University of Chester

Author(s): Vera Slavtcheva-Petkova ; Sabina Mihelj

Title**:** Europe - a default or a dream? European identity formation among Bulgarian and English children

Date: 2012. Appeared online 21 November 2012

Originally published in: *Ethnicities*

Example citation: Slavtcheva-Petkova, V., & Mihelj, S. (2012). Europe - a default or a dream? European identity formation among Bulgarian and English children. *Ethnicities, 13*(5), 565-583. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1468796812465722

Version of item: Authors' post-print

Available at: http://hdl.handle.net/10034/552074

Europe – a default or a dream? European identity formation among Bulgarian and English children

Vera Slavtcheva-Petkova, University of Chester, UK

Vera Slavtcheva-Petkova, University of Chester, Department of Media, Room CKW150, Kingsway Buildings, Parkgate Road, Chester CH14BJ, UK. Email: v.petkova@chester.ac.uk

Sabina Mihelj, Loughborough University, UK

Abstract

This article examines the formation of European identity among children in two very different countries – the traditionally Eurosceptic Britain and the enthusiastic EU newcomer, Bulgaria. The paper revisits existing debates about the relationships between European identity, knowledge, and the political and historical context, paying particular attention to the meanings attached to Europe. It demonstrates that children who identify as European are more likely to see Europe in geographic terms, which facilitates the perception of the European identity as 'default'. In contrast, children who refuse to describe themselves as European see Europe as an exclusive political entity, associated with high standards and distant elites. These perceptions are significantly more common among Bulgarian children, who often depict Europe as a dream, and perceive the European identity as an ideal they aspire to reach. The article also shows how

ethnicity and the images of Europe influence the relationship between national and European identities.

Introduction

The European Union (EU) has expanded at an unprecedented pace from 12 member-states in 1994 to 27 in 2007. One of the main challenges enlargement has posed is the ever-increasing gap between the elites and the citizens or the so-called democratic or legitimacy deficit (Grundmann, 1999; Lord, 1998: 165). Recent events such as the painful negotiations over the latest EU treaty and the failed referenda in France and the Netherlands in 2005 suggest that, without a proper level of support from the people, the future of the European project becomes uncertain. It is therefore hardly a surprise that the past decades have seen a surge in empirical studies on popular support for EU integration, which examined the impact of factors ranging from values and national attachments to the perceived economic benefits of European integration (e.g. Deflem and Pampel, 1996; Gabel, 1998; Hewstone, 1986; Inglehart, 1977; Janssen, 1991). As the EU expanded to include the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, attention shifted to the new member-states. These provided an ideal laboratory for existing explanatory models, and for their elaboration (Christin, 2005; Cichowski, 2000; Tanasoiu and Colonescu, 2008).

While this body of research approaches European integration primarily as an economic and political process, literature published since the mid-1990s increasingly focuses on the social and cultural dimensions of Europeanization, including the formation of European identity (e.g. Breakwell and Lyons, 1996; Bruter, 2005; Cinnirella, 1996; Díez Medrano and Gutiérrez, 2001; Duchesne and Frognier, 1995; 2008). Several scholars (Bache and George, 2006; Beus, 2001; Decker, 2002) have also suggested that support for European integration, and hence the democratic legitimacy of the EU, is dependent on the development of a stronger collective attachment to Europe. Our article contributes to this body of work by examining the formation of European identity among children in Bulgaria and England. More specifically, our aim is twofold. First, we seek to clarify the relationships between European identification, knowledge (cognitive mobilization) and the political and historical context, paying particular attention to the meanings children attach to Europe. We argue that greater levels of cognitive mobilization or knowledge about Europe do not automatically imply stronger attachments to Europe. Rather, levels of identification with Europe depend on the meanings attached to Europe. These meanings, in turn, are shaped in part by the historical and political context. Second, we also investigate the relationship between European and national identity, focusing on the role of representations of Europe vis-à-vis the nation, as well as on links with ethnicity.

To achieve these aims, we draw on 174 semi-structured interviews with children aged 9–10, conducted in two different member-states: Bulgaria and the UK, more precisely one of its four nations – England. Given Bulgaria's enthusiastic embrace of European membership and England's notorious Euroscepticism, one would expect to

find higher levels of identification with Europe among Bulgarian children. Yet as our results demonstrate, this expectation is misleading: European identifications are actually considerably more common among English than Bulgarian children, despite the fact that Bulgarian children tend to be more knowledgeable about Europe and, in particular, the EU. These results lead us to revisit existing explanatory models of European identification along the lines outlined above.

The decision to conduct our study among children may seem unusual. Existing research on European identity focuses largely on adults (notable exceptions are Barrett, 2007 and Philippou, 2005), and one may also wonder whether children as young as 9 or 10 years old can really form a meaningful attachment to an abstract entity such as Europe. Yet existing studies by Barrett and his associates (for a summary see Barrett, 2007) have clearly demonstrated that by the age of 9 or 10 (and quite often much earlier) children already possess a national identity and many – 70% of the 10-year-olds in Barrett's (1996: 357–358) English sample – say they feel European as well. Barrett (1996: 363) also found 'a fundamental shift in children's awareness of the supranational group to which they belonged between six and ten years of age' since only 3 percent of the 6-year-olds in his sample defined themselves as European. Our study thus provides an insight into a decisive stage of European identity formation. This is not to say that the forms of European identification detected among children, and the factors determining them, will be immediately applicable to adults. European and national identities, along with similarly abstract forms of identification like ethnicity and kinship, tend to be more flexible and open to negotiation than for instance gender identities (cf. Jenkins, 2004: 62–65), and are thus more likely to change as children grow up. Nonetheless, it is

feasible to assume that these early forms of European identification, established during childhood, will be less flexible than those acquired later in life, and will thus exert a lasting impact. If we are to fully understand the key determinants that shape the formation of European identity on a mass level, research on children is therefore clearly indispensable.

Explaining European identity

Paradoxically, even though many studies of European identity are similar both theoretically – a majority draw on Tajfel's (1981) social identity and Turner et al.'s (1987) self-categorization theories (among others, Barrett, 1996; Breakwell and Lyons, 1996; Castano, 2004; Cinnirella, 1996) – and empirically – they tend to analyze the same Eurobarometer surveys – the conclusions they reach regarding the existence of European identity are often contradictory. Thus, some (Beetham and Lord, 1998: 29) argue that 'most commentators are agreed that a sense of European identity and loyalty is embryonic at best among the European electorate', while others (Bruter, 2005: 131) firmly believe that 'there is such thing as a European identity, which is certainly developed by a significant part of the European polity'. These disagreements stem not only from the different time periods in which research was conducted but also in part from the lack of agreement over the definition and measurement of European identity, in particular from the tendency to think of identity as a stable psychological entity or state, which, once developed, simply continues to exist. Yet as sociological and anthropological theories of identity emphasize, identity is not a fixed 'thing' that individuals or groups possess, but a discursively and socially constituted process or position (e.g. Jenkins, 2004; Lawler, 2008). In line with this, European identity should

not be conceptualized as a finished object or state, but as a fluctuating process dependent on diverse contextual factors (for a similar approach see Duchesne and Frognier, 2008). Identity is best operationalized, therefore, as a 'series of identifications' (Woodward, 2002: 5).

Empirical studies have examined a number of contextual factors that affect the process of European identification on a mass level. Inglehart's early research (1970; 1977) emphasized the importance of 'cognitive mobilization' and value orientations. Drawing on theories of modernization developed during the 1950s and the 1960s (e.g. Deutsch, 1961), Inglehart suggested that identifications with Europe, as well as support for European integration, is likely to be higher among those individuals who are more 'cognitively mobilized' – that is, who are able to relate to remote roles and situations, including a remote political community – and among individuals sharing 'postmaterialist' values, such as orientation to individual self-actualization, independence and intellectual fulfilment. Subsequent studies confirmed that the link between cognitive mobilization and European identification appears relatively robust, while the link with postmaterialist values does not (Díez Medrano and Gutiérrez, 2001; Duchesne and Frognier, 1995; Janssen, 1991).

Arguably, the operational definition of cognitive mobilization proposed by Inglehart and used in subsequent research is too narrowly focused on formal and political dimensions, and hence not entirely adequate if we want to capture the social and cultural aspects of European identity formation. When devising his analytical framework, Inglehart (1970: 47) limited the original concept of social mobilization (Deutsch, 1961) to 'the individual's capacity to receive and interpret messages relating

to a remote political community' and measured it using indicators such as exposure to the news media, level of education, and frequency of political discussions with friends. While not irrelevant, such indicators tell us little about the individual's ability to understand issues related to Europe, and restrict cognitive mobilization to the political domain – neither of which is particularly conducive to an inquiry into the social and cultural aspects of European identification. To make the argument about cognitive mobilization more directly relevant to the study of European identity, it is therefore advisable to devise a measurement more open to the diverse dimensions of individual knowledge about and understanding of Europe, which does not limit cognitive mobilization solely to political communication skills. This is what our study seeks to achieve.

It is tempting to assume that a high level of knowledge about Europe – or, more broadly, a high level of cognitive mobilization – will go hand-in-hand with a strong attachment to Europe. Yet as Eder (2009: 432–434) points out, the assumption that knowledge about Europe and familiarity with European symbols such as the flag or the hymn automatically imply the existence of European identification is misleading because it overlooks the impact of shared narratives and meanings. Whether or not higher levels of knowledge will give rise to European identifications depends on the 'content' of this knowledge – or, more specifically, on the nature of meanings attached to Europe.

Eder is not alone in emphasizing the importance of meanings in shaping identifications. Drawing on Turner's (1975) and Tajfel's (1981) social identity theory, Díez Medrano and Gutierrez (2001) argue that individuals who perceive Europe in

positive rather than negative terms will be more likely to identify as European. However, it is questionable whether positive images of Europe automatically lead to European identification. While social identity theory indeed maintains that individuals strive to attain a positive social identity, this does not necessarily mean they will immediately identify with the group they perceive in positive terms, or attempt to emulate its behaviour ('social mobility'). In endeavouring to attain a positive identity, they could also choose to enter into a competitive relationship with the higher-status group ('social competition'), or seek to improve one's own group status and image by changing the criteria for comparison with the higher-status group ('social creativity'). Furthermore, even when an individual chooses the route of social mobility, it is possible to envisage a situation where the positive identity is constructed as an ideal one should strive to attain, but has not yet achieved – which could potentially discourage the immediate adoption of the higher-status identity.

These diverse strategies of identity management suggest that the relationship between European identification and meanings cannot be understood fully if we restrict our analysis to the simple opposition between negative and positive meanings. One solution might lie in adopting a more encompassing typology of meanings of Europe, and distinguishing between 'civic' and 'cultural' components of European identity (Bruter, 2005). Although widely used in studies of national identity, such typologies are often criticized for being too crude to capture the variety of actual forms of collective identification and exclusion (Janmaat, 2006; Pehrson et al., 2009). In particular, when dealing with sample sizes that are amenable to qualitative analysis – which is the case in

our study – it is better to avoid starting with a rigidly defined typology of meanings, and instead devise a more nuanced one based on bottom-up analysis of materials.

Meanings, knowledge and identities are of course not formed in a vacuum, but are shaped by the particularities of the political, social and historical context. As Díez Medrano and Gutiérrez (2001) show in their examination of European identity formation in Spain, the historical trajectory and political developments after the death of Franco gave rise to a positive portrayal of Europe, which became associated with various economic and political gains, as well as with strength, modernization, democratization and peace. These positive meanings, argue the authors, are among the factors that can explain the relatively high levels of European identification among Spanish citizens. Moreover, as Faas (2010: 12) points out, 'the experience of people in different countries demonstrates that there can be no single definition of Europe.' It is feasible to expect that the historical and political trajectories of Bulgaria and England will also have an impact on the meanings of Europe invoked by children, and thereby also on their identifications.

Even if, in many aspects, England is a fairly typical representative of Western Europe, this is hardly the case in terms of its positioning vis-à-vis Europe. Situated geographically off the mainland of Europe, the UK is often perceived as detached from Europe; at the level of everyday discourse, the inhabitants of the British isles frequently draw contrasts between the British 'us' and 'them' in continental Europe, and even associate travelling to other European countries as 'going to Europe'. Historically, the UK was a far less enthusiastic supporter of European integration than, for instance, France and Germany, and its political elites were often openly hostile or at best sceptical

toward EU policies. The Eurobarometer surveys indicate that such attitudes are shared by a considerable proportion of the population; British citizens are typically among the least enthusiastic supporters of the EU, and also exhibit lowest levels of attachment to Europe (Cinnirella and Hamilton, 2007). Furthermore, of all four nations in the UK, the English are often given as an example of being the least 'supportive of the EU' (Carey, 2002). It is therefore not a surprise that the UK is often labelled as the 'awkward partner' (Blair et al., 2001) in a 'troubled relationship' with Europe (Minford et al., 2005: 20). Some authors even suggest that Britain is a 'stranger in Europe' (Wall, 2008: 204–221) and Europe is, at best, its friendly 'other' (Risse, 2004: 266).

At first sight, England's political and historical trajectory may lead us to expect that English children will perceive Europe as a distant entity, and refuse to identify with it, or at least that levels of European identification among them will be lower than among Bulgarian children. Yet, a closer look at the historical and political context of European identity formation in Bulgaria indicates that this may not be the case. One of the main differences between Eastern and Western European conceptions is in the definition of what the 'ideal' Europe is and who (which countries) represents it (Kuus, 2007; Mihelj, 2005; Ranova, 2010). Kuus (2007: 22) claims that when the concept 'Eastern Europe' was coined, it was defined 'as being a part of Europe by geography but still in process of becoming fully European in the political and cultural sense' and 'the region's difference from Western Europe became conceptualized as distance from an idealized Europe'. Originally formed during the Enlightenment period (Wolff, 1994), these perceptions, along with the associated feelings of inferiority vis-à-vis the West, were revived after the fall of the communist regimes. In this context, Central and

Eastern Europeans often view EU membership as a 'return to Europe' (Katsikas and Siani-Daview, 2010: 15; Kuus, 2007: 27).

In the Bulgarian case, Ranova (2010: 155–172) says, this return is linked with an ideological battle between the 'cultural establishment' and the 'elite-in-the-making'. For the former, Bulgaria's national identity should be enhanced rather than demarcated by Europeanization, whereas the latter 'creates its recognizable identity by enunciating a direct critique of nationalism' (Ranova, 2010: 156). Both groups have one thing in common – 'an inferiority complex' towards Europe. They feel they are lagging behind the Europe they are aiming towards. It will be interesting to see whether this inferiority complex is shared by Bulgarian children. If this is the case, then it may well be that the difference between the level of European identifications among Bulgarian and English children will not be particularly striking. After all, regardless of its troubled relationship with Europe and in particular the EU, the UK is a long-standing member. It is quite possible that at least for the youngest generations of Britons, European identity – much like British, English or Scottish identity – is increasingly becoming something they take for granted. If it is the case that in established Western nation-states, national identity tends to become 'banal' and self-evident (cf. Billig, 1995), then it is reasonable to expect that in old EU member-states, European identity will also, gradually, become 'banal' (cf. Cram, 2009). Existing comparative data on European identity in old member-states yield some support to this argument. Citizens of the founding states are more likely to identify as European than those of the UK and Scandinavian states (Citrin and Sides, 2004: 167). Also, longitudinal comparisons reveal that the proportion of citizens expressing equal attachment to both their own nation and Europe is growing

across all old member-states, including the UK (Citrin and Sides, 2004: 170). These results lead us to tread carefully when hypothesizing about the relationship between European identifications in England and Bulgaria. If our reasoning is correct, the level of European identifications in Bulgaria should be similar to that in England, or perhaps even slightly lower.

Another issue to consider when developing an explanatory model for European identity is the relationship between European and national identifications. Some commentators suggest that European and national identities are 'mutually incompatible' (Cinnirella, 1996: 258), and that the 'unfinished' formation of the European identity might represent a potential threat to current identities (Breakwell, 2004: 34-35). Comparative studies involving several member-states, however, typically demonstrate that the nature of the relationship varies from country to country (e.g. Citrin and Sides, 2004; Duchesne and Frognier, 1995) and also with time (Duchesne and Frognier, 2008). Often, people who identify strongly with nation(-state)s also identify strongly with Europe and hence, the two identities are complementary – or, as Díez Medrano and Gutiérrez (2001) and Risse (2004) suggest, 'nested'. This nestedness resembles the 'Russian Matruska doll' where 'national identities form the core and European identity the outer boundary of the Russian doll' (Risse, 2004: 250). Finally, studies imply that in some cases, national and European identities are not related at all (e.g. Mihić, 2009).

Given the variability of the relationship between national and European identities across time and space, it makes sense to ask what factors might help explain this variation. According to Díez Medrano and Gutiérrez (2001), a key factor is the framing of Europe and its relationship to national identity. If Europe is seen as a threat to

national identity, then strong national attachments are likely to go hand-in-hand with low levels of European identification. If, in contrast, Europe is seen as potentially advantageous for the nation, then the relationship is likely to be positive. Díez Medrano and Gutiérrez also argue that these different meanings are shaped by the disparate political contexts and historical trajectories of individual countries, which helps explain why the nature of the relationship between national and European identities varies from country to country. Another decisive factor, which accounts for the variation of the relationship across time, is the existence of political contestation; if the benefits of European integration are disputed, anti-European arguments are likely to prompt an increase in the proportion of citizens who perceive Europe as a threat to national identity, which in turn leads to a negative relationship between national and European identifications (cf. Duchesne and Frognier, 2008). Finally, Cinnirella and Hamilton's (2007) study among British Asians suggests that the relationship between national and European identities may also depend on ethnicity. In examining our materials we should seek to establish whether and to what extent these arguments apply also to Bulgarian and English children's identifications.

Methodology and sampling

Unlike the majority of existing research on European identity, the study relies on in-depth, semi-structured interviews rather than existing large-scale surveys. Each child was interviewed individually for a period of between 40 minutes and an hour and a half. The interviews combined closed- and open-ended questions as well as psychological strategies, mostly the use of cards and photographs. To assess children's cognitive mobilization vis-à-vis Europe and the EU – that is, their knowledge of Europe/the EU –

children were asked to explain what Europe and EU are, to name the member-states, and to identify a range of key EU symbols such as the flag and the euro, as well as important personalities in the history and present affairs of the Union. Initially, we used more than 30 photographs when asking children to identify national, local and European symbols and personalities. Then, all people's names were read out. This range of questions allowed us to assess cognitive mobilization in a more direct and encompassing way than past studies of European identity did. Responses to open-ended questions were coded thematically using the constant comparison method (Dye et al., 2000; Glaser, 1965), based on relevant differences and similarities in the available material. Children's identifications, on the other hand, were researched by using a number of questions, mainly adapted from Barrett's (2007) studies. First, they were shown cards with identity labels (girl, boy, child, pupil, European, British, etc) and were asked to choose and then rank the ones that describe them. Then, they were directly asked 'Are you European/Bulgarian/English/British?' and were subsequently prompted to explain how important these identities were for them and what they meant, namely what it means to be European/Bulgarian/English/British. Finally, the pupils had to choose among different cards that offered different variations of the relationship between their national and European identifications. Since the larger study was concerned not only with children's knowledge and identifications but also with a myriad of other factors, the questionnaire used included quite a few other questions – on demographics, media use, etc. These do not have a direct bearing on the aims of this paper and will be discussed elsewhere.[1]

The sample included 174 children between the ages of 9 and 10, of which 67 were from England and 107 from Bulgaria. All interviews were conducted between February 2009 and February 2010. Pupils were recruited through schools, and recruitment was guided by a combination of theoretical sampling and disproportionate stratified sampling. The chosen methods of data collection and analysis precluded the adoption of fully random and proportionate sampling. Instead, drawing on the principles of theoretical sampling (cf. Deacon et al., 2007: 54), we sought to recruit children who were more likely to help elaborate emerging hypotheses. For instance, given that one of the explanatory factors considered in the study was ethnicity, the sample was ethnically boosted to ensure an adequate number of ethnic minority children (32.7 percent in Bulgaria and 35.8 percent in the UK). The focus was on the Roma minority in Bulgaria and the Asian children with family origins from India in England. These are two of the biggest minority groups in both countries. Given the overall qualitative nature of the sample, it was not possible to include more minority groups because that would have prevented meaningful comparisons. Obviously, the label 'ethnic minority' is hardly telling given that the two ethnic minorities groups are quite different from each other: historically and culturally but also in relation to Europe and potentially to the EU. These differences undoubtedly have repercussions on the level of European and even national identities. The simplification of variables for clarity of presentation purposes, namely labelling both groups as ethnic minorities, is by no means an attempt to blur or ignore the differences between them and the importance of these differences for the processes studied. Which is why, when relevant, the repercussions of these differences will be further addressed in the paper. It is interesting to note, however, that in spite of the

immense differences between the two ethnic minority groups, quite a few similarities were found among them in relation to European identities.

Furthermore, when the sample was constructed, every effort was made to achieve a degree of randomness in drawing the sub-populations. In other words, the theoretical saturation aim was achieved with the help of the principles guiding disproportionate stratified sampling – a form of probability sampling in which 'the researcher draws a random sample from each subpopulation' he or she is interested in (Neuman, 2007: 152). The procedure was as follows. First, the head teachers of schools whose catchment areas cover different socio-economic characteristics (as determined by their Ofsted reports in England) were approached in both countries in order to make sure that there is a fair representation of socio-economic groups. Further recruitment was based on the same principle: inclusion of as many diverse backgrounds as possible. Once a head teacher gave permission, all children in the respective age group were asked to participate. The final sample includes participants from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds and indeed children's status appears to impact substantially on their European identities – a topic explored in further work on the subject.

Given the size of the sample, we of course cannot claim that our results provide a representative portrayal of European identification in England and Bulgaria. The value of this study therefore does not lie in estimating average effects of particular causal factors (such as cognitive mobilization, meanings, or the historical and political context) on European identifications in populations at large. Instead, the contribution lies in accounting for why European identifications among selected groups of children are as they are, by means of providing a meaningful explanation of relationships between

causal factors. We would hope that this explanation of causality will provide a useful reference point for large-scale, quantitative studies.

Results and discussion

The European identity is not particularly salient among either Bulgarian or English children we interviewed. Less than half of all children – 43 percent – say yes when asked 'Are you European?' In line with our argument – but perhaps in contrast to commonsense expectations – the expressions of European belonging are far more common in the traditionally Eurosceptic country than in the newcomer that, by all accounts, has embraced its membership wholeheartedly. While only 20.6 percent of Bulgarian children choose the word 'European' to describe themselves, the proportion of English children is 28.4 percent, $\chi^2(1, N=174)=6.25$, p=0.001. Similarly, while only 37.4 percent of Bulgarian children reply yes when asked 'Are you European?', the proportion among English children is 52.2 percent, $\chi^2(1, N=174)=3.71$, p=0.05.

At first sight, it is tempting to suggest that this result is an outcome of Bulgaria's recent membership and the fact that the knowledge about Europe and the EU has not yet trickled down to all of its youngest members, and they are therefore not as 'cognitively mobilized' as their English peers. Yet, other data imply this is not the case. In both countries, the proportion of children who are knowledgeable about Europe and the EU is significantly higher than the proportion of those who identify with Europe. Although only a third of Bulgarians and half of English children define themselves as European, many more actually know what Europe is – 62 percent in Bulgaria and 91 percent in England, $\chi^2(1, N=174)=18.02$, p<0.001. Other questions suggest that, in many aspects, and especially with regard to the EU, Bulgarian children are more knowledgeable than

English ones. The EU flag is clearly recognized by considerably more children in Bulgaria than in England – 84.1 percent vs. 49.3 percent, χ^2(1, N=174)=24.16, p<0.001. Bulgarians are also more familiar with their national representatives at European level. In England, only three children recognise the name of their Commissioner Catherine Ashton, while in Bulgaria, 43.9 percent say they have heard about Meglena Kuneva, who was a European commissioner at the time of interviewing, χ^2(1, N=174)=30.85, p<0.001. Furthermore, more Bulgarian than English children tend to recognize their MEPs, and only 13 percent of English children as opposed to 33 percent of Bulgarian ones, correctly describe the euro as Europe's currency, χ^2(1, N=174)=6.82, p=0.009. Finally, although English children are able to list a greater number of European states, only one among them (1.5 percent) as opposed to 10.3 percent of Bulgarians, knows the exact number of member-states, χ^2(1, N=174)=4.96, p=0.026.

The analysis of the relationships between familiarity with Europe and the EU on the one hand, and European identification on the other, also demonstrates that cognitive mobilization vis-à-vis Europe and/or the EU does not necessarily lead to higher levels of European identification. In fact, our data suggest that is some cases, identification can occur without any significant knowledge. Two patterns stand out cross-nationally, each present in close to 40 percent of the sample. One is, of those children who know what Europe and/or the EU is, as well as identify as European, and the other one is, of those children who also know what Europe and/or the EU is but do not define themselves as European. When examining each of the two countries separately, it becomes apparent that the first pattern is significantly more common among English, and the second among Bulgarian children (Table 1), χ^2(3, N=174)=17.82, p<0.001.

To explain this difference, we need to take into account the role of meanings. The thematic analysis of the open-ended questions shows that English and Bulgarian children hold rather different perceptions of Europe. English children provide a relatively unified description of Europe as a continent – a word used by 48 percent. A further 27 percent depict it as a few countries and for 15 percent it is a country. Thus, a boy says, Europe is 'lots of countries in an area of the world', while another one quite simply defines it as 'one of the seven continents'.

Bulgarian accounts are qualitatively different. The word continent is used only by a fifth of children and another fifth specifically talk about Europe being equal to the EU. The biggest thematic group involves those pupils who volunteer the word 'state'. It is unclear whether by state they actually mean a nation-state or a super/supra-state organization such as the EU. Furthermore, even some who use the word 'continent' include vocabulary more typical for the EU and especially for its pre-accession process. For example, a girl says, Europe is 'a continent, in Europe they accepted Italy, Bulgaria, Austria'. A boy says Europe is a 'created' continent. 'Accepted' and 'created' clearly clash with the geographical meaning of the word 'continent', implying there is more to Europe than geography (the EU?). Ultimately, a boy who tries to explain how exactly Europe and the EU are linked ends up equating them: 'I know that Bulgaria is part of Europe. Europe is countries that have become one; they have joined the European Union.'

These results enable us to make sense of the different patterns of identification and knowledge. For children who define Europe as a continent, it is most likely easier to identify with it, because they accept that simply by virtue of living on that continent they qualify as European. By contrast, for pupils who associate Europe with a political entity, identification is not that straightforward, since it probably implies complying with certain rules and regulations or living up to certain standards, or suggests a personal connection with a rather abstract and distant political entity. Given that English children are more inclined to see Europe as a continent than Bulgarians, it is feasible to argue that these different meanings shape their sense of European-ness, making English children on average more willing to self-identify as European, even if they do not know much about the EU. Arguably, the geographic perception of Europe is also more amenable to a 'banal' European identity – taken for granted and perceived as a part of the natural order of things.

The analysis of the additional question of 'What does it mean to be European' largely confirms these trends. All in all, the cross-national accounts are quite similar. For the majority, it is equivalent to living in Europe although not all realize they actually do. However, for a significant proportion of Bulgarian – unlike English children – the European identity appears as a high-status, dream-like identity, one they aspire towards but have not yet attained. For such children, identifying with Europe is not (yet) an option.

The analysis of the patterns of relationship between knowledge, identification and meanings reveals that differences in meanings allow us to explain, not only the differences between the two countries, but also national variations among individual

children. The majority of English children who identity as European not only know more about both Europe and the EU but also tend to define Europe as a continent (71.4 percent) and the EU as an organization of European states (57 percent), which have gathered together to help each other and work as a parliament or a government. In contrast, English 'non-Europeans' rarely (15.2 percent) define Europe as a continent, and half do not know what the EU is – some even think it is the London Olympics, a capital city or another name for Europe. Among Bulgarian 'Europeans', the focus on Europe as a geographical rather than a political entity is not that strong (34.2 percent), though it is still considerably stronger in comparison with the 'non-Europeans'. The 'non-Europeans' hardly ever say Europe is a continent (7 percent), and instead tend to describe Europe as a state (33.8 percent) or hold misconceptions (e.g. a city or a school). When asked about the EU, more than half do not know what to say, and among those who do provide a description, many exclude themselves from it, because they think the EU is for rich people and politicians.

To sum up, meanings clearly intervene in the relationship between knowledge and identification at both individual and national level. In England and Bulgaria alike, children who identify as European are more likely to see Europe as a geographical entity – a meaning that is more conducive to banal Europeanism – and the proportion of children who see Europe in geographic terms is higher in England. In contrast, children who do not identify as European either do not know what Europe and/or the EU are, or (in the Bulgarian case) associate Europe with an exclusive political entity or a distant dream. It is due to this that, in the Bulgarian case, the discrepancy between levels of cognitive mobilization and European identification is even higher than in England.

These results are consistent with our expectations: the meanings children attach to Europe (which are of key importance for their European identifications) are closely linked with the national political and historical context, including the potential for growth of (banal) European identity.

The final issue to consider is the relationship between the national and the European identities. In this respect, it is important to distinguish between the presence of identity as such, and its relative salience. The figures on children's national identities show that national identifications – both British and English – are somewhat more common among English children. When asked whether they are Bulgarian/English/British, 77.6 percent define themselves as Bulgarian, 85.1 percent as English and 80.6 percent as British. At the same time, however, national identity appears to be significantly more salient for Bulgarian than English children. When given a selection of name cards with labels indicating different types of identities ('girl', 'boy', 'pupil', 'European', 'Bulgarian', 'English', etc) and then asked to rank their chosen identities, 70.6 percent rank being Bulgarian among their top three identities as opposed to only 40.9 percent and 16.7 percent of English children on British-ness and English-ness, respectively (χ^2(1, N=174)=16.02, p<0.01 for difference between ranking of Bulgarian and English identity and χ^2(1, N=174)=38.84, p<0.001 for difference between ranking of Bulgarian and British identity). Data on European identity reveal a remarkably similar pattern. As already mentioned, the European identity is somewhat more common among English than Bulgarian children (52.2 as opposed to 37.4 percent). Yet at the same time, as many as 40.9 percent of Bulgarian children who identify as European by selecting the European card consider it a top three identity, as

opposed to only 15.8 percent of English children. The difference is not statistically significant, however, perhaps due to the fact that a very small number of children in relative figures actually select the European card (22 in Bulgaria and 19 in England).

These results suggest that by and large, in both countries, national and European identities are compatible, if not mutually reinforcing. This is confirmed by the high proportion of children who choose to identify both with the nation and with Europe. Children were with a set of questions offering them to select the option of identifying themselves as only European, only national, or both national and European. In the UK case children first got to select between 'British', 'both British and European' and 'European' and then between 'English', 'both English and European' and 'European'. As many as 52.3 percent of Bulgarian children choose the 'Bulgarian and European' option, while among English children, 56.7 percent choose the 'English and European' option and 62.7 percent the 'British and European' option. Quite interestingly, as many as 91 percent of those who choose the 'English and European' option also choose the 'British and European option' and similarly, as many as 98.3 percent of those who select the 'British and European' option also select the 'English and European' one. Thus, even some of the children who initially do not define themselves as European choose a combination of national and European identities to describe who they are.

On the whole, given the relatively similar figures in both countries, it is difficult to derive any firm conclusions about the impact of systemic factors – either the political and historical context, or the particular meanings shaped by them. If anything, we can speculate that the disparate political and historical contexts, as well as meanings of

Europe, are both conducive to a predominantly compatible relationship between national and European identities.

The analysis of the factors that shape the relationship between national and European identities at individual level is more revealing, especially when combined with the qualitative analysis of children's responses to the question of what it means to be European (Table 2).

The first major category includes children who choose a combination of national and European identities. For instance, one girl says she is happy to be European because 'it is my home and it's also the place where I like to go on holiday.' Among children in this group, a significant proportion (18 percent in England and 20.5 percent in Bulgaria) describe their identities in a way consistent with the notion of nested identities. These children explicitly explain they define themselves as European exactly because their country is part of Europe and/or the EU, as the two girls in the quotations below do:

— *Why did you say you are European?*

— Because I was from Britain.

— *Who do you think is European?*

— I am from Bulgaria and Bulgaria is in Europe.

The second category includes those children who declare they possess only a national identity. For the majority of them, the lack of European identification is not a

result of any explicit antagonism between the national and the European identities. In fact, for only four children in Bulgaria and four in England, the European and the national identities are mutually exclusive, because they clearly state they are not European as they cannot be both English/British and European, or both Bulgarian and European. Thus, when asked 'Why did you say you are not European?' a boy in Bulgaria replies 'Because I am Bulgarian, actually Gypsy', while a girl in England explains: 'I don't know. I asked my Mum "Am I European?" No, I am not European. I am either British or English or Hindu. That's what my Mum says. I say what she says.'

As the quotations demonstrate, these children perceive the European and national identities as mutually incompatible, which supports the argument about the influence of meanings and images of Europe. At the same time, these examples also provide support for the impact of ethnicity; many of the children who fail to define themselves as European are actually representatives of the ethnic minorities – mainly Indians in England and Roma in Bulgaria. Some of them endorse a national identity, but fail to embrace the European one perhaps because they do not consider it as inclusive. Our quantitative data also support this conclusion. Thus, only two Roma define themselves as European in contrast to more than a half of ethnic Bulgarians, $\chi^2(2, N=107)=27.86$, p<0.001. In England, 66.7 percent of the ethnic English define themselves as European in contrast to 28 percent of the minority, $\chi^2(2, N=67)=14.39$, p<0.001. These results, however, are very different from the ones reached by Cinnirella and Hamilton (2007), who concluded that the relationship between ethnic minority status and European identity among British Asians is positive. Given that our interviewees were children, while their study was based on a survey among adults, our

results might suggest that the youngest generation of British Asians share a different, more exclusive perception of Europe, but a more inclusive perception of their national (British and/or English) identity. Evidently, the relationship between ethnic minority status and European identity as well as the overall impact of social structures deserves a closer, more detailed consideration – something we intend to address in future work.

Finally, the last category is the so-called 'other', namely all who do not fit into any of the previous three – they either say they have no national and European identities (23.4 percent in Bulgaria and 0 percent in England) or declare they feel only European (0 percent in Bulgaria and 3 percent in England). For these children, it is not relevant to research the relationship between the European and the national identity, because there is no such relationship – they define themselves as only British/English/Bulgarian or European or none for reasons other than interplay between the national and the European dimension.

Conclusion

To sum up, the results presented in this article help clarify the relationship between European identity and the various factors that, according to existing research, influence its formation – namely cognitive mobilization (specifically, knowledge about Europe/the EU), meanings of Europe, and the political and historical context. Our analysis demonstrates the key role played by divergent meanings of Europe, which helps explain the divergent patterns of knowledge and identification at both systemic and individual levels. Children who identify as European not only know more about Europe and/or the EU, but are more likely to see Europe in geographic terms, and this image facilitates the perception of the European identity as a taken-for-granted, default or even potentially

26

banal identity, one acquired simply by virtue of living in Europe. In contrast, children who refuse to describe themselves as European either know little about Europe and/or the EU, or perceive it primarily as an exclusive political entity, which is associated with high standards, distant political elites, or rich people – and therefore not an entity children can identify with.

The latter group of meanings is significantly more common among Bulgarian children we interviewed, who also tend to see Europe as a distant ideal or a dream, and hence perceive the European identity as an ideal they aspire to but do not yet possess. Such idealized images are absent among English children. As a result, Bulgarian children are less likely to identify as European than English ones, although they tend to be more knowledgeable about Europe and in particular the EU. As we have argued, the systemic differences in meanings can be linked to the disparate political and historical trajectories of the two countries: on the one hand, the history of an idealized perception of (Western) Europe in Bulgaria, reactivated after the fall of communism; and on the other hand, the gradual proliferation of a default form of Europeanism in the UK. Still, the last point should not be overstated; although the percentage of English children who define themselves as European is higher than of Bulgarian, the difference is not that significant. Moreover, it is difficult to predict how this identification will develop with age, and especially with greater exposure to the notoriously Eurosceptic news coverage of European events in English media. The role of other socialization agents such as school and parents is also worth researching – a topic of analysis for subsequent papers.

In terms of the relationship between national and European identities, there was no significant difference between European and Bulgarian children in our sample – for

slightly more than half in each group, the identities appeared complementary – and it was therefore impossible to draw any conclusions about the impact of systemic factors. In contrast, comparisons between individual children confirmed the influence of images of Europe. Those children who felt their national belonging was an obstacle to European identity tended to perceive Europe either as a threat or simply as incompatible with nationhood. The results also suggest that the relationship between European and national identity is affected by ethnicity, though not in the same way as suggested in existing research. In both countries, ethnic minority children were less likely to embrace a European identity, and their answers imply that European identity might have a racial boundary. These results call for a closer examination of the relationship between European identity and ethnicity – an issue that we could not tackle fully here, and which has to be addressed in conjunction with other social structures: age, gender, and, above all, class.

1. The full questionnaire is available upon request.

References

Bache I and George S (2006) *Politics in the European Union.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Barrett M (1996) English children's acquisition of a European identity. In: Breakwell G and Lyons E (eds) *Changing European Identities*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 349–370.

Barrett M (2007) *Children's Knowledge, Beliefs and Feelings about Nations and National Groups.* Hove and New York: Psychology Press.

Beetham D and Lord C (1998) *Legitimacy and the EU*. London: Longman.

Beus JD (2001) Quasi-national European identity and European democracy. *Law and Philosophy* 20(3): 283–311.

Billig M (1995) *Banal Nationalism.* London: Sage.

Blair A, Leopold J and Karsten L (2001) An awkward partner? Britain's implementation of the working time directive. *Time & Society* 10(1): 63–76.

Breakwell G (2004) Identity change in the context of the growing influence of European Union institutions. In: Herrmann, R et al. (eds) *Transnational Identities: Becoming European in the EU*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 25–39.

Breakwell G and Lyons E (eds) (1996) *Changing European Identities: Social Psychological Analyses of Social Change*. Oxford: Butterwoth-Heimemann.

Bruter M (2005) *Citizens of Europe? The Emergence of a Mass European Identity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Carey S (2002) Undivided loyalties: is national identity an obstacle to European integration? *European Union Politics* 3: 387–413.

Castano E (2004) European identity: a social-psychological perspective. In: Herrmann R, Risse T and Brewer M (eds) *Transnational Identities: Becoming European in the EU*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 40–59.

Christin T (2005) Economic and political basis of attitudes towards the EU in Central and East European countries in the 1990s. *European Union Politics* 6(1): 29–57.

Cichowski RA (2000) Western dreams, Eastern realities: Support for the European Union in Central and Eastern Europe. *Comparative Political Studies* 33(10): 1243–1278.

Cinnirella M (1996) A social identity perspective on European integration. In: Breakwell G and Lyons E (eds) *Changing European Identities: Social Psychological Analyses of Social Change.* Oxford: Butterwoth-Heimemann, 253–275.

Cinnirella M and Hamilton S (2007) Are all Britons reluctant Europeans? Exploring European identity and attitudes among British citizens of South Asian ethnicity. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30(3): 481–501.

Citrin J and Sides J (2004) More than nationals: how identity choice matters in the New Europe. In: Herrmann R, Risse T and Brewer M (eds) *Transnational Identities: Becoming European in the EU.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 161–185.

Cram L (2009) Identity and European integration: Diversity as a source of integration. *Nations and Nationalism* 15(1): 109–128.

Deacon D, Pickering M, Golding P and Murdock G (2007) *Researching Communications: A Practical Guide to Methods in Media and Cultural Analysis.* London: Hodder Arnold.

Decker F (2002) Governance beyond the nation state. Reflections on the democratic deficit of the European Union. *Journal of European Public Policy* 9(2): 256–272.

Deflem M and Pampel FC (1996) The myth of post-national identity: Popular support for European unification. *Social Forces* 75(1): 119–143.

Deutsch KW (1961) Social mobilization and political development. *The American Political Science Review* 55(3): 493–514.

Díez Medrano J and Gutiérrez P (2001) Nested identities: national and European identity in Spain. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 24(5): 753–778.

Duchesne S and Frognier A-P (1995) Is there a European identity? In: Niedermayer O and Sinnott R (eds) *Public Opinion and Internationalized Governance.* New York: Oxford University Press, 193–227.

Duchesne S and Frognier A-P (2008) National and European identifications: a dual relationship. *Comparative European Politics* 6(2): 142–168.

Dye J, Schatz I, Rosenberg B and Coleman S (2000) Constant comparison method: a kaleidoscope of data. *The Qualitative Report* 4(1/2). Available at: http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR4-1/dye.html (accessed 2 October 2012).

Eder K (2009) A theory of collective identity. Making sense of the debate on a 'European identity.' *European Journal of Social Theory* 4(12): 427–447.

Faas D (2010) *Negotiating Political Identities: Multiethnic Schools and Youth in Europe.* Farnham: Ashgate.

Glaser B (1965) The constant comparative method of qualitative analysis. *Social Problems* 12(4): 436–445.

Grundmann R (1999) The European public sphere and the deficit of democracy. In: Smith D and Wright S (eds) *Whose Europe? The Turn towards Democracy.* Oxford: Blackwell, 125–147.

Gabel M (1998) Public support for European integration: An empirical test of five theories. *The Journal of Politics* 60(2): 333–354.

Hewstone M (1986) *Understanding Attitudes toward European Integration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Inglehart R (1970) Cognitive mobilization and European identity. *Comparative Politics* 3(1): 45–70.

Inglehart R (1977) Long-term trends in mass support for European unification. *Government and Opposition* 12(2): 150–157.

Janmaat JG (2006) Popular conceptions of nationhood in old and new European member states: Partial support for the ethnic-civic framework. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29(1): 50–78.

Janssen JIH (1991) Postmaterialism, cognitive mobilization and public support for European integration. *British Journal of Political Science* 21(4): 443–468.

Jenkins R (2004) *Social Identity.* London: Routledge.

Katskikas S and Siani-Daview P (2010) Introduction: the Europeanization of Bulgarian society: a long-lasting political project. In: Stefanos K (ed) *Bulgaria and Europe: Shifting Identities.* London: Anthem Press, 1–22.

Kuus M (2007) *Geopolitics Reframed: Security and Identity in Europe's Eastern Enlargement.* New York: Palgrave.

Lawler S (2008) *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*. Cambridge: Polity.

Lord C (1998) *Democracy in the European Union.* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press/University Association for Contemporary European Studies.

Mihelj S (2005) To be or not to be a part of Europe: appropriations of the symbolic borders of Europe in Slovenia. *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 20(2): 109–128.

Mihić V (2009) Da li smo i mi Evropljani? Povezanost i korelati evropskog i nacionalnog identiteta. *Psihologijs* 42(2): 203–220.

Minford P, Mahambare V, Nowell E and Elgar E (2005) *Should Britain Leave the EU? An Economic Analysis of a Troubled Relationship*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Neuman LW (2007) *Basics of Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Boston, NY: Pearson.

Pehrson S, Vognoles VL and Brown R (2009) National identification and anti-immigrant prejudice: Individual and contextual effects of national definitions. *Social Psychology Quarterly* 72(1): 24–38.

Philippou S (2005) Constructing national and European identities: the case of Greek-Cypriot pupils. *Educational Studies* 31(3): 293–315.

Ranova E (2010) Mirroring gazes: Europe, nationalism and change in the field of Bulgarian art and culture. In: Katsikas S (ed) *Bulgaria and Europe: Shifting Identities.* London: Anthem Press, 155–172.

Risse T (2004) European institutions and identity change: what have we learned? In: Herrmann R, Risse T and Brewer M (eds) *Transnational Identities: Becoming European in the EU.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 247–272.

Tajfel H (1981) *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tanasoiu C and Colonescu C (2008) Determinants of support for European integration: The case of Bulgaria. *European Union Politics* 9(3): 363–377.

Turner JC (1975) Social comparison and social identity: Some prospects for integroup behaviour. *European Journal of Social Psychology* 5(1): 1–34.

Turner J, Hogg M, Oakes P, Reicher S and Wetherell M (1987) *Rediscovering the Social Group: A Self-Categorization Theory*. Oxford: Basic Blackwell.

Wall S (2008) *A Stranger in Europe: Britain and the EU from Thatcher to Blair*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wolff L (1994) *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Woodward K (2002) *Understanding Identity*. London: Arnold.

Table 1. Most common patterns of relationship between knowledge and identification

Pattern	Bulgaria		England		Total	
	%	n	%	n	%	N
1	*29*	*31*	**53.7**	**36**	*38.5*	*67*
2	**37.4**	**40**	*41.8*	*28*	**39.1**	**68**
3	6.5	7	1.5	1	4.6	8
4	27.1	29	3	2	17.8	31

Note**:** Pattern 1 is when a child knows about Europe and/or the EU and feels European, pattern 2 involves only knowledge without European identity, pattern 3: neither knowledge nor identity and pattern 4: identity without knowledge. Cross-national differences are statistically significant as $\chi^2(1, N=174)=17.82$, $p<0.001$.

Table 2. Patterns of relationship between the national and the European identities

Country	European and national			Only national identity				Other			
	In total		Nested		In total		Mutually exclusive		Only European identity		None	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Bulgaria (n=107)	52.3	56	20.5	22	24.3	26	3.7	4	0	0	23.4	25
England (n=67)	55.2	37	18	12	41.8	28	6	4	3	2	0	0