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European Without Euros: How Geopolitical Histories Shape the Symbolic Boundaries of Europe

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geocultural dynamics shape the symbolic boundaries of Europe and the psychological and political consequences of those boundaries. We extend traditional models of social identification by arguing that claims to group representativeness - and the recognition of such claims - are deeply informed by geopolitical contexts often neglected in mainstream psychological theory. Drawing on data from three studies conducted in Romania, Serbia, and Türkiye, we explore how perceptions of Europe's boundaries are socially constructed and experienced in non-Western European contexts. Study 1 investigates how geopolitical positioning informs constructions of a superordinate European identity, revealing a dominant framing of Europe as a "Western" project. Study 2 shows how this framing influences national self- and other-stereotyping, demonstrating an internalization of low status among non-Western countries in Europe. Study 3 experimentally evidences how positive recognition can create more positive geopolitical attitudes toward various European supranational organizations. Together, these studies show that geopolitical inclusion and exclusion have meaningful psychological effects. We argue for a more explicit integration of geopolitical histories and conditions into psychological research on superordinate identity. In doing so, we contribute to the emerging field of geopolitical psychology and highlight the mutually reinforcing relationship between geopolitical positioning and psychological recognition in defining the boundaries of Europe.

1 | Introduction

What does it mean to be Europeanand who has the power to decide? Traditional approaches to national and supranational identification have largely emphasized self-categorization - how individuals claim membership in a group. Yet identification, particularly with superordinate categories like "Europe," is not solely a self-directed process. It is dialogical, shaped by both claims to group membership and the recognition of those claims by others (Amer and Obradović, 2022). Crucially, recognition is not distributed equally. It is structured by power relations between groups, which are themselves rooted in geopolitical histories. These histories shape the psychological boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in ways that traditional psychological models often overlook.

We argue that understanding identification with Europe requires attention to the geopolitical conditions that constrain both claims to, and recognition of, group representativeness. We demonstrate this argument by examining how historical power asymmetries

have enabled certain nations to define the stereotypical image of Europe, and how this symbolic authority reinforces their capacity to recognize or denyothers' claims to Europeanness. We argue that this cyclical relationship between geopolitical positioning and psychological recognition has tangible consequences: those positioned as prototypical Europeans are empowered to define group norms and gatekeep membership, while others must navigate the psychological and political consequences of being perceived as not "European enough." For countries in this latter category, nonrecognition can have downstream effects on geopolitical attitudes, including resistance to and disengagement from supranational institutions intended to foster European cooperation. Drawing on data from three countries-Romania, Serbia, and Türkiye- we examine who is perceived as the prototypical "European" and why (Study 1), how this prototype informs self- and other-stereotyping (Study 2), and how recognition by prototypical others shapes geopolitical attitudes toward key European institutions, including the EU, NATO, and Schengen (Study 3).

2 | Dialogical Conceptualization of Identification

The integration of social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1986) and self-categorization theory (Turner et al. 1987) is often referred to as the "social identity approach" (hereafter SIA; Reicher et al. 2010), an approach that allows us to theoretically understand how people come to see themselves as part of different social groups, and the consequences this can have for how we relate to, and interact with, others. While both theories have been written about extensively, we focus here specifically on how they address and theorize the role of relevant others. Within social identity theory, others are relevant comparators, drawn on to achieve a positive sense of self, which is partially derived from being a group member. Within self-categorization theory, the focus shifts to relevant others within our groups, who become relevant comparators against which we assess our own group representativeness. Namely, SCT refers to the concept of "prototypicality," to capture the ways in which group members will conform to the prototype of a group (the most "ideal type" member). This becomes part of the process of shifting our perspective from seeing ourselves as individuals to seeing ourselves as group members. Insights from SCT have also been successfully used to develop models of superordinate group identification as a pathway toward overcoming intergroup differences and divides (Dovidio et al. 2009; Wenzel et al. 2008).

SIA recognizes that identification is relational and provides insights into the various strategies that group members engage with to attain a positive sense of self or to be seen as part of a group. But identification does not happen only in relation to others, but it also occurs in response to and resistance to them. In many cases, these processes play out in contexts of unequal power relations, where relevant others might constrain what the prototype is and who conforms to it. In other words, identification is not only relational, but also dialogical, where identification (or its absence) is the outcome of the interplay between claims to, and recognition of, group representativeness (see Amer and Obradović, 2022). Through a dialogical concept of identification, we bring to the fore how our positive sense of self is somewhat reliant on the recognition of our identity and group representativeness from both ingroup and outgroup members, and the potential negative consequences for wellbeing, behavior and intergroup relations, when recognition is not afforded or received. In facing the possibility of such negative consequences in instances of nonrecognition, SIA provides us with a strong theoretical framework that considers the interplay of power and agency within such dialogical encounters, highlighting possibilities of resistance. SIA also importantly emphasizes the role of social context in shaping the ways in which dialogical psychological processes play out. When we think about social context we need to consider how this is composed of several components, the relevant others with whom we share a social environment with, the cultural, historical, and political events that have given meaning to self, identity and intergroup dynamics and last, the power dynamics that permeate interactions and legitimize certain representations of groups and their members, over alternative representations (Howarth 2002). Power becomes particularly important when we consider the consequences of how norms and stereotypes come to influence representations of prototypicality of subgroups/group members in relation to superordinate groups, and how, as such, claims to and recognition of belonging by less prototypical members become constrained.

A dialogical conceptualization of identification centers the role of others within identification processes, and interlinks self and other within the broader social, political, and historical context that constructs and constrains what identities are, and who can claim representation of them. Namely, a key argument of this paper is that claims to, and recognition of, group representativeness, are informed by the "objective realities" of geopolitics and geoeconomics, making it important to interlink the symbolic with the material constraints. What are the potential consequences for intergroup relations of uneven power and prototypicality in a shared superordinate context?

3 | The Geoeconomic, Political, and Cultural "Europe"

The construction of Europe as a social, political, and historical category has been defined primarily by its difference from an Other, often embodied by the ideologically, geographically, and conceptually vague "East" (Mungiu-Pippidi 2024; Wolff 1994). The concept of the East has been theorized and discussed extensively by scholars through expanding on Said's (1979) orientalism and suggesting parallel concepts such as "nesting Orientalism" (Bakić-Hayden 1995), "Balkanism" (Todorova 2009), and "Eastern Europeanism" (Kalmar 2023). A key normative argument made by these scholars is that the construction of the East is done by, and for, the West, where the notion of orientalism as "a way of thinking about and practices of making the other" (Buchowski 2006, 465) have served the purpose of bordering, and protecting Europe from its illiberal, undemocratic and uncivilized "inner-Other." These distinctions between West and East do not refer to explicit, rigid geographical borders, but symbolic borders shifting with time as geopolitical projects change in Europe. For example, scholars often refer to "Russia and Europe," a distinction that geographically makes less sense than it does politically (Orenstein 2015). In Central Europe (including countries such as Poland and Czechia), the need to align with East over West, a geopolitical transition that began in 1989 (Kuus 2007), has led to "domestic

orientalism," where citizens are classified as civilized or primitive, and where the latter are to blame for limited progress toward Western ideals (Buchowski 2006). Arguably, the political project of the European Union (EU) is one of bringing countries further toward the West through "integration" (Diez 2004; Favell 2022), reinforcing civilizational hierarchies that construct the EU as the ideal (Cebeci 2025).

There are several problematic implications of this conceptualization of Europe and its continued reproduction in geopolitical discourse. First, it limits claims to European identification by defining the prototype (or "normative ideal") of Europe as being Western (e.g., Obradović et al. 2024). Furthermore, the conflating of Europe with the EU, and the geopolitical power of the latter, affords Western European countries vis-à-vis Eastern more legitimacy to define and control what it means to be European, entangling geopolitical power with cultural influence (Karić et al. 2025). By extension, it is not enough to be *in* Europe to be European. This leads to the second implication, which is the impact that adherence to these projects has on countries on the periphery of geocultural Europe. Research finds that it can lead to the internalization of inferior discourses where the East is seen as regressive (Kiss 2017), a turning away from the European project through heightened appeals to nationalism (Polyakova and Fligstein 2016) or a geopolitical reorientation toward the "Eastern" world (Aksu and Özer 2022). We seek to examine these implications by focusing on three countries that have geopolitically and historically been positioned as "in-between" East and West: Romania, Serbia, and Türkiye.

3.1 | Romania

Romania's geopolitical trajectory is a complex narrative, consistently shaped by a deep-seated aspiration to align with Western Europe and transcend its "Balkan" heritage, a descriptor often associated with backwardness and chaos in Western discourse (Dumbravă 2014). Historically, Romanian elites viewed state-building and national identity through a Western lens, seeking to prove their belonging to the "great family of Romanity" and to escape Orientalist perceptions (Kiss 2017). In 2004, Romania made progress in this direction, becoming a member of NATO, followed shortly by EU accession in 2007 (Frunzaru and Corbu 2011). Post-2007, Romania's relationship with Europe entered a new phase, characterized by an instrumental understanding of European identity. Using a representative national sample, Frunzaru and Corbu (2011) found that, even post-integration, a majority of Romanians (61%) still identified as "Romanian only," while only a third embraced a dual identity as Romanian and European. For many Romanians, European identity is primarily a civic one, linked to a pragmatic assessment of the costs and benefits of EU integration on their daily lives, such as democracy, economic prosperity, and freedom of movement (Frunzaru and Corbu 2011).

A defining feature of post-accession Romanian geopolitics is the emergence of pro-European social movements that vocally challenge domestic political realities (Bliuc et al. 2018). Slogans like "Vrem o țară ca afară!" ("We want a country like abroad!") articulate a desire to redefine state-building through a pro-European discourse, directly contrasting local elites and corruption with Western ideals of democracy, capitalism, and meritocracy. These movements often appeal directly to foreign ambassadors and EU officials, whose support strengthens their message by framing discontent as a fundamental contradiction between "modern Europe" and "backward Romania" (Gubernat and Rammelt 2021). Despite this fervent pro-European sentiment, Romanians, particularly those living abroad, contend with a sense of "semi-Europeanness" or "in-betweenness," often leading them to differentiate themselves from "eastern" Romanians to claim a more "westernized" identity (Andreouli and Howarth 2019). This ongoing internal contestation, coupled with the EU's own challenges in managing the enlargement process, highlights that Romania's journey within the EU continues to be shaped by a complex interplay of historical legacies, evolving national identity, and the persistent East-West divide (Volintiru et al. 2024).

3.2 | Serbia

Serbia's current position in Europe and relationship with the EU is deeply intertwined with its geopolitical identity and history. Serbia is not a part of Schengen, the EU or NATO, but holds differing views toward each. Serbia positions itself with a "four pillars" foreign policy, maintaining good relations with the United States, Russia, and China, alongside its stated goal of EU membership (Guzina 2023). This balancing act is often articulated through the narrative of Serbia being a unique geographic and political "bridge" between East and West, a stance that includes a principle of military neutrality toward both NATO and Russia. However, the 1999 NATO bombing of Serbia and the subsequent recognition of Kosovo's independence by many Euro-Atlantic powers in 2008, has considerably strained Serbia's relationship with Western and European institutions like NATO, but also the EU (Savić 2014).

Despite the EU's 2003 promise that all Western Balkan states would become an integral part of Europe, Serbia's accession process, as a formal candidate since 2012, has been slow and uncertain (Vukasović 2025). Following years of limited progress, after 2017, the European Commission adopted a more geopolitical approach to enlargement, framing it as being in the EU's "vital geopolitical self-interest" to advance accession more decisively and counter the increasing influence of other powers like Russia and China in the Western Balkans (Petrovic and Tzifakis 2021). However, this shift in discourse has not significantly accelerated the process, partly due to internal divisions among EU member states and stricter requirements, and the requirement for candidate countries to urgently resolve bilateral disputes prior to accession.

The most significant of these disputes is the unresolved status of Kosovo. Serbia views Kosovo as a sacred territory, the historical and cultural heartland of the Serbian nation, based on historical and identity narratives (Subotic 2011). The EU has pressured Serbia on this issue, making it a de facto condition for accession, a pressure that has fueled significant public Euroscepticism in Serbia, distinguishing it from other Western Balkan countries (Stanojević et al. 2023). This complex interplay between Serbia's geopolitical balancing, its unresolved territorial claims over Kosovo, and a slow, conditional EU path contributes to a state of "in-betweenness" for Serbia (Vukasović 2025). In social

psychological terms, this reflects a profound identity crisis and foreign policy anxiety, where the process of Europeanization is seen as diverging from core national identity interests, often leading to a hybrid foreign policy and a seeming incompatibility between European and Serbian identity (Obradović and Sheehy-Skeffington 2020; Subotić 2016).

3.3 | Türkiye

Türkiye's geopolitical positioning in relation to Europe and the EU has long been characterized by ambivalence, shaped by both strategic considerations and contested identity narratives on both sides. Historically, Turkish political elites promoted a Western-oriented identity by framing Türkiye as a "bridge" between East and West (Yanık 2009). This metaphor has served not only as a geopolitical strategy but also as a search for international recognition, emphasizing Türkiye's hybrid or dual identity as "both Eastern and Western" (Rumelili and Suleymanoglu-Kurum 2017; Yanık 2009). It symbolized civilizational and geopolitical alignment with Europe, while simultaneously rejecting associations with the Middle East (Bilgin 2004) and distancing the country from its Ottoman past (Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm and Gençkal Eroler 2023). For instance, NATO membership in 1952 was perceived by the Turkish elites as formal entry into the Western political order (Bilgin 2004).

Yet this self-positioning has always been dialogically shaped by Europe's own perceptions of Türkiye, which have oscillated between strategic partnership (e.g., the 2016 refugee deal) and cultural exclusion. While Türkiye has been an official EU candidate since 1999, accession talks have stalled amid debates over democratic backsliding, cultural incompatibility, and the boundaries of European identity. European discourses have simultaneously instrumentalized Türkiye as a "model" for the Muslim world (Aydın-Düzgit et al. 2020) while reinforcing symbolic boundaries that frame Türkiye as "not quite European." These "model country" narratives draw on enduring neo-orientalist legacies, constructing Europe as secular, rational, and modern in contrast to Türkiye's Islamic identity, which is often considered in European discourse as essentially incompatible with democracy (Aydın-Düzgit et al. 2020).

In the past decade, national identity discourse in Türkiye has shifted, moving away from Eurocentric alignment toward a more Islamic or anti-Western orientation (Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm and Gençkal Eroler 2023). This has been accompanied by a revival of "neo-Ottomanism", a reimagining of national identity grounded in Ottoman rather than European historical sources (Tokdoğan 2024), and is described by some scholars as a process of "de-Europeanization" (Atmaca and Torun 2021). This dynamic illustrates how Turkish and European identities co-construct each other within a shifting international order. Accordingly, identification with national or European categories must be understood against the background of these geopolitical transformations.

Each of these countries' relationship to Europe emphasizes an "in-betweenness" (East vs. West) that is characteristic of how countries denoted as "Balkan" have historically been positioned within European discourse (e.g., Todorova 1997). While Romania and Türkiye are both members of NATO, Romania is the only country that is part of the EU (and a partial member of Schengen), affording it a potential level of political recognition as European. By analyzing whether geopolitical, economic, and cultural factors influence the construction of Europe (Study 1), we can examine the role of these factors in self- and other-stereotyping (Study 2), and the geopolitical impact of positive recognition as European by representative others (Study 3).

4 | The Present Research

To examine how geopolitical histories shape the symbolic boundaries of Europe and their psychological consequences, we present three interconnected studies that systematically investigate the dialogical nature of (European) identification. These studies explore how claims to, and recognition of, group representativeness are informed by geopolitical contexts, moving from the construction of symbolic boundaries to their internalization and political implications.

Study 1 establishes the foundational question of categorization: whose claims to Europeanness are recognized, and what criteria inform these judgments? By examining how participants from Romania, Serbia, and Türkiye construct the category "European" in open-ended responses, we test whether geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geocultural factors shape social psychological categorization processes. Study 1 reveals which countries are positioned as most and least European, and the underlying logic that supports these hierarchies.

Study 2 examines the psychological internalization of these geopolitical hierarchies. If certain groups are consistently positioned as more "European" than others, how does this asymmetry shape self- and other-perceptions? Using the most European country identified in Study 1 (Germany) as a comparison point, we investigate whether participants from our three focal countries exhibit stereotype patterns in open-ended response that are consistent with status differences within the European context. Drawing on the stereotype content model (Fiske et al. 2002), we investigate whether participants attribute warmth and competence to ingroups and outgroups in ways that reflect perceived status differences within the European context, demonstrating the psychological consequences of categorization.

Study 3 addresses the critical "so what" question: what are the geopolitical consequences of recognition or non-recognition by more representative European others? Through an experimental manipulation of German perceptions of each target country's Europeanness, we examine whether positive or negative recognition affects attitudes toward European institutions (EU, NATO, Schengen) and cooperative policies. By drawing on the participant generated data from Studies 1 and 2, this final study tests our central theoretical claim that recognition by more powerful and representative subgroups has tangible political implications for international cooperation and institutional support.

Together, these studies examine the full dialogical cycle we theorize: how geopolitical conditions shape categorization (Study 1), how these categorizations become psychologically internalized (Study 2), and how recognition dynamics based on these cate-

gorizations influence political attitudes and behaviors (Study 3). The progression from social categorization to stereotype content to political consequences allows us to demonstrate the mutually reinforcing relationship between geopolitical positioning and psychological recognition in defining European boundaries.

Our focus on Romania, Serbia, and Türkiye provides strategic variation in geopolitical positioning relative to European institutions, allowing us to examine how different levels of formal inclusion (EU membership, NATO membership, candidate status) interact with symbolic recognition processes. Each country represents a different point on the trajectory of European "integration," enabling us to assess how formal recognition (through institutional membership) interacts with psychological recognition processes across diverse geopolitical contexts.

We use an existing dataset, part of which was published in Obradović et al. (2024). The data used here have not been published elsewhere. Obradović et al. (2024) presents detailed information on methods, which will not be reiterated in this paper. Instead, we will present the main information necessary to understand each study.

5 | Study 1

To first establish whether geopolitical positioning shapes the social psychological construction of a superordinate identity, Study 1 asks whether elements of geopolitics, geoeconomics, and geoculture feature in the way participants in Romania, Serbia, and Türkiye explain which countries they consider more or less European.

5.1 | Method

5.1.1 | Participants

Three hundred seventy-four participants from Romania, Serbia, and Türkiye took part in Study 1. One hundred ninety-eight participants from Romania, (M_{age} = 37.98, SD_{age} = 13.84; n_{female} = 111), 90 from Serbia (M_{age} = 22.28, SD_{age} = 4.92; n_{female} = 65), and 86 from Türkiye (M_{age} = 22.38, SD_{age} = 1.68; n_{female} = 65).

5.1.2 | Procedure

At the beginning of Study 1, all participants were asked to select the five "most" and five "least" European countries from a list of 51 countries in total (for the full list see Supporting Information, Table S1 and Study 1 prompts). Options included all the countries and autonomous provinces with territory on the continent of Europe to be as inclusive as possible in the first step of the study, enabling participants to select from as wide a range as possible. Participants were also asked to rank their own country by assigning it a numeric value ranging from 1 to 44 (the official number of sovereign states within Europe). After each question, participants were asked to explain the reasoning for their ranking using an open-ended text box.

5.1.3 | Analysis

Our theoretically informed analysis focused on examining if, and how, geopolitics, geoeconomics, and geoculture permeated participants' construction of the social category of Europe. Therefore, after noting the "most" and "least" European countries identified across the samples, we analyzed the open-ended responses to identify common patterns. We did this separately for each sample. We followed a directed content analysis approach (Hseih and Shannon 2005), used to analyze textual data where existing research guides the initial coding process. In our case, this entailed developing a codebook and instructions (Table S2) that focused on capturing what we consider the "objective realities" that might underpin why a country is more or less European. This codebook was supplied to three research assistants who were native speakers of Romanian, Serbian, or Turkish. They analyzed each set of responses (most/least/own) separately, applying the codebook and developing new codes. The coded data, including new codes, was then reviewed and discussed by the authors of the paper to ensure codes were appropriately applied across the datasets, and infrequent codes (this varied across the three datasets due to sample size) were excluded from the final codebook.

5.2 | Results and Discussion

We first present the rankings before discussing the open-ended responses. Table 1 below shows the three countries most frequently ranked as 1st by participants when selecting their five most, and five least, European countries, as well as the median of own country ranking.

Germany emerged as the most European country across all three datasets (see Table 1), with over 75% of participants in each sample including it among their five most European countries (See Table S3 for total percentages of how many participants included each country as one of their five most/least European). There was more variety in the "least" European ranking, which seems to reflect regional geopolitics more than a European-wide consensus. For Romania, this was Moldova (13.6%, followed by Russia, 12.1%), for Serbia it was Kosovo (16.7%, followed by Kazakhstan, 15.6%), and for Türkiye it was Türkiye itself (26.7%, followed by Kazakhstan, 9.3%). The open-ended responses as to why Kosovo was the least European tended to focus on the point that Kosovo was not a country in Europe, highlighting the unresolved status of the region and its continued significance for Serbian identity and geopolitics (Subotic 2011). For this reason, we focused on the second-most-ranked country (Kazakhstan) for Serbia to capture why countries recognized *as countries* were perceived as less European. We also did so for Türkiye, to enable us to both examine why other countries are seen as "less" European, alongside why one's own was ranked where it was.

Across the three countries, there were also similarities in what attributes participants drew on to justify which countries they perceived as more/less European (see Table 2).

We find both economy and politics in responses explaining why countries were selected as 'most' and 'least' European as well as in justifying the ranking of one's own country. Similarly, an

TABLE 1 | Rankings of most, least, and own country's Europeanness.

Country	Most European	Least European	Median own country rank (1-44)
Romania	Germany (38.9%) France (9.1%) Italy (8.6%)	Moldova (13.6%) Russia (12.1%) Türkiye (9.6%)	30
Serbia	Germany (24.4%) France (23.3%) UK (18.9%)	Kosovo (16.7%) Kazakhstan (15.6%) Albania (14.4%)/Azerbaijan (14.4%)	30
Türkiye	Germany (34.9%) United Kingdom (14%) Netherlands (10.5%)	Türkiye (26.7%) Kazakhstan (9.3%) Armenia (7%) /Azerbaijan (7%)	30

emphasis on the (lack of) democratic governance was common for explaining one's own-country's relatively low rankings. In reviewing the responses to the "least" European we see, implicitly, what it means to be European; that is, civilized, developed, modern, free, and Western.

While there were trends across the datasets, Serbia and Türkiye showed more similarities in responses compared to Romania. An emphasis on mentality, culture, and geography, which contrast the East and the West within Europe, was present in both countries but not in the Romanian data. Instead, Romanian participants' responses across the categories focused more on European values related to democracy, economic prosperity and governance, supporting previous findings of how Romanian's understanding of European identity is primarily a civic one (Frunzaru and Corbu 2011). This contrasts with Serbian and Turkish participants who anchored Europeanness firmly in Western nations and positioned those aligned with the East as "not there yet." Participants conveyed this through references that marked least European countries as well as their own country as lagging behind, geographically distant, or lower in status relative to Western Europe ("a lot of work left to (reach) that famous Europe," "far from a European understanding of democracy," "adequate level"). These responses highlight a paradox; on the one hand they show both an acceptance and internalization of Europeanness as a historical achievement, something that a nation *becomes*, rather than is, on the other hand, this category is more essentialized, where "becoming" European entails not only political and economic transformation, but also cultural and psychological. This paradox shows the clear interlinking between geopolitical positioning and psychological group representativeness.

In sum, Study 1 supports the idea of Europe as a "Western" project, captured by the dichotomy between "developed" and "developing," found in each country, and the dichotomy between the explicitly "civilized" and the implicit uncivilized found in the data from Serbia and Türkiye (Diez 2004; Favell 2022). This distinction between Romania on the one hand, and Serbia and Türkiye on the other, we consider a reflection of where they are on the "integration" pathway, with Romania having gained official recognition as European through its geopolitical and geoeconomic inclusion in the EU. Interestingly, we also see the internalization of these views through the presence of "domestic orientalism" with reference to ingroup members as part of the "problem" (Buchowski 2006). Study 2 examines the issue of self-stereotyping in more detail.

6 | Study 2

Study 1 demonstrated that geopolitical and economic forces shape who is recognized as the most European. Study 2 examines the consequences of this by asking whether the power asymmetries within the category Europe are internalized. We do so by exploring the intergroup stereotypes that emerge when Romanians, Serbs, and Turks are asked to compare themselves to Germans, the "most" European country, as identified in Study 1. The stereotype content model (hereafter "SCM," Fiske et al. 2002) becomes a useful tool for considering how identification processes impact intergroup perceptions. The SCM states that intergroup stereotypes stem from perceived competition (predicting warmth) and perceived status (predicting competition). Warmth refers to the perceived intentions of a group, its trustworthiness, friendliness, cooperation, and empathy. Competence is associated with capability, intelligence, efficiency, agency, and success (Cuddy et al. 2009). The content of a group stereotype is derived from perceptions of that group's status and competition with the perceiver's group. On a national level, this content can lead to a tendency toward outgroup favoritism over ingroup favoritism in terms of positive characteristics and traits (Gligorić et al. 2025; Swindle et al. 2019). As such, the SCM provides us with a useful tool for examining if, and how, relevant others shape our understanding of our identities and how geopolitical histories might permeate understandings of status relations between groups in a shared context.

6.1 | Method

6.1.1 | Participants

There were 1255 participants in total from three samples: Romanian, Serbian, and Turkish citizens. Romanian sample had 698 participants ($M_{age} = 37.94$, $SD_{age} = 12.20$; $n_{female} = 364$), the Serbian sample had 296 participants ($M_{age} = 30.09$, $SD_{age} = 12.43$; $n_{female} = 204$) and the Turkish sample had 261 participants ($M_{age} = 31.29$, $SD_{age} = 11.23$; $n_{female} = 141$).

TABLE 2 | Attributes of most, least European, and own country.

Category/Country	Attributes	Example quotes
Most European (Germany in all countries)		
Romania	Economy	"*They have strong economy, high purchasing power and plenty of jobs,*" "*The economy is strong, there are good living conditions and high quality of life*"
	Development	*"They are very well developed in all respects"*
	Education	*"The education system is modern and well structured,"* "*The educational system is very advanced"*
	Tourism	*"These countries are most visited"*
Serbia	Governance and political system	*"Political development of the country, taking into account their laws (at a more general level), immigration policy, health system"*
	History/Culture	*"Historically very significant for the spread of civilization in Europe and the spread of their philosophy,"* "*They are the most civilized"*
	Intuition	*"I think everyone usually associates Europe with these countries"*
Türkiye	Economy	*"Comparing their living standards with my own country, I think they are more developed"*
	Education	*"The word European evokes countries with a high level of education"*
	Culture	*"In my view, they are the countries that keep civilization alive the most in terms of culture, history and lifestyle"*
	Intuition	*"Always, when a topic about Europe is talked about, these countries are mentioned"*
Least European		
Romania (Moldova)	Economy	*"There is much poverty and the economy is weak"*
	Development	*"They are the least developed in Europe"*
	Governance and political system	*"The governance is weak and corrupt and people are poor,"* "*The politics is totalitarian, citizens are controlled by the state"*
	Human and civil rights	*"People's rights are not respected,"* "*There is no freedom of speech"*
Serbia (Kazakhstan)	Development	*"They're not developed enough to be considered properly European"*
	Culture	*"The culture of these countries is more Eastern than European"*
	Geography	*These countries sit on the border between Europe and Asia"*
Türkiye (Kazakhstan)	Development	"*Because I don't see their level of development enough*"
	Culture and mentality	*"(These countries are) more distant from civilization, unable to adapt their culture to modern life, living in a more oriental style"*
	Geography	*"Because I think these are countries far from the European continent"*
Own country		
Romania	Economy	*"The economy is not developed enough,"* "*There are few and low paid jobs"*
	Development	*"Romania is still a developing country"*
	Education	*"The educational system is old and underfinanced,"* "*There are many uneducated people"*
	Governance	*"Politicians are corrupt and only take care of themselves, meanwhile people suffer in poverty"* "*The governance is weak, inept and leaders change frequently"*
Serbia	Economy	*"Not developed enough, economically speaking"*
	Governance and political system	*"Political ties with non-European countries might make it a little less European"*
	Mentality	*"The view of the world is quite different in my country in relation to how I imagine or see the European [view]"*

(Continues)

TABLE 2 | (Continued)

Own country		
	Transition/ Trajectory	*"We have a lot of work left to (reach) that famous Europe"*
Türkiye	Economy	*"The purchasing power is really low. Manufacturing is very low. I would say the most important reason is definitely economic"*
	Development	*"I do not see my country at an adequate level of development"*
	Governance and political system	*"The autocratic administrative structure is far from a European understanding of democracy"*
	Culture and mentality	*"I think that our culture and family structure do not fit the 'European' stereotype"*

6.1.2 | Procedure

At the beginning of the study, participants were told, "This study looks at how different countries in Europe perceive what it means to be European" (followed by information about participation and the consent form). This implicitly primed a focus on Europe. Participants were then asked to (1) "Please write down six attributes that you think are characteristic of Romanians/Serbs/Turks in comparison to Germans. Try to include at least two positive and two negative," followed by (2) the same question but asking them to generate attributes characteristic of Germans vis-à-vis their own ingroup.

6.1.3 | Analysis

Study 2 utilized a summative content analysis approach (Hseih and Shannon 2005). Unlike directed content analysis, summative content analysis begins by quantifying the data, in our case counting the references to different attributes generated for each group. Three research assistants helped with this first task. The authors then reviewed the 10 most frequently mentioned attributes for each group and interpreted them through the lens of the stereotype content model.

6.2 | Results and Discussion

The attributes generated by participants evidence a similar tend across all countries (see Table 3 below); Germans are perceived as component but less warm, and one's own group is perceived as warmer, but less competent.

These responses followed the logic of the stereotype content model, meaning participants attributed positive and negative values to the ingroup and outgroup in ways that reflected perceptions of Germans as a high-status group vis-à-vis one's own country within the context of Europe and Europeaness. Many of the characteristics and attributes identified were deemed to be representative of what it means to be European, as identified in Study 1. Namely, the positive outgroup stereotypes reflected competence and determination (alongside negative interpersonal attributes ascribed to the outgroup), where being disciplined, hard-working and organized can help explain why Western European countries are developmentally progressing ahead of non-Western countries. Conversely, the negative stereotypes of the ingroup highlighted an internalization of the *lack of* characteristics aligned to prototypical Europeanness, where the laziness, corruption, and neglectfulness might in turn function to explain why these countries are "lagging behind" their Western counterparts.

7 | Study 3

In this final study, we move to the "so what" question underpinning this paper. So what if geopolitical contexts constrain psychological claims to representativeness in a superordinate group such as Europe? Some scholars would argue that this undermines the European identity project, as a shared common ingroup is key to resolving intergroup tensions (e.g., Dovidio et al. 2009). While others would argue that the inherent process through which this category has been given meaning, makes the European identity project unequal and inaccessible to the "East" from the start (e.g., IPM Europeans, Wenzel et al. 2008). By considering the dialogical nature of identification we place emphasis on the potential role that recognition can play for making superordinate identities more accessible. Namely, if geopolitical contexts make some groups more European than others, then those more European are in a position to expand, or contract, the boundaries of the group by either affording, or denying, recognition of belonging to groups on the periphery. In this final study, we therefore examine if, and how, recognition of group representativeness impacts geopolitical attitudes toward superordinate institutions that aim to facilitate intergroup cooperation (EU, NATO, Schengen) and reflect policies that may increase a superordinate group identity. We conducted this study using an exploratory approach, with no specific a priori hypotheses. As such, we explored possible differences across conditions, countries, and variables.

7.1 | Method

7.1.1 | Participants

We ran a power analysis using G*Power, which showed that 756 participants (252 per condition across three conditions) were needed to achieve 0.95 power to detect a medium effect size (0.25) at a 0.05 alpha level. There were 573 participants in total from three samples; 155 Romanian participants (M_{age} = 37.94, SD_{age} =

TABLE 3 | Most common positive and negative attributes of ingroup and outgroup (Germans).

Group	Most common attributes
Positive attributes: Ingroup [Own Country]	
Romania	Hospitable, hard-working, industrious, welcoming, friendly, and warm
Serbia	Hospitable, social, friendly, and polite
Türkiye	Friendly, warm, helpful, sincere, hospitable, comfortable
Negative attributes: Ingroup [Own Country]	
Romania	Lazy, neglectful, and corrupt
Serbia	Lazy, unorganized, and stubborn
Türkiye	Lazy and undisciplined
Positive attributes: Outgroup [Germany]	
Romania	Punctual, serious, fair, hard-working, and organized
Serbia	Disciplined, hard-working, and organized
Türkiye	Disciplined, hard-working, punctual, honest, and organized
Negative attributes: Outgroup [Germany]	
Romania	Cold, strict, egocentric, and racist
Serbia	Cold, arrogant, and reserved
Türkiye	Cold, normative, cold-blooded, and individualist

12.20; $n_{female} = 81$), 226 Serbian participants ($M_{age} = 30.09$, $SD_{age} = 12.43$; $n_{female} = 156$) and 192 Turkish participants ($M_{age} = 31.29$, $SD_{age} = 11.23$; $n_{female} = 104$).

7.1.2 | Procedure

Based on Study 1's finding that Germany is the "most" European country, we designed an experiment framing Germany's perception of the target group as either very European (positive condition), not very European (negative condition), or neutral (control condition) that did not mention Germany. Using positive and negative ingroup characteristics from Study 2, we created vignettes for each condition. All participants were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions. In the experimental conditions, participants were asked to read a vignette that told them that:

"Previous findings of this larger project on Europeanness have found that in a survey conducted in Germany, when asked how European people from Romania/Serbia/Türkiye are, the majority of participants answered either 'very European' or 'somewhat European' [in the positive condition] or 'not at all European' or 'not very European' [in the negative condition]. When asked to provide descriptions of what characterized these countries, common responses included [three positive attributes per country] [in the positive condition] [three negative attributes per country] [in the negative condition]."

In the control condition, participants read that "This study is part of a larger and ongoing research program on perspectives on Europeanness among people in Europe. The findings so far indicate that this category is perceived as diverse and complex, informed by the many different countries that make up Europe."

After reading the vignettes, all participants were asked to answer a host of randomized questions (most reported elsewhere; Obradović et al. 2024, see also Supporting Information for Study 3 design). Eight items about geopolitical attitudes relevant to this study were:

Membership: Three questions were asked about participants' political support for EU, Schengen, and NATO membership; "Please indicate to what extent you personally think that Romania/Serbia/Türkiye should be a member of the following political union: EU/Schengen/NATO."

Enlargement: Three questions were asked about participants' attitudes toward the enlargement of EU, Schengen, and NATO; "Please indicate to what extent you think that the following political unions should expand to include more members (regardless of whether your country is a member of not): EU/Schengen/NATO."

Political influence: One question asked participants to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "The EU is a positive influence on Türkiye/Serbia/Romania."

Refugee crisis: Four items asked participants about the extent to which European countries should cooperate on addressing the refugee crisis facing Europe (e.g., "I think that all nations of Europe should cooperate to manage the refugee crisis" and "We in Serbia/Romania/Turkey should engage in joint action with other

TABLE 4 | Overall MANOVA results for each country.

Participant group	*N*	*df*	*Wilks' Λ*	*F*	*p*
Romania	191	16,362	0.86	1.7356	.049
Serbia	226	16,432	0.84	2.4341	.002
Türkiye	152	16,284	0.89	1.1009	.035

European countries even if this implies we suffer economic losses in the short-run."

All items were on a 7-point scale (1: strongly disagree, 7: strongly agree). The full details on vignettes, manipulation checks and questions can be found in Supporting Information.

7.2 | Results and Discussion

Means, standard deviations, and correlations by conditions for each country are presented in Table S4. We conducted a MANOVA for each country, and results are presented in Table 4. The independent variables are the three conditions (positive, negative, and neutral). The dependent variables were eight variables related to geopolitical attitudes.

7.2.1 | Geopolitical Attitudes

There were significant differences between the conditions in participants' geopolitical attitudes toward supporting membership of the EU, NATO, and Schengen (see Table 5 below). Romanian participants reported significantly stronger support for EU membership, NATO membership and Schengen membership in the positive condition compared to the neutral condition. Similarly, for Serbian participants, there was significantly stronger support for EU membership and Schengen membership in the positive condition compared to the neutral condition; however, there was no significant effect of condition on support for NATO membership. This is unsurprising given Serbia's history with NATO and its bombing of the country in 1999. Serbian participants also reported significantly weaker political support for EU and Schengen membership in the negative compared to the positive condition. The conditions had no significant effect on Turkish participants' support of EU, NATO, or Schengen membership.

There were significant conditional differences in support for the enlargement of the EU and Schengen, but not NATO. Only Romanian and Serbian participants reported significantly greater support for Schengen enlargement in the positive compared to the neutral condition. Serbian participants also reported significantly greater support for EU enlargement in the positive versus neutral condition and significantly weaker support for EU enlargement in the negative condition compared to the positive conditions. The conditions had no significant effect on Turkish participants' support of EU, NATO, or Schengen enlargement.

In terms of whether the EU is a positive influence on each nation, there were no significant differences between the conditions for either Turkish or Romanian participants. For Serbian participants, there was significantly greater belief that the political influence of the EU on Serbia was more positive in the positive condition compared to the neutral condition and a more negative influence on Serbia in the negative, compared to positive condition.

Finally, there was substantial variation in the effects of the conditions on support for European cooperation to address the refugee crisis. As with other variables, there were no significant differences between the conditions for Turkish participants. Among Romanian participants, support was significantly lower in the negative condition than the positive condition. For Serbian participants, there were significant differences across all conditions: those in the negative condition reported significantly lower support for refugees compared to participants in both the positive and neutral conditions.

The findings from Study 3 evidence the geopolitical impact of recognition of representativeness in superordinate group contexts. Positive recognition created more support for geopolitical cooperation through various supranational entities such as the EU, NATO, and Schengen, while negative/non-recognition created more resistance toward supranational entities and cooperation to address shared crises.

These findings varied across countries, evidencing the importance of contextual sensitivity to how different countries' geopolitical histories play into shaping responses to positive or negative recognition in the context of Europe. In the case of Romania, for example, its existing memberships (EU and NATO) might act as a buffer against negative recognition by one subgroup in a context where it has formal recognition of its Europeanness. Regarding Serbia its history with NATO is relevant for understanding the persisting negative attitudes towards the organization, regardless of recognition (Savić 2014). In the case of Türkiye, the absence of any effect on attitudes is noteworthy and may indicate a broader process of "de-Europeanization" in public opinion (Atmaca and Torun 2022; Tokdoğan 2024).

8 | General Discussion

The present paper set out to contribute to the developing field of geopolitical psychology by examining how the symbolic boundaries of Europe and contemporary notions of Europeanness are defined by the intersection of geopolitics, geoeconomics, and geoculture, and the psychological, social, and political implications of these boundaries.

To do this, we proposed a multidimensional theoretical framework that considers how power and context inform the dialogicality of identities, their meanings, and boundaries. We offered an expanded conceptualization of social identification as a process informed by both claims to, and recognition of, group membership, arguing that the objective conditions of geopolitics can inform perceptions of social categories in ways that are often overlooked by psychological models of categorization and identification. We applied this framework across three studies to examine how the geopolitics, economics, and culture inform the construction of the social category of Europe (Study 1), how these "objective realities" shape processes of self- and other-stereotyping (Study 2), and how positive recognition from more "European" others impact geopolitical attitudes (Study 3).

TABLE 5 | Geopolitical attitudes: Mean comparisons between the conditions for each country.

Geopolitical variables	*df*	*F*	η_p^2	*p*	Differences between meta-perception conditions
			Romanian participants		
Political Support for EU membership	2189	3.34	0.03	.04	Positive > Neutral ($M_{difference} = 0.71$, $p = .033$)
Political Support for NATO membership	2189	3.61	0.04	.03	Positive > Neutral ($M_{difference} = 0.77$, $p = .022$)
Political Support for Schengen membership	2189	4.93	0.50	.008	Positive > Neutral ($M_{difference} = 0.77$, $p = .023$)
Political Support for EU enlargement	2189	1.944	0.20	.15	—
Political Support for NATO enlargement	2189	0.381	0.004	.68	—
Political Support for Schengen enlargement	2188	2.961	0.03	.05	Positive > Neutral ($M_{difference} = 0.63$, $p = .058$)
Political Influence of the EU	2189	1.623	0.02	.20	
Political Support for Refugees	2189	3.491	0.04	.032	Negative < Positive ($M_{difference} = 0.71$, $p = .041$)
			Serbian participants		
Political Support for EU membership	2223	6.29	0.05	.002	Positive > Neutral ($M_{difference} = 1.10$, $p = .008$) Negative < Positive ($M_{difference} = 1.31$, $p = .014$)
Political Support for NATO membership	2223	0.356	0.003	.70	—
Political Support for Schengen membership	2223	3.576	0.03	.03	Positive > Neutral ($M_{difference} = 0.75$, $p = .040$) Negative < Positive ($M_{difference} = 0.77$, $p = .054$)
Political Support for EU enlargement	2223	4.715	0.04	.01	Positive > Neutral ($M_{difference} = 0.91$, $p = .030$) Negative < Positive ($M_{difference} = 1.12$, $p = .010$)
Political Support for NATO enlargement	2223	1.054	0.01	.35	—
Political Support for Schengen enlargement	2223	3.181	0.03	.04	Negative < Positive ($M_{difference} = 0.75$, $p = .053$)
Political Influence of the EU	2223	9.792	0.08	<.001	Positive > Neutral ($M_{difference} = 1.16$, $p = 0.002$) Negative < Positive ($M_{difference} = 1.53$, $p < .001$)
Political Support for Refugees	2223	10.02	0.08	<.001	Negative < Positive ($M_{difference} = 1.07$, $p < 0.001$) Negative < Neutral ($M_{difference} = 0.61$, $p = .009$)
			Turkish participants		
Political Support for EU membership	2152	0.70	0.01	.50	—
Political Support for NATO membership	2152	0.521	0.01	.60	—
Political Support for Schengen membership	2150	1.227	0.002	.30	—
Political Support for EU enlargement	2151	1.268	0.02	.28	—
Political Support for NATO enlargement	2152	1.874	0.02	.16	—
Political Support for Schengen enlargement	2152	1.038	0.01	.36	—
Political Influence of the EU	2152	1.246	0.02	.29	—
Political Support for Refugees	2152	0.19	0.002	.83	—

Study 1 evidenced the idea of Europe as a "Western" project, establishing that geopolitical positioning shapes the social psychological construction of a superordinate identity. This echoes the work of critical scholars (e.g., Fabian 2014; Vukasović 2025) who highlight how Western articulation of geopolitics has successfully constructed temporality as linear, denying non-Western others a contemporary status vis-à-vis the West, perpetuating discourses and conceptions of "developing" nations as "not yet there" (Mignolo 2013). In this way, Western nations have set the trajectory for both the geopolitical and symbolic "Europe," and non-Western nations need to follow this trajectory to arrive at a place of being recognized as civilized, developed and ultimately, European (Cebeci 2025).

Study 2 evidences the implications of the internalization of Europe as a Western project, where acceptance of low-status positionality among non-Western countries triggered outgroup favoritism, following the theoretical claims of the stereotype content model (Cuddy et al. 2009; Fiske et al. 2002) and previous research (Gligorić et al. 2025; Swindle et al. 2019). A recent 45-country study confirms this pattern, and its wider links to wider macroeconomic inequalities (Gligorić et al. 2025). As we show elsewhere (Obradović et al. 2024), when in- and out-group attitudes are then assessed in terms of how reflective they are of the superordinate category (European), through measuring "relative prototypicality," we find that it correlates positively with identification, both at the national and European level. In other words, alignment between group attributes becomes important for not only feeling a sense of belonging to the European community, but also feeling better about one's national identity, hinting at the relevance of recognition mechanisms for group membership.

Study 3 experimentally tested the geopolitical impact of positive recognition as European by representative others. While we find important variations between countries, Study 3 overall demonstrates that positive recognition can create more positive geopolitical attitudes toward various European supranational organizations. It is noteworthy, however, that most of these positive effects were identified either in Romania, Serbia or both. Türkiye emerges as a significant outlier, where the experimental manipulation did very little to change attitudes. The lack of effect in Türkiye can be situated within the broader context of Türkiye's recent geopolitical reorientation, often described as de-Europeanization (Atmaca and Torun 2022). As Türkiye distances itself from a European trajectory and increasingly turns toward the Muslim or non-Western world - exemplified by neo-Ottomanist discourses (Tokdoğan 2024) - the category "European" remains symbolically powerful, particularly in shaping internal debates about national identity. Historically, Turkish national identity has been defined by a tension between Westernization as a foundational ideal and more recent efforts to revive Ottoman–Islamic heritage. While our findings do not directly assess these macro-level dynamics, the internalized self-stereotyping observed, especially perceptions of a developmental or cultural gap vis-à-vis Europe, can be understood as reflecting this tension. These symbolic hierarchies continue to influence how national belonging is articulated and contested within Türkiye.

The Serbian sample, in contrast, emerged as the most malleable in terms of how positive versus negative recognition impacted participants. With the exception of attitudes toward NATO, positive and negative recognition mattered to either improve or worsen geopolitical attitudes toward the EU, Schengen and geopolitical cooperation. In other words, unlike in Romania, where positive recognition mattered, but negative recognition had less of an effect, in Serbia both mattered. This difference can be explained both by Serbia's internal geopolitics, and its official status in Europe as a candidate EU member-state. Namely, Serbia's "four pillars" foreign policy strategy entails a delicate balancing act between competing geopolitical forces, of which the EU is one. In much public discourse on the country's politics, this balancing act is perceived as a fragile one, often framed in relation to which strategic partner will do less harm to Serbian identity and culture (Obradović and Bowe 2021). As recent research finds national attachment, and concerns around sovereignty, to be key driving forces behind rising Euroscepticism (Stanojević et al. 2023), recognition that Serbia is already European enough might alleviate some of the symbolic threat associated with EU integration.

With regards to Romania, the absence of a negative impact in the negative condition signals that Romania's EU membership might to some extent act as "objective reality" that buffers against the negative impact of denied recognition of belonging in Europe. Interestingly, with regard to attitudes toward enlargement, the position condition only had an impact on enlargement of the entity to which Romania is not yet a full member: Schengen, signaling that positive recognition is relevant when self-interests are at stake.

Through these studies, we see the interplay of identity and group membership and geopolitics, geoeconomics, and geoculture. We see how broader geopolitical understandings of how countries are perceived can influence our own understanding of our identities and the meaning of the categories we claim. Moreover, we see how identity and recognition (or nonrecognition) of our group membership by relevant others, often in positions of power and influence, can influence geopolitical attitudes if contextually relevant and tangible. Thus, it not only highlights the importance of a dialogical approach to understanding identity and group memberships but also stresses the significance of these dynamics for policymaking, as perceptions and recognition of representativeness can function to create more cooperative geopolitical attitudes.

8.1 | Limitations and Future Directions

The demographic characteristics of the samples limit claims to generalizability. While information on age and gender distribution was provided for participants from Romania, Serbia, and Türkiye, the studies did not account for other crucial societal segments such as class, religiosity, ethnicity, or country-specific internal dynamics. Given the paper's focus on how geopolitics, geoeconomics, and geoculture shape the symbolic boundaries of Europe, it could be expected that different groups within these societies might respond differently to concepts of

Europeanness, European identity, and recognition. Factors like level of contact with Europeans (real or symbolic), extent of travel, and foreign language skills could influence perceptions of Europe and responses to recognition, but these were not measured.

Study 3 exclusively used Germany as the "most prototypical group." This decision was empirically based on Study 1, which consistently identified Germany as the most perceived "European" country by participants from all three samples. However, this might limit the generalizability of the findings regarding recognition's impact. Perceptions and responses to recognition from other countries perceived as "more European" (e.g., France or Italy, also frequently identified as highly European in Study 1) might differ. The category "European" is not necessarily homogenous or reducible to a widely shared prototype (even if, in this paper, we see some commonality to attributes identified). Different countries might represent diverse aspects of what it means to be Europe. In addition, the reality of (lack of) recognition of one's country is hard to suppress, and experimental manipulations, even when well-designed, might not fully override these deeply embedded real-world. This could be a potential factor explaining why, in Study 3, positive recognition might not have worked for Turkish participants.

8.2 | Future Directions

Future studies could explore how self-, other-, and meta-stereotypes vary when different prototypical European countries are used as points of comparison. This would help assess whether symbolic boundaries of "Europe" shift depending on the comparative context.

Further work might also examine the perspectives of policy-makers, through surveys, interviews, or qualitative analysis of policy documents, public statements, and media discourse. As actors with greater access to symbolic and material resources, their boundary-making practices are crucial to understanding dominant representations. At the same time, future studies could investigate how individuals and groups exercise agency in resisting misrecognition, exploring how symbolic boundaries are contested through everyday and geopolitical encounters (e.g., how intergroup contact experiences might facilitate dialogue about category boundaries and (mis)recognition; see Vine and Greenwood 2021).

9 | Conclusion

In a time of growing geopolitical tensions and uncertainties, reclaiming the unifying role of supranational categories is crucial. The findings from our studies demonstrate how geopolitics and (social) psychological processes mutually constitute and influence each other in a cyclical pattern. Geopolitical histories shape the symbolic boundaries of the category Europe, constraining who is seen as more or less representative, and whose recognition in turn matters for being "seen" as part of the group. This recognition can have both positive and negative consequences for geopolitical attitudes, evidencing the crucial role that social psychological processes play in reacting and responding to geopolitical events on a national and supranational level.

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To be completed prior to publication.

Ethics Statement

All studies received ethical approval from the first author's previous institution (London School of Economics Research Ethics Committee).

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Open Science Framework at http://osf.io/u4w3z, reference number 10.17605/OSF.IO/U4W3Z.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.

Supporting Table S1: List of 51 countries and autonomous provinces on the continent of Europe that participants could select from. **Supporting Table S2**: Study 1 Codebook. **Supporting Table S3**: Percentage of people who listed each country at least once, as part of their most European five or least European five. **Supporting Table S4**: Means, standard deviations, and correlations by participant groups and conditions for all variables.