the second theme, which centred on the role of other subgroups within the EU and the power relations within the superordinate group itself. Tying them together was participants' sense of incompatibility with the EU, which stemmed from perceptions of the EU as dominated by Western European countries. These countries were seen not only as different from Serbia, but also as in a position to impede the creation of a diverse "new" European identity such as that envisioned by the Common Ingroup

Identity Model, indicating that lay understandings of the superordinate group are aligned with existing power relations within the group.

Excerpt 3: Belgrade (2)

M1: In any case I think they should at least try to "Europeanize" us, even if those aren't some values that, I don't consider the "Europeanization" paradigm to be, we are Europe just as much as they are and with regard to civilization, well maybe we are a little bit on the edge, with some influences from the Oriental, and both East and West. [...] Even if we do join the EU, we'll be some third-class country there. You know exactly which countries are in the first class, such as for example Germany and France, which for example have the right to subsidize agriculture, France is so powerful that it can do that. But for us, that won't be allowed...

M4: and we expect that.

Within this excerpt, we see how Western European countries are positioned as prototypical members, able to define what it means to be European (over and above geographical belonging) and thereby expected to "Europeanize" incoming members. Here, power and status become conflated in the group discussion, both seen as important for dictating the way of life and identity of the superordinate group (Sindic & Reicher, 2009). Interestingly, we also see an acknowledgment of this superiority ("we expect that"), reflecting existing IPM work on the relationship between legitimacy and prototypicality (Weber et al., 2002). More prototypical subgroups are seen as entitled to more resources ("subsidize agriculture"), while incoming members are not ("for us, that won't be allowed"; Wenzel, Mummendey, Weber, & Waldzus, 2003). This further seems to indicate that the participants perceive the EU as a hierarchy-enhancing union, where high-power members will continue to be afforded more rights and resources than low-power ones. This is similarly reflected in the following exchange;

Excerpt 4: Čačak

W6: All we want is to be an equal member, but there are no equal members there. Everyone knows who's who. [...] Like they say, "all countries are small, only Britain is Great." *(Laughter)*

R: What are some of the things you think might be less beneficial with joining the EU then?

W4: Loss of identity

W3: In fact, we'll become a colony

M2: We already are

W4: Yes! Either way we already are...

The use of the word "colony" interlinks questions of power and belonging in the superordinate group (Devos & Banaji, 2005). It highlights the reality constraints of power in shaping the meaning of a superordinate group, and which is seen, in absolute terms, as more prototypical (Waldzus et al., 2004). It further indicates that despite claims to cohesion and solidarity, Serbs do not perceive the EU as

hierarchy-attenuating, imagining a future where their membership entails not equality, but subordination (Sinclair et al., 1998).

2.2.3 | Theme 3: Political change as a rupture to collective continuity

The third theme focused more specifically on the intragroup context, and how political change was seen as potentially undermining of national identity. One such potential threat was to the historical and cultural ties that Serbia had with Russia, which seemed for many participants to be in direct conflict with the political aspirations of the EU.

Excerpt 5: Belgrade (1)

W5: It's simply not possible that we'll join the EU without previously having done with Russia what they [the EU] wants us to in order to get on board with the EU's way of thinking in relation to Russia. Because if they let you join them they surely won't let you have anything independent of that

[M2: Of course]

W5: In terms of thinking. That's a big topic, meaning, now you're going to have to explain to Serbs, to get them to think that Russians aren't all that nice, even though that's what you've been telling them for hundreds of years. That'll require a lot of work.

The assumption that EU integration entailed not only a common foreign policy but also a common "way of thinking" speaks to the importance of maintaining continuity of key subgroup identity elements when faced with the changes brought by superordinate integration (Obradović, 2018). Many participants weighed the cost–benefit relationship of EU integration from the perspective of what the EU would bring versus what it would take away (McLaren, 2002). In some cases, what would be lost was quite tangible.

Excerpt 6: Belgrade (3)

W2: The question is, when that moment comes, and the last condition is the "de jure" recognition, both de facto and de jure recognition of Kosovo? Because you can't join the EU when you can't define your borders. [...] they messed up once with Cyprus, which was a comparably smaller problem than this.

Discussions around whether Serbia would join the EU, with or without Kosovo, highlighted the role of national borders as markers of where the nation begins and ends. These concerns around detrimental changes to intergroup relations and national territory were voiced as supporting arguments for why Serbia should not join the EU, indicating how threats to identity continuity tend to heighten resistance to change (Jetten & Hutchison, 2011). This resistance was also expressed in relation to continuity of more banal everyday practices.

Excerpt 7: Belgrade (2)

W1: The standards, we want EU standards, but to say to a farmer from Sumadija [region known for the production of plum brandy, Serbia's national drink] "you can't make your own brandy", he'll say "who me? What do I need the EU for?"

Excerpt 8: Niš

M4: Our people, an average citizen with a high school education says "we'll get this and that [benefits], that's great!" but when you tell him "you can't park your car wherever you want man" then it's "oh, what, the EU? What's the point?"

While producing brandy and parking cars might seem inconsequential in a discussion of EU integration, these anecdotes illustrate how the political permeates the personal. Political change is given meaning through the implications it has for sociocultural continuity of everyday practices that "enact" and reproduce an identity (Sindic & Reicher, 2009), with the conclusion in both cases being a rejection of the superordinate group. It is thus clear that participants see EU integration as bringing about substantial changes to a Serbian way of life, both politically and psychologically.

2.3 | Discussion

Focus group data from across Serbia revealed a number of concerns regarding potential group membership in the EU. For many participants, the perceived power hierarchy within the EU (and Serbia's place at the bottom of it), alongside issues of deeper historical, cultural and practical incompatibilities, created a sense of ultimate sacrifice: to belong to the EU would mean to become less Serbian. There seemed to be two interrelated threads that permeated the focus group discussions. The first related to the compatibility between the subgroup and the superordinate group in the present (incorporating Themes 1 and 2), while the second centered on the perceived continuity of the subgroup identity within the superordinate group in the future (corresponding to Theme 3). Both threads, in turn, were placed in a larger context of questions of structural and intergroup power.

Looking at the first thread on compatibility, perceptions of current power in the EU were seen as important in shaping the values and goals to which a nation should aspire as a new member, and by implication, who is seen as more or less European. Unlike the predictions of the CIIM, we do not see participants perceiving Europeanness as a diverse and inclusive "new" identity, but rather, a tendency to equate rich, Western countries (such as France, Germany, and the UK) with the EU. This seems to reflect more closely the theorizing of the IPM, by highlighting how perceptions of intergroup power constrain claims to "prototypicality" among new and prospective members (Alexandre et al., 2016).

Compatibility between a Serbian and European identity is thus hindered by Serbia's lack of power in being able to define and shape what a European identity means, and who "is" European. This leads us to the expectation that perceptions of power and compatibility are tightly related, and both influence whether subgroup and superordinate group identification can be positively correlated, that is, whether harmonious dual identification can emerge. While the IPM would argue that dual identification drives perceived compatibility between the subgroup and superordinate group (as we then "project" our subgroup characteristics onto the superordinate group; Wenzel et al., 2003), our qualitative findings lead us to believe that among low-power groups the reverse might be true. Namely, for those who are members of low-power groups and prospective members of a superordinate group, a sense of representativeness within the new group might be a necessary condition for mutually identifying with it and with one's subgroup (see Sidanius et al., 2008). Research in the context of mergers finds representativeness to be a key driver of post-merger identification with the superordinate group (Boen, Vanbeselaere, & Wostyn, 2010; Rosa et al., 2020), a relationship that might be mirrored in the context of EU integration. Our first research question for the quantitative study thus asks: *How is supranational identification shaped by the perceived compatibility between sub- and superordinate groups, and what is the underlying role of power therein?*

Whereas a sense of compatibility in the present is constrained by a current sense of low power, joining the EU can potentially be seen as a means to gain more power in the future, and to create greater equality between the nations that form the supranational body. This epitomizes the goal of the EU and is symbolic of the ways in which politicians construct the benefits of membership. However, the second thread of our focus group findings implies that these egalitarian representations of the EU are not mirrored in the discourse of citizens of prospective member states. Rather, the EU was seen as an institution that serves to maintain inequalities, rather than eradicate them, and this had consequences for perceptions of the continuity of Serbian identity into the future.

Sindic and Reicher's (2009) work suggests that perceptions of the powerlessness of the subgroup in the superordinate group predict a sense of threat to identity continuity that is both symbolic and practical, which in turn diminishes enthusiasm toward superordinate group membership. Our findings, and in particular concerns about identity-based practices (excerpts 7 and 8), suggest that this model applies beyond the case of existing members of a superordinate union, to that of prospective members. This shift matters, as it is primarily in thinking about the future that identity threats can shape present-day political views (Danbold & Huo, 2015). Also going further than previous research, the findings from Study 1 suggest that whether the structural power relations of the superordinate group are perceived by subgroups as egalitarian will have implications for willingness to be part of the group (Sindic et al., 2019). This leads us to draw more explicitly on SDT to formulate our second research question for the quantitative study: *How is support for EU accession shaped by perceived discontinuity of Serbian identity, and what is the underlying role of intergroup hierarchy dynamics in shaping these concerns?*

Ranging from changes to mentality (excerpts 1 and 5), territory (excerpt 6) and cultural practices (excerpts 7 and 8), the focus groups foregrounded identity as a focal point of discussions around political change. The interactive format also brought to the fore differences and disagreement in views of the importance and nature of identity-related implications for EU membership for Serbia. In seeking the quantifiable individual differences underlying this divergence, and mindful of the importance of subgroup identification in shaping attitudes toward superordinate groups (Sidanius et al., 2008, 2019), we turned to strength of national identification as a potential moderator of the above relationships. Specifically, we reasoned that it is those with the strongest attachment to a Serbian identity for whom notions of compatibility and continuity will be most important in shaping identification with and attitudes toward the supranational group.

3 | STUDY 2

Study 2 was designed to assess, in a large sample of Serbs, whether the two conceptual threads identified in Study 1 have quantitative empirical grounding. This enabled us to move beyond a sense of the nature and importance of particular social psychological phenomena, to examine how these phenomena relate to each other, and whether such relationships might characterise the concerns of the wider Serbian population.

We designed a survey aimed at measuring the key constructs emerging from the qualitative study and its theoretical interpretation. Drawing on the two research questions identified from Study 1 and the theoretical insights from the IPM and SDT, we set out to test two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a *Identification with Europe will be predicted by the perceived current power of Serbia in Europe, and this relationship will be mediated by how representative Serbian identity is of a European identity.*

Hypothesis 1b *This indirect relationship will be stronger among high national identifiers.*

Hypothesis 2a *Support for EU accession will be predicted by perceptions of the EU as a hierarchy-enhancing versus hierarchy-attenuating union, and this relationship will be mediated by the perceived discontinuity of Serbian identity in an EU future.*

Hypothesis 2b *This indirect relationship will be stronger among high national identifiers.*

3.1 | Methods

3.1.1 | Participants

An online survey was administered to individuals living in Serbia, recruited through various social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook). Participants were informed that the survey was voluntary and anonymous, and that the questions focused on exploring their attitudes toward current affairs in Serbia and Europe. The total number of valid responses were 1,192.[1] Of these participants, 29% (349) self-identified as male and 59% (699) self-identified as female, with 12% (144) not indicating their gender. Participants' age ranged from 18 to 79 years old (mean = 37).

3.1.2 | Materials and procedure

The survey was preregistered via www.aspredicted.org (REF nr: 6039). It was constructed in English, then translated and back-translated by two research assistants from the University of Belgrade, Serbia. Any discrepancies between the versions were discussed with a third bilingual research assistant before being resolved, and the final survey was uploaded onto Qualtrics. The order in which measures were completed was randomized, with the exception of demographic questions appearing at the end. The survey was piloted by eight individuals living in Serbia. After the pilot, minor spelling errors and cases of scale point mislabelling were corrected.

3.1.3 | Measures

National identity and European identity
Participants responded to five items (7 point-scale; 1: Strongly disagree, 7: Strongly agree) that were taken from previous studies on national identity and European identity (see Cinnirella, 1997). Sample items included "To what extent do you feel Serbian/European?" and "How important is being Serbian/European to you?" The five-item scales were internally consistent for both national identity (Cronbach's alpha = .86) and European identity (Cronbach's alpha = .82). For both measures a higher score indicated stronger identification with Serbian/European identity.

Current power in Europe
To test whether participants perceived a power hierarchy within Europe and where they saw Serbia within it, seven countries (France, Germany, Ireland, Romania, Serbia, Spain and Turkey) were rated individually in terms of the amount of power participants perceived them to have in Europe, on a scale of 1 (Powerless) to 7 (Very powerful). For our primary analyses, we focused on ratings for Serbia (descriptive statistics of ratings for other countries can be found in Appendix S1).

Identity compatibility
To gauge whether Serbs saw their nation as representative of a European ingroup, we drew on Devos and Banaji's (2005) measure

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[1]The final sample of valid responses was derived from a larger number (3,249) of recorded responses to the survey. The vast majority of these had completed less than 10% of the survey, and were thus excluded before data analysis as they were judged likely to be "bots" or "low effort participants" (Buchanan & Scofield, 2018; see Supplemental Information for a comparison of excluded and non-excluded participants that justifies the 10% completion cut-off point).

TABLE 2 Correlation matrix for main variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. National Identity	4.37	1.55						
2. European Identity	3.90	1.45	−.006					
3. Current Power in Europe	1.95	1.02	.180**	−.015				
4. Identity Compatibility	3.21	1.7	.195**	.281**	.199**			
5. EU as Hierarchy Enhancing	4.7	0.96	.189**	−.272**	−.140**	−.051		
6. Identity Discontinuity	4.20	1.46	.307**	−.347**	−.042	−.142**	.459**	
7. Importance of EU Integration	5.43	3.0	−.236**	.359**	.067*	.036	−.029	−.465**

Note: N = 1,192. All items on 7-point scale except item 7, with 10-point scale.
*p < .05; **p < .01.

of associations between a subgroup and a superordinate group. This proxy for compatibility was chosen over common measures of prototypicality (which focus on rating an ingroup, outgroup and superordinate group on attributes to compare compatibility, i.e., Wenzel et al., 2003) because previous research with low-power prospective subgroups has found representativeness to play a key role in shaping superordinate identification (Rosa et al., 2020). Specifically, participants were presented with the same list of seven countries, and asked to rate them on a 7-point scale (1: Not at all European, 7: Extremely European):

> Bring to mind individuals who were born and live in the greater European area. In your mind, how "European" are people who belong to the following countries? That is, how strongly do you identify them with Europe and all things European?

A higher score indicated the group was perceived as more European. Again, we focused on ratings of Serbia for the tests of our hypotheses (descriptive statistics of ratings for other countries can be found in the Supplemental Information).

EU as hierarchy-enhancing
Six statements were used (Sinclair et al., 1998) to assess the extent to which participants perceived the EU as a system which either enhanced or attenuated hierarchy between members. Items included "The EU exists mostly to maintain the existing inequalities between European countries" and "The goal of the EU is to reduce the differences in wealth between European countries" (reverse-coded), rated on a scale of 1 (Completely disagree) to 7 (Completely agree; α = .65). A higher score indicated perceptions of the EU as more hierarchy-enhancing, promoting inequality between member states.

Identity discontinuity
Adapted from Sindic and Reicher (2009) to reflect a prospective superordinate group membership rather than a current one, identity discontinuity was assessed via four statements addressing participants' perceptions of the implications of EU membership for national

identity (α = .80). Items (e.g., "Becoming part of the EU will allow Serbia to keep its specific and separate identity" (reverse-coded) and "If Serbia becomes part of the EU it will undermine the Serbian way of life") were rated on a scale of 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). A higher score indicated perceptions of increased identity discontinuity in the future.

Support for Serbian government focus on EU accession was measured through a single-item questionnaire asking participants to rate the importance of "Gaining EU membership" as a "political goal for the government to focus on" from a scale of 1 (not at all important) to 10 (very important). A higher score indicated greater importance of the political goal.[2]

3.2 | Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations for the main variables appear in Table 2. Of note is a positive correlation between European identity and importance of EU integration (.359), hinting at the potential role played by superordinate group identification for successful support for integration. This pattern is reversed when we consider identification at the national level, which is negatively correlated with importance of EU integration (−.236), giving a first indication of a potential incompatibility between the national and supranational group memberships.

As we were testing two separate themes emerging from the focus group data, we divided the variables and analysed their interrelationships in two multiple regression path models.

3.2.1 | Subgroup compatibility with the superordinate group

Our first hypothesis explored the role of compatibility for superordinate group identification by considering whether power plays a role in shaping representativeness of a superordinate identity, and in turn

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[2]This item was part of a larger scale with other policy priorities on it, including "Educational Reforms", "Fight Corruption" and "Increase Human Rights Protection".

whether this mediates the relationship between power and superordinate group identification at different levels of subgroup identification. Looking at the interaction the other way, we were also able to explore the conditions needed for the possibility of harmonious dual identification, by testing the role of perceived power and compatibility in enabling a positive correlation between subgroup and superordinate group identification.

H1 was tested using Hayes' (2018) SPSS macro PROCESS (Model 14) to explore the conditional indirect effect of perceptions of current national power on European identification through perceptions of compatibility between Serbian and European identity, at different levels of national identification. The analysis is an example of "second-order" moderated mediation, meaning that the role of the moderator is explored vis-à-vis the effect of the mediator on the dependent variable (Hayes, 2018, p. 591).

The results of the analysis are reported in Table 3 and illustrated in Figure 2. They revealed a significant main effect of power on compatibility ($b = 0.34$, $t(1044) = 6.60$, $p < .001$), indicating that the more power Serbia was seen as having in Europe, the more Serbs felt representative of the category European, supporting H1a.[3] Compatibility, in turn, was positively associated with European identity. The link between compatibility and identification as European was moderated by Serbian identity, being strongest at high levels of national identification ($+1\ SD$, $b = 0.38$, $t(1044) = 11.8$, $p < .001$), but also significant at average ($b = 0.25$, $t(1044) = 9.83$, $p < .001$) and at low levels of national identification ($-1\ SD$, $b = 0.12$, $t(1044) = 3.55$, $p = .001$). We further illustrate the set of relationships by considering the interaction in the other direction (common for IPM research; Wenzel et al., 2003), with compatibility as the moderator of the relationship between national and European identity. Although the zero-order correlation coefficients seem to imply no link between Serbian and European identification, there is in fact a positive correlation at high levels of compatibility ($+1\ SD$; $b = 0.09$, $t(1031) = 1.99$, $p < .05$) and a negative association at average ($b = -0.10$, $t(1031) = -1.66$, $p = .09$) and low levels of compatibility ($-1\ SD$; $b = -0.10$, $t(1031) = -2.28$, $p < .05$). The reversal of the correlation between national and European identity from negative (at low levels of compatibility) to positive (at high levels of compatibility) seems to indicate that a sense of representativeness is a necessary condition for harmonious dual identification as Serbian and European.

results of the moderated mediation analysis illustrated that the link between perceived power in Europe and European identification was partially mediated by compatibility, as the path between power and identification with Europe was reduced (though still significant), once compatibility was controlled. The overall model explained almost one eighth of the variance in identification with the EU ($R^2 = .122$, $SE = 1.79$, $F(1,044) = 35.95$, $p < .001$). The indirect effect was moderated by national identification, being strongest at high levels of national identification ($+1\ SD$; $b = 0.13$), though also

TABLE 3 Regression results and indirect effects for moderated mediation model (1)

	B	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Mediator variable model (DV = Identity Compatibility)				
Constant	2.57	0.11	22.70	.0001
Current Power in Europe	0.34	0.05	5.69	.0001
Dependent variable model (DV = European Identity)				
Constant	4.68	0.24	19.01	.0001
Current Power in Europe	−0.09	0.04	−2.18	.0297
Identity Compatibility	−0.13	0.07	−1.81	.0702
National Identity	−0.33	0.05	−6.20	.0001
Identity Compatibility × National Identity	0.09	0.02	5.92	.0001

Conditional Effects of Identity Compatibility on European Identity at values of National Identity				
National Identity	**Boot indirect effect**	**Boot *SE***	**Boot *t***	**Boot *p***
−1 *SD* (2.8)	0.12	0.04	3.26	.0011
M (4.3)	0.25	0.03	9.83	.0001
+1 *SD* (5.9)	0.38	0.03	11.80	.0001

Conditional Indirect Effects of Power in Europe on European identity via Identity Compatibility at values of National Identity			
National Identity	**Effect**	**Boot *SE***	**Boot 95% CI**
			Lower / Upper
−1 *SD* (2.8)	0.04	0.02	0.010 / 0.074
M (4.3)	0.08	0.02	0.052 / 0.122
+1 *SD* (5.9)	0.13	0.03	0.081 / 0.184

Index of Moderated mediation			
Mediator	**Index**	**Boot *SE***	**Boot 95% CI**
			Lower / Upper
Identity Compatibility	0.03	0.008	0.015 / 0.046

significant at average (M; $b = 0.09$) and low levels ($-1\ SD$; $b = 0.04$), thus supporting H1b.[4]

3.2.2 | Subgroup identity continuity within the superordinate group

Our second hypothesis focused on exploring the role of continuity in relation to support for superordinate group membership, similar to previous work in the context of Scottish–UK relations (Sindic & Reicher, 2009). We used a moderated mediation analysis to test whether the relationship between the egalitarian (vs. anti-egalitarian) nature of the EU and

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[3]Power and Compatibility were also highly correlated for the remaining five Western European countries, but not for Turkey, indicating a connection between perceptions of Western European countries as powerful and perceptions of them as representative of a European identity (see Appendix S1 for descriptive statistics).

[4]As can be seen by comparing Tables 2 and 3, the non-significant positive correlations between current power and identity compatibility on the one hand, and European identification on the other, become negative regression coefficients once both independent variables are included in the model. As this indicates a suppressive relationship between the variables, it should be interpreted with caution.

FIGURE 2 Identity compatibility as a mediator between current power in Europe and identification with Europe, at low and high levels of national identification. Direct effects in parentheses. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$. $R^2 = .122$

Low National Identification (−1 SD)

Identity compatibility

.34*** .12***

Power in Europe

Identification with Europe

.04** (−.09*)

High National Identification (+ 1 SD)

Identity compatibility

.34*** .38***

Power in Europe

Identification with Europe

.13** (−.09*)
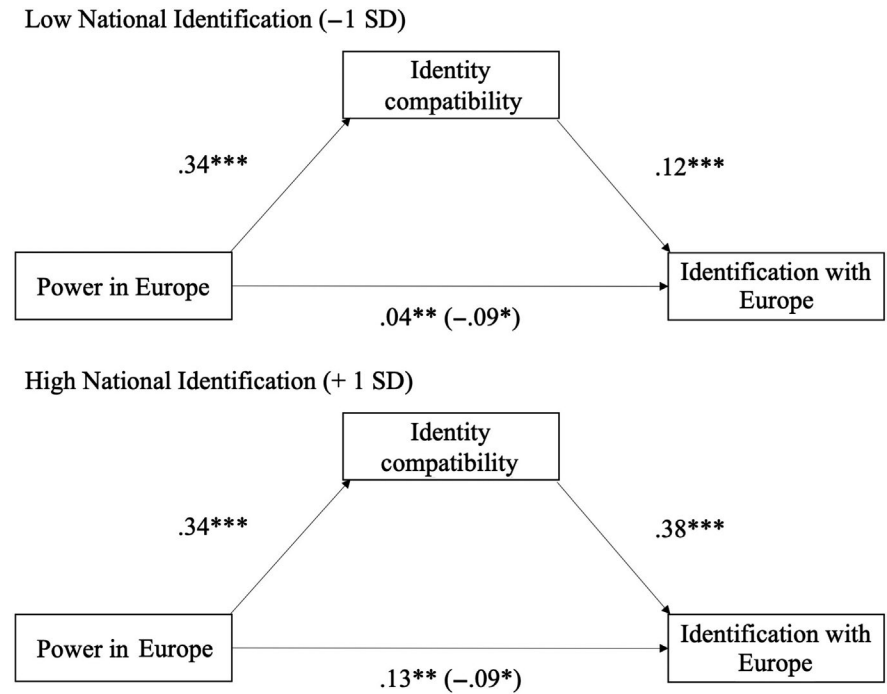
support for EU accession was mediated by identity discontinuity, and in turn different among low and high national identifiers.

The results of this analysis are presented in Table 4 and illustrated in Figure 3. First, perception of the EU as hierarchy-enhancing, that is, as promoting inequalities between member states, was positively correlated with perception of future identity discontinuity as part of the EU ($b = 0.70$, $t(1044) = 16.63$, $p < .001$), implying that the less relative power Serbia was perceived to be able to possess as an EU member in future, the more individuals perceived the EU as potentially threatening to the continuity of a Serbian identity. Higher perceptions of identity discontinuity, in turn, led to lower levels of support for EU accession, and this was moderated by national identification. Specifically, the dependency of support for EU accession on the possibility of the maintenance of national identity was most strong for high national identifiers (+1 SD; $b = -0.99$, $t(1041) = -12.55$, $p < .001$), though also significant for those at average levels of national identification ($b = -0.85$, $t(1041) = -14.1$, $p < .001$) and at low levels of national identification (−1 SD; $b = -0.71$, $t(1041) = -9.00$, $p < .001$).

full moderated mediation analysis illustrated that identity discontinuity is a significant partial mediator of the negative effect of perceiving the EU as hierarchy-enhancing on support for EU accession. The model explained over a third of the variance in support for EU accession ($R^2 = .365$, $SE = 5.92$, $F(1,041) = 149.78$, $p < .001$). The indirect effect was stronger among high national identifiers ($b = -0.69$, 95% CI [−0.55, −0.82]) than among low national identifiers ($b = -0.49$, 95% CI [−0.36, −0.64]).

3.3 | Discussion

The current study was designed to quantitatively test and elaborate on the two conceptual threads identified in Study 1. It did so by formulating two hypotheses arising from the qualitative research and the theoretical issues it raised, and testing them with a large, diverse sample. Moderated mediation analyses yielded supportive results in both cases.

With regard to the first hypothesis, we sought to predict Serbs' degree of identification with Europe, in order to shed light on the underlying drivers of harmonious dual identification as both Serbian and European. The results indicate that identity compatibility is key: When perceptions of identity compatibility were low, such that Serbia was perceived as relatively unrepresentative of Europe, the relationship between Serbian and European identity was negative. In contrast, when perceptions of compatibility were high, the relationship became positive, indicating that sense of representativeness can play an important role in making sub- and superordinate group identities mutually supportive (see Rosa et al., 2020). Identity compatibility was in turn predicted by the perceived current power of Serbia in Europe, and mediated the path between power in Europe and European identification. This indirect path, as well as its moderation by national identity, was found to be significant using bootstrapped estimates, thus providing support for H1.

National identification was also a proposed moderator in our second set of analyses, in which we sought to predict support for joining the EU. EU accession support was shaped by perceptions of the potential for Serbia to be treated as equal to existing EU members, as captured by participant ratings of whether the EU functioned in general to enhance versus to attenuate inequality among its members. Perception that the EU system was in fact anti-egalitarian in nature exerted its impact both directly, and indirectly via triggering fears of the discontinuity or unsustainability of Serbian national identity as an EU member. Although this pattern held across levels of national identification, it was particularly

TABLE 4 Regression results and indirect effects for moderated mediation model (2)

	B	SE	t	p
Mediator variable model (DV = Identity Discontinuity)				
Constant	0.90	0.20	4.46	.0001
EU as Hierarchy Enhancing	0.70	0.04	16.63	.0001
Dependent variable model (DV = Support for EU integration)				
Constant	11.90	0.71	16.66	.0001
EU as Hierarchy Enhancing	−0.85	0.09	−9.59	.0001
Identity Discontinuity	−0.45	0.16	−2.89	.0040
National Identity	0.26	0.15	1.78	.0759
Identity Discontinuity × National Identity	−0.10	0.03	−2.77	.0056

Conditional Effects of Identity Discontinuity on Support for EU integration at values of National Identity

National Identity	Boot indirect effect	Boot SE	Boot t	Boot p
−1 SD (2.8)	−0.71	0.08	−9.00	.0001
M (4.3)	−0.85	0.06	−14.10	.0001
+1 SD (5.9)	−0.99	0.08	−12.55	.0001

Conditional Indirect Effects of EU as hierarchy enhancing on Support for EU integration via identity discontinuity, at values of National Identity

National Identity	Effect	Boot SE	Boot 95% CI	
			Lower	Upper
−1 SD (2.8)	−0.49	0.07	−0.64	−0.36
M (4.3)	−0.59	0.06	−0.71	−0.48
+1 SD (5.9)	−0.69	0.07	−0.83	−0.56

Index of Moderated Mediation

Mediator	Index	Boot SE	Boot 95% CI	
			Lower	Upper
Identity Discontinuity	−0.06	0.02	−0.11	−0.02

pronounced among high national identifiers, presumably as these would be the people for whom the continuity of Serbian identity is most cherished. The findings support H2 and are consistent with those of Sindic and Reicher (2009), here extended to the case of a prospective member of a superordinate group. These results further highlight how perceptions of identity continuity, or lack thereof, in the future, have significant consequences for political attitudes in the present.

4 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

What is at stake, psychologically, when a nation considers joining a supranational union such as the EU? In this article, we have argued,

and illustrated with a mixed-methods approach, that a focus on social identification and power becomes an important avenue through which we can understand public attitudes toward EU membership in a prospective member state.

In particular, we focused on examining how compatibility between the subgroup and superordinate group impacts identification with the new group in significant ways. In addition, as our focus was on a prospective rather than existing member state, we also brought to the fore the importance of identity continuity and its role in shaping whether upcoming socio-political change is supported or resisted.

The design of the study allowed us to explore if, and how, these identity dynamics emerged in citizens' discussions around political change, and to draw on this to formulate and address two research questions on a larger sample of the Serbian population. Within both studies, the role of power was central in shaping core social identity processes, and this enabled us to make some advances on current theorising in the area of superordinate group dynamics.

First, we addressed the question of how to generate strong identification with Europe among Serbs without compromising national identification, in line with the stated goals of the EU. The focus group findings suggested that identification with Europe was constrained by the extent to which Serbs fit a particular notion of "European", the latter heavily influenced by the countries seen to dominate Europe: Germany, France, and the UK. In contrast with the optimistic picture painted by the Common-Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM), in which superordinate group identity is equally accessible to all subgroups, the focus group findings echo the more pessimistic picture painted by the Ingroup Projection Model (IPM), involving asymmetries across subgroups in who gets to count as prototypical (Alexandre et al., 2016). Departing from the IPM, however, superordinate group identification, from the perspective of Serbs looking toward Europe, is not a pre-existing construct complementary to subgroup identification, but is informed and shaped by such exclusionary dynamics. Results from our survey both validated and elaborated on this picture. A moderated mediation model confirmed that especially for high national identifiers (though also for low national identifiers), a precursor to identification with a supranational union is perceived compatibility between one's nation and that union, compatibility, which, in turn, depends on how powerful or dominant one's nation is perceived to be. By examining our data from this perspective, we revealed that "compatibility" shapes the extent to which subgroup and superordinate group identification can be positively correlated. Harmonious dual identification, measured indirectly in this way, presents a high bar for those working toward successful and inclusive superordinate group integration, whether in the case of organisational mergers, immigration, or international governance. Nevertheless, our findings imply that one route to making it possible is through increasing the sense of power of (prospective) subgroups, thereby increasing their sense that they are representative of the larger group (Sindic & Reicher, 2009). Thus, though in line with the IPM's focus on inequalities in access to subgroup–superordinate group compatibility, our findings highlight that once power (as opposed to status) is placed

FIGURE 3 Identity discontinuity as a mediator between EU as hierarchy-enhancing and support for EU accession, at low and high levels of national identification. Direct effects in parentheses. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$. $R^2 = .365$

Low National Identification (−1 SD)

High National Identification (+1 SD)
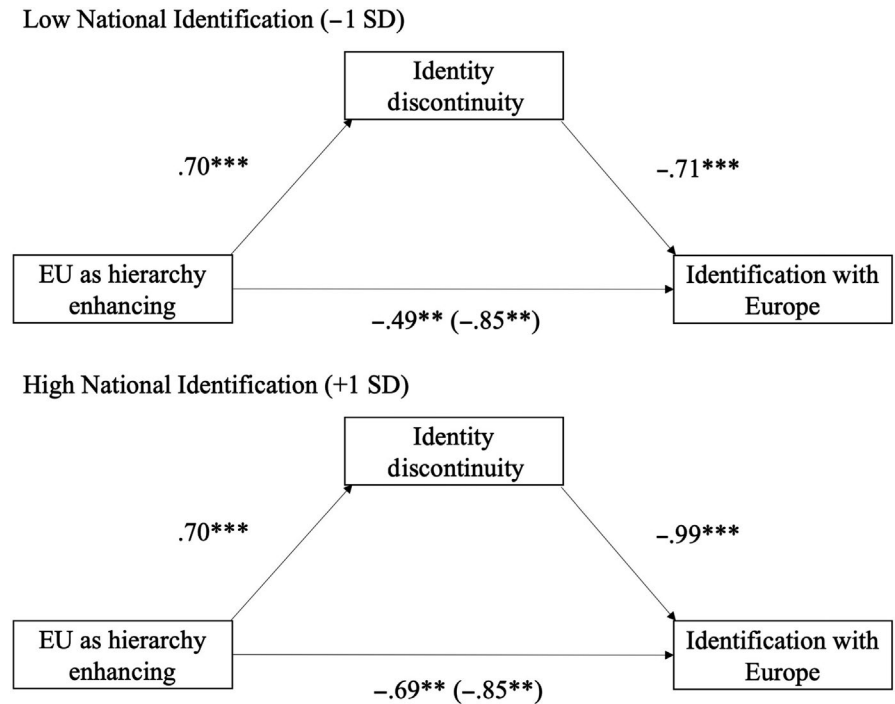
centre-stage, and in the case of subgroups who are not yet accepted as superordinate group members, superordinate group identification is constrained by the realities of intergroup hierarchy (see Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). This integration of insights from existing models of superordinate groups with models that focus more squarely on intergroup hierarchy highlights the centrality of power relations to predicting how prospective members of a supranational union feel about joining it.

Our novel focus on prospective superordinate group membership enabled us to make an additional theoretical contribution, by shifting the temporal context in which membership, and its implications for identity, is imagined. The second strand of our research moved from identification to policy attitudes, examining the precursors to enthusiasm for (vs. disinterest in) joining a supranational union, and the role of perceptions about what such a future state would entail. When thinking about this major political change possibly occurring in the not-too-distant future, members of our focus groups raised concerns regarding the very viability of being Serbian, in both a symbolic and a practical sense, while being a member of a union described as if it existed merely for the purpose of domination and control of low-power, poorer countries (Sindic et al., 2019). Our survey findings dug deeper, to see if Serbians explicitly adhered to this implied anti-egalitarian goal of the EU, and investigated the implications of such perceptions, first, for perceived identity continuity for Serbia in the EU, and then for citizen-level support for the government actively to pursue this outcome. We found that especially for those who care most about Serbian identity (though also for those who express lower levels of identification) the prospect of identity discontinuity does indeed sap support for government actions to obtain EU membership. The importance of identity continuity mirrors that found in cases of integration at the level of

organization (Gleibs et al., 2010), while the critical role of power in enabling it is in line with what had been found for the case of subgroups already inside a superordinate group (Sindic & Reicher, 2009). Importantly, fears of such identity discontinuity depended, in part, on whether one saw the function of the EU as "hierarchy-enhancing", drawing terminology from Social Dominance Theory (see Sidanius, Cotterill, Sheehy-Skeffington, Kteily, & Carvacho, 2017; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). A social dominance perspective thus highlights the importance not only of power, but also of the power-related function of an institutional context, in constraining enthusiasm for superordinate group membership and possibilities for dual identification.

Taken together, our findings show that once perceptions of power and the dynamics of intergroup hierarchy are measured directly, their role in shaping identity compatibility and continuity comes to the fore. Namely, whereas perceptions of current power in the superordinate context strongly correlated with superordinate group compatibility and identification (i.e., do we "fit in"?), perceptions of the functioning of the power hierarchy within the EU, and its implications for the survival of national identity into the future, were important for shaping attitudes toward membership (i.e., will joining this group allow us to maintain our distinct identity?). While we examined two pathways through which power dynamics are perceived and experienced (structurally and through subgroups), we do not mean to imply that these operate in isolation. Rather, they are likely to be interlinked in constructing perceptions of supranational groups as both shaped by, and perpetuating, unequal power relations between member states. The intimate relationship between power, identity, and belonging can be understood better if we acknowledge that the group functions as a source of power for its members in enacting and reproducing

their way of life (Sindic & Reicher, 2009). As such, threats to power become threats to identity. This in turn might lead more nations to try to resolve this dilemma by turning inwards, focusing on restoring the power of the nation as a unique group, rather than the nation as part of a superordinate group. With the growing emergence of nationalist movements and anti-EU sentiments across Europe, it becomes increasingly pressing to consider how these power dynamics are interpreted and mobilized through an identity lens.

4.1 | Limitations and further research

The limited scope and inferential power of this set of studies opens avenues for further research. First, the findings are limited to the context of Serbia, and the superordinate group dynamics are consequently shaped in important ways by the history of Serbia and its place in Europe. While the article attempted to couple some of the more specific meaning-making processes with underlying social identity processes, the links explored in Study 2 were nevertheless informed by the specific content and context of Serbian identity and representations of Europe, leaving open the possibility that such dynamics might play out differently in another subgroup–superordinate context. Importantly, however, we believe that taking a mixed-method approach, as we have done here, enables the pairing of insights regarding relationships between general social psychological processes with the nuanced expression of concerns arising from a particular historical and geographical context (see also Power et al., 2018). We hope that this consideration of the rich content and temporal context of identity in specific locations will be a feature of future work on challenges to national identification in a globalizing and unequal world.

Second, and related to this methodological approach, as the first study was exploratory, and our survey data was correlational, clear claims of causality cannot be made regarding the nature of the associations observed. Future research should consider devising an experimental or longitudinal design to test how shifting perceptions of power, inequality, and the endurance of identity shape attitudes toward being part of a superordinate group, and the possibility of identifying with it without losing hold of attachment to one's subgroup.

5 | CONCLUSION

Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, this article offers insight into how citizens make sense of political change by exploring how it becomes embedded and understood within a broader sociocultural context. By shifting the focus from elite discourse around integration to population sentiments about what it means for their daily lives and sense of selves, our findings reveal the importance of the psychosocial resources of identity, temporality and sense of power. We explored the meaning participants gave to these issues in their own words, and, through quantitative survey analysis, considered the extent to which they represented relationships between

social psychological processes that might be generalizable to other contexts.

The resulting insights point toward opportunities for making international integration of historically poorer nations, and indeed the joining of superordinate groups, less psychologically threatening, and more empowering, than it is currently experienced to be. To do so, superordinate groups must not only become more diverse, but they must also, and perhaps more crucially, treat subgroups with dignity and respect (Sidanius et al., 2019). Alongside consideration of this more symbolic form of inclusiveness, our findings point toward the need to interrogate claims that the EU at heart works toward greater political equality between nations, given the harmful consequences of perceptions that it does just the opposite (see also Petkanopoulou et al., 2018; Sindic et al., 2019).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS
Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Committee in the Department of Psychological and Behavioural Science, London School of Economics, in 2014. Written informed consent was received from participants prior to data collection. All names and identifiers have been anonymized within the manuscript to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of the participants.

TRANSPARENCY STATEMENT
The data is publicly available at https://osf.io/zuap3/. This repository includes the full data set for the quantitative component of the study (Survey) and partial information from the qualitative component of the study (Focus Groups). Due to the nature of the qualitative data (which includes key identifiers of participants which might limit anonymity and confidentiality) the repository includes only the topic guide and the codebook.

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