

Monique Landberg, Katharina Eckstein, Clara Mikolajczyk, [Sam Meijas](#), Petr Macek, Frosso Motti-Stefanid, Ekaterina Enchikova, Antonella Guarino, Andu Rämmer and Peter Noack.

Being both – A European and a national citizen? Comparing young people's identification with Europe and their home country across eight European countries

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**Monique Landberg, Katharina Eckstein, Clara Mikolajczyk, Sam Mejjas, Petr Macek, Frosso Motti-Stefanidi, Ekaterina Enchikova, Antonella Guarino, Andu Rämmer & Peter Noack (2017): Being both – A European and a national citizen? Comparing young people’s identification with Europe and their home country across eight European countries, *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, DOI: 10.1080/17405629.2017.1391087**

Abstract

It is a well-established fact that forming a mature and coherent political identity is one developmental task in adolescence and young adulthood. However, given different degrees of commitment on the regional, national, and European level, the question remains whether young people’s identification varies among those spheres? Drawing on data from the European Catch-EyoU-project, it was the goal of this study to examine whether young people can be classified according to their identification toward their home country and Europe and how these types are associated with age, gender, country as well as political interest, tolerance, and political participation. The study is based on adolescents and young adults from the Czech Republic, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Estonia, Italy, Portugal, and Sweden ( $N = 9,339$ ;  $Mage=19.62$ ; 59.1% female). Cluster analysis revealed five types of young people’s identification with country and Europe which showed significant associations between group membership and tolerance, political interest, and participation. The implications of distinguishing types of identification and their associations with political outcomes are discussed.

*Keywords:* National identity, European identity, EU, youth, political engagement, tolerance

Being both – a European and a national citizen? Comparing young people's identification with Europe and their home country across eight European countries

It is commonplace to understand adolescence and young adulthood as an important period of identity development when individuals try to explore and define their place in the social world of both personal relationships and society beyond interpersonal contexts (cf. Erikson, 1968; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). As part of their identity work young people face the challenge to negotiate their role as political citizens (Hurrelmann & Quenzel, 2016). Since the emergence of nation-states this task includes to define their position vis-à-vis the country of which they hold legal citizenship or in which they live, respectively. According to established conceptualizations, political citizenship includes the relation between a person and the country (identity aspect) as well as the readiness to move beyond individual interests and to contribute to the common good (Sherrod, Flanagan, & Youniss, 2002). With the implementation of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, every national of an EU (European Union) member state is automatically a citizen of the EU (European Communities – Council, 1992), including the expectation that EU citizens develop a sense of European identity.

At first glance, negotiating a European in addition to the national identity may not be seen as a considerable extra challenge for young people given the nested nature of both contexts. For example, the social psychological model of ingroup projection (Wenzel, Mummendey, & Waldzus, 2007) suggests that members of social groups tend to almost automatically project ingroup characteristics onto the superordinate category. However, on the subjective level European and national identities can but do not have to be nested, and therefore may also cross-cut (Herrmann & Brewer, 2004). In line with this assumption, surveys with adult samples show that identifications with nested categories tend to coincide, i.e., are both high or both low, but in a substantial minority of cases opposing identifications were observed (e.g., Iglic, 2010; Klandermans, Sabucedo, & Rodriguez, 2003). Moderate correlations between national and European identities were also reported among youth

samples (Agirdag, Phalet, & Van Houtte, 2016). While identification was generally found to be stronger on the national than on the European level (e.g., Boehnke & Fuss, 2008; Kerr, Sturman, Schulz, & Burge, 2010), cross-national comparisons revealed meaningful variations across European countries. In this regard, Cinnirella (1997), for example, reported a positive correlation of European identity with national identity among Italian respondents, while the correlation was negative in a British subsample. Focusing on the commitment aspect of identity (Marcia, 1980), the present study sets out to examine the identifications of adolescents and young adults from eight EU countries with their national contexts and Europe.

### ***National and European Identification in the Course of Identity Development***

Taking Erikson's (1968) theorizing on the adolescent identity crisis as point of departure, Marcia (1980) developed his identity status theory. A central tenet of the theory holds that identity development proceeds by way of exploring important domains of life, such as vocation or gender roles, and eventually making commitments in these domains. Based on the two dimensions of exploration and commitment, Marcia defined four identity status (e.g., achieved identity: exploration high, commitment high). In the more recent years, the model was refined by, e.g., differentiating in-breadth and in-depth exploration (Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, & Beyers, 2006), and extended by adding the dimension of reconsidering commitments (Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008). Evidence from studies drawing upon the original or more recent versions of the model could basically confirm its central claims but also point to considerable variations concerning individual trajectories of development and underscore that identity dynamics are not limited to adolescence but may well continue into adulthood (Meeus, 2011). It should be noted that in identity status theory the commitment dimension, which, for example, captures the relation of individuals to their home country, has always an evaluative quality in addition to a descriptive one. In this respect, it differs from domain-specific components of the hierarchical self-concept (Marsh, 1990) which could be

the mere self-description as citizen of a given country regardless of the possibility of holding negative feelings for it.

While there is a plethora of studies on identity development that focus on domains such as vocational career, peer relationships, and ideology, the development of young people's exploration of and commitment to more comprehensive social groups besides the interpersonal sphere and to society at large has attracted clearly less scholarly attention. It could be shown, however, that the model can be also successfully applied to capture regional and national identifications (e.g., Greischel, Noack, & Neyer, under review; Schubach, Zimmermann, Noack, & Neyer, 2017). Likewise, Phinney (1989) took Marcia's ideas as her point of departure of her model of the development of ethnic identity.

### ***Socio-Structural Correlates of Young People's National and European Identification***

Research has identified a wide variety of factors related to young people's sense of belonging to social groups. According to cognitive-developmental approaches (e.g., Aboud, 1988), group identities develop early in life. While this is particularly the case for concrete and physical characteristics (e.g., gender, color of skin, nationality), Barrett (1996) could show that a sense of European identity starts to emerge in middle/late childhood as well. Throughout the adolescent and young adulthood years, regional identifications were found to be highly stabilized (Greischel et al., under review). While the considered age range is often too narrow to draw any conclusions about age differences within the subgroup of young people (e.g., Kerr et al., 2010; Quintelier, Verhaegen, & Hooghe, 2014), results from the Eurobarometer indicated that adolescents (15-19 years) held more positive views about the EU than young adults (25-30 years; European Commission, 2007).

Besides age, young people's identification was also found to differ by gender. When asked about their views toward Europe, for example, male youth reported higher levels of agreement than their female counterparts, although overall effect sizes remained small (Agirdag, Huyst, & Van Houtte, 2012; Kerr et al., 2010; Quintelier et al., 2014). At the

national level, however, results are less consistent. Whereas some studies found significant effects of gender (European Commission, 2007), others reported no such differences (Agirdag et al., 2016; Boehnke & Fuss, 2008).

With regard to socio-economic factors, such as financial hardship or educational attainment, young people from higher SES backgrounds were repeatedly found to be more positive about the EU and to report a stronger sense of European identification than their less socio-economically advantaged peers (Agirdag et al., 2012; Curtis, 2016; European Commission, 2007). Associations between SES and national identity, in turn, are more ambiguous and need to be considered against the backdrop of the applied measures of identification. While several studies found no significant SES-effects (Agirdag et al., 2016; Boehnke & Fuss, 2008), research based on indicators that primarily stressed chauvinistic or nationalistic tendencies reported negative correlations with SES (e.g., Coenders & Scheepers, 2003).

Finally, cross-national research underlines the necessity to account for differences at the country level. Jugert (2017), for instance, could show that the relationship between national and European identity varies across countries and is stronger in more egalitarian than in unequal societies. Moreover, despite differences in the operationalization of identity and the considered age groups, there are some repeating patterns when looking at country-level means: Lower values of European identity were particularly found in the UK, Italy, and Greece, while higher values were reported on average among respondents from Belgium, Luxembourg, or Germany (Boehnke & Fuss, 2008; European Commission, 2007; Kerr et al., 2010).

### ***Civic Correlates of Young People's National and European Identification***

The interconnection between identity processes and civic orientations is stressed in developmental (Wilkenfeld, Lauckhardt, & Torney-Purta, 2010) as well as social psychological theorizing (Huddy, 2013) and also reflected in definitions of political

citizenship (Sherrod et al., 2002). Drawing on Erikson's (1968) and Marcia's (1980) seminal work on identity, research showed that young people with achieved identities are more likely to endorse social responsibility and to be civically engaged than young people with less consolidated identities (Crocetti, Jahromi, & Meeus, 2012). Moreover, the more people identify with a social group, the more they are inclined to act on their group's behalf (cf. Steklenburg & Klandermans, 2010). In this regard, Huddy and Khatib (2007), could show that young Americans who reported a strong national identity (i.e., national attachment) were more politically interested, knowledgeable, and likely to vote, while relationships with national pride, patriotism, or nationalism were either negligible or opposite in sign. In addition, social psychological theorizing suggests that group identity may be associated with outgroup animosity (cf. Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Thus, especially national identification characterized by feelings of superiority have been found to be associated with less tolerance toward outgroup members (e.g., religious or cultural minorities; Meeus, Duriez, Vanbeselaere, & Boen, 2010). Identification at a superordinate level, which comprises various subgroups (such as the EU), in turn, has been assumed to improve intergroup relations (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). Supporting the assumption of differential processes depending on the level of identification, Boehnke and Fuss (2008) found that national identity was positively and European identity was negatively associated with ethnocentrism among young adults from Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Slovakia, Spain, and the UK. On the contrary, Licata and Klein (2002) found that young Belgians who strongly identified themselves as European reported higher attitudes of intolerance than less identified students, while no significant associations with national identity emerged.

### ***The Present Study***

Despite the strong presence of Eurosceptic voices, large-scale surveys indicate that European identification is highest among youth when compared with other generations (European Commission, 2013). For most young people, however, European and national

citizenship are not mutually exclusive. It is therefore the goal of the present study to gain a deepened understanding of the interplay between young people's European and national identification. Given the inconclusive findings summarized above, we follow an explorative approach to this question. More precisely in a first step, we choose a person-centered approach to examine if young people can be grouped according to the constellation of their identification with their home country and Europe. While positive associations of orientations to one's country and Europe as found in some earlier studies are suggestive of groups of youths committed to both or non-committed to either one, we also expect diverging commitments such as a high national identification going along with a low European identification and vice versa.

Since both national and European identification were found to be associated with socio-demographic characteristics, we examine in a second step, if identification patterns vary by age, gender, and country of origin. Finally, we want to elucidate associations of identification patterns with other aspects of citizenship, namely political interest, tolerance, and political participation.

### *Method*

#### *Sample*

The study is based on data collected as part of an international project dealing with the development of active citizenship among European youth (*Constructing ActiveCitizenship with European Youth: Policies, Practices, Challenges and Solutions*; CATCH-EyoU). Between October 2016 and March 2017, adolescents and young adults from eight European countries (i.e., Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Sweden) were asked to participate in an online or paper pencil assessment. The overall sample comprised of 10,318 youth. Given the study's focus on European and national identification, however, only those young people were included in the analyses who held citizenship (or dual citizenship) of their current country of residence and who provided responses on the key



variables of interest. The resulting sample is based on 9,339 young people between 14 and 30 years of age ( $M = 19.62$ ,  $SD = 3.49$ ; females: 5,517, 59.1%; males: 3,785, 40.5%; missing: 37, 0.4%). More information on sample characteristics divided according to country is given in the online supplemental material (see Appendix I, Table A).

### ***Measures***

Identification was assessed using commitment measures based on the Utrecht-Management of Identity Commitments Scale (U-MICS; Meeus, 1996). European and national identification was each measured with three items (e.g., “I feel strong ties to my country/Europe.”). Cronbach's Alpha was .82 ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = .90$ ) for European identification and .86 ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = .97$ ) for national identification. The response format was a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*.

Political interest was measured using a scale adapted from Amnå, Ekström, Kerr, and Stattin (2010). The four items (e.g., “How interested are you in politics?”) had a Cronbach's Alpha of .88 ( $M = 3.15$ ,  $SD = .90$ ). The response format ranged from (1) *not interested at all* to (5) *extremely interested*.

Tolerance was captured by six items (e.g., “I feel that refugees should have the right to maintain their traditions and cultural heritage.”; Amnå, Ekström, Kerr, & Stattin, 2010; Barrett & Zani, 2015). Cronbach's Alpha was .82 ( $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = .91$ ). The response format ranged from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*.

Political participation was assessed by 18 questions asking whether participants had done any of the following activities during the preceding 12 months (e.g., signed a petition, discussed social or political issues on the internet; Barrett & Zani, 2015). For our analysis, a scale was created showing a Cronbach's Alpha of .88 ( $M = 1.59$ ,  $SD = .57$ ). Response options ranged from (1) *no* to (5) *very often*.

Age and gender (0 = *female*, 1 = *male*) were included as control variables.

### ***Results***

### *Patterns of Identification*

We used cluster analyses conducted with SPSS 24 to identify profiles of identification. In doing so, we followed a two-step clustering approach (Gore, 2000): First, a hierarchical cluster analysis was conducted using Ward's method and squared Euclidian distances for European identification and national identification. Then, starting with the initial classification from the hierarchical cluster solutions, *k*-means clustering was applied. *K*-means clustering entails relocating cases to create more homogenous and thus more similar clusters (Gore, 2000). As no outliers were detected, no participants were excluded. After comparing different cluster solutions (2-6 clusters) in terms of their theoretical meaningfulness, explanatory power, and parsimony, we decided on a five-cluster solution which is depicted in Figure 1. The first cluster was interpreted as *Low Identified* based on low values especially with regard to national identification ( $n = 2,023$ ). The second cluster suggested a *European* orientation with high values on European identification and low values on national identification ( $n = 2,246$ ). The third cluster characterized by low values on European identification and high values on national identification was interpreted as *National Identified* ( $n = 2,105$ ). Members of the fourth cluster showed low values on both identification scales and were referred to as *Unidentified* ( $n = 718$ ). The final cluster had high values on both identification scales which we referred to as *Dual Identified* ( $n = 2,247$ ). The five-cluster solution explained a high amount of variance of the European identification scale ( $R^2 = .68$ ) as well as of the national identification scale ( $R^2 = .77$ ).

### *Variations Depending on Age, Gender, and Country*

An analysis of variance indicated a significant difference regarding age between the clusters;  $F(4,9104) = 11.85, p < .001$ . Bonferroni adjusted post-hoc tests revealed that young people in the Low Identified group were younger ( $M = 19.51; SD = 3.41$ ) than the European Identified youth ( $M = 20.00; SD = 3.51, p < .001$ ). European Identified youth were significantly older ( $M = 20.00, SD = 3.51$ ) than National Identified ones ( $M = 19.28, SD =$

3.47,  $p < .001$ ) and older than Dual Identified young people ( $M = 19.64$ ,  $SD = 3.47$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

National Identified youth were younger ( $M = 19.28$ ,  $SD = 3.47$ ) than Dual Identified youth ( $M = 19.64$ ,  $SD = 3.47$ ;  $p < .01$ ).

We conducted a chi-square difference test to examine gender-specific variations which indicated significant differences between females and males;  $\chi^2(4, N = 9,297) = 154.75$ ,  $p < .001$ . More females were in the Low Identified cluster (23.8% vs. 18.4%) and the European Identified cluster (26.8% vs. 19.9%) than were young males. Male participants, in turn, were more numerous in the National Identified cluster (26.7% vs. 19.8%), the Unidentified cluster (9.5% vs. 6.4%), and the Dual Identified cluster (25.5% vs. 23.1%) than were young females.

To examine country-specific variations we conducted another chi-square difference test;  $\chi^2(28, N = 9,339) = 749.52$ ,  $p < .001$ . The observed and expected frequencies as well as the percentage of young people according to country can be seen in Table 1. For example, in Sweden fewer young people were in the National Identified cluster than expected (254/279.9). In Germany, more young people than expected were observed in the Unidentified cluster (148/83.2). In Greece, more young people were expected to be in the Low Identified cluster than were observed (135/271.2). In the UK, more young people were in the European Identified cluster than expected (252/222.5) and fewer were in the Dual Identified cluster (198/222.6).

### ***Associations with Political Interest, Tolerance, and Participation***

A multivariate analysis of variance controlled for age and gender (MANCOVA) yielded a significant difference between clusters regarding political interest;  $F(4,8771) = 65.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ; tolerance;  $F(4,8771) = 31.84$ ,  $p < .001$ ; and political participation;  $F(4,8771) = 5.99$ ,  $p < .001$ . Bonferroni adjusted post-hoc tests revealed that young people in all clusters differed significantly from each other in their political interest (all  $ps < .001$ ; Low Identifieds and National Identifieds differed by  $p < .05$ ) except for those in the Low Identified and the Unidentified cluster. Youth in the Unidentified cluster had the lowest political interest with a

mean of 2.92 ( $SD = 1.00$ ), the European Identified youth had a mean of 3.17 ( $SD = .85$ ), and the Dual Identified youth had the highest mean with 3.37 ( $SD = .86$ ). Finally, the mean of the National Identified youth was 3.06 ( $SD = .87$ ) and the mean of those in the Low Identified cluster was 2.98 ( $SD = .90$ ).

For tolerance, Bonferroni adjusted post-hoc tests showed that young people in the National Identified group were lower in tolerance ( $M = 3.16$ ,  $SD = .90$ ) than those in the Low Identified group ( $M = 3.44$ ,  $SD = .92$ ;  $p < .001$ ), those in the European Identified ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = .86$ ;  $p < .001$ ), those in the Unidentified ( $M = 3.48$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ;  $p < .001$ ), and those in the Dual Identification cluster ( $M = 3.34$ ,  $SD = .83$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Youth in the Dual Identification cluster were lower in tolerance ( $M = 3.34$ ,  $SD = .83$ ) than those in European Identification ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = .86$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and those in Unidentified cluster ( $M = 3.48$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

Bonferroni adjusted post-hoc tests revealed for political participation that the National Identification group had the lowest participation rate ( $M = 1.53$ ,  $SD = .50$ ), significantly differing from the means of the Unidentified group ( $M = 1.64$ ,  $SD = .64$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and the Dual Identification cluster ( $M = 1.60$ ,  $SD = .58$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

### *Discussion*

To sum up, we assessed European and national identifications of young people in eight European countries. Following a case-based approach we grouped young people according to the constellation of their identification with their home country and Europe. We could empirically establish five types of young people based on their European and national identification, namely a Low Identified group having particularly low values on national identification, a European Identified and a National Identified group, and an Unidentified group, with low values on both identification scales, as well as a Dual Identification group which had high values on both identification scales. In a second step, we examined variations of identification patterns depending on age, gender, and country of origin. Here we found, for example, that youth in the European Identified cluster were the oldest compared to all other

four clusters. Females were more present in the Low Identification and in the European Identified clusters. Males, however, were more frequently represented in the other three clusters. Surprisingly more than expected European Identified youth came from Great Britain and Italy.

Finally, we wanted to elucidate associations of commitment patterns with political interest, tolerance, and political participation. One cluster, we called Unidentified, turned out as a particularly interesting one. When looking at the values of tolerance and political participation, young people in this cluster are not at all self-focused. Instead, they show quite high levels of tolerance and participation. Hence, they seem to be somehow against the system but still politically engaged. The results indicate that only looking at values of identification with Europe and the nation does not per se offer direct evidence of political behavior of youth, but that the interplay of European and country identification seems to be relevant pointing to the fruitfulness of a case-based strategy of analysis.

There are some limitations of the study that need to be addressed. The cross-sectional nature of the data does not allow to draw any conclusions about causalities. A case in point are associations linking identifications and participation values. However, since a second wave of data collection is planned, future studies can overcome this limitation and try to disentangle, for example, how identification and political engagement mutually affect each other. Furthermore, according to seminal theories (e.g., Marcia, 1980), identity development is not only characterized by commitment, but also by exploration. While we focused on the former dimension, future studies may complement the current findings by considering both identity dimensions. It might be speculated, for instance, that young people with high levels of exploration are politically open-minded and accordingly report high levels of political interest and engagement. In addition, it should be noted that identification clearly goes beyond a self-description of being a member of one's home country and the EU. It also has an affective aspect and is consequently associated with young people's appraisal. Most established

measures of identity typically capture this component. However, even this affective aspect of identity may not be clearly unidimensional and might include an evaluation as well as a feeling of belonging to a country which do not have to fully overlap. Nevertheless, to gain a more profound understanding of both components, it would be interesting to differentiate between the rather emotional aspect of identification on the one hand and the evaluative component on the other hand in future studies.

To summarize, by focusing on geographical and political commitment, our study extends research on identity development beyond the traditional domains of work, relationships, or education in adolescence and young adulthood. Our findings indicate that young people do differ in their levels of national and European commitment. The reported associations with socio-structural variables and political outcomes provide an important starting point for a better understanding of why some young people encounter the European Union with optimism and support, while others remain skeptical and distanced. After all, the European project essentially depends on the support of its younger generations, a thorough understanding of youth's national and European citizenship and its interrelation is therefore of particular importance.

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