

*Milena Apostolovska Stepanoska**
*Hristina Runceva Tasev***

NATIONAL IDENTITY VS. EUROPEAN IDENTITY: PARTNERS OR RIVALS

Abstract

This paper aims to analyze whether the European identity can be equated with the national identity. The authors make an attempt to define the European identity through the markers of national identity given by the famous theorist and researcher of national identity Anthony Smith. The paper presents an overview of the theory of the national identity from Anthony Smith and the standpoints of the most relevant authors and theorists in the field of European identity. The authors of the paper come to a conclusion that: the European identity can't be theorized with the national identity definitions and that the existence of national identity is not an obstacle for the formation of the European supranational identity.

Key words: European identity, national identity, culture, supranational identity.

I. NATIONAL IDENTITY

The national identity is special type of collective identity. Different authors give different definitions of what the national identity is. In that manner some authors claim that the national identity presents the totality of social and cultural characteristics of the nation that can help the nation to integrate from inside and based on which it differs from other nations. National identity is inconsistent and changing in different socio-historical circumstances, especially in circumstances that arise with globalization.

According to Anthony Smith the term "national identity" implies to some sense of political affiliation, regardless if that feeling is low. The political community is comprised of common institutions and a code of rights and duties for all its members living in certain precisely marked territory to which they identify with. In the same line were the French philosophers when they defined the nation as a community of people who obey the same laws and institutions within a given territory.¹

It must be pointed out that this definition is typical for the West. However, the Western experience made the powerful, in fact major influence on the understanding of the nation. A new kind of politics - the rational state, and a new kind of community - territorial nation, are put in close correlation for the first time. The western or the civil model of the nation is mostly often named- territorial conception. Anthony Smith as important symbols of national identity lists:

1. Historical territory-homeland;
2. Common myths and historical memories;
3. Shared mass public culture;

* Milena Apostolovska Stepanovska, PhD., Assistant Professor, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, Faculty of Law "Justinianus Primus", Skopje, Republic of Macedonia.

** Hristina Runceva Tasev, PhD., Assistant Professor, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, Faculty of Law "Justinianus Primus", Skopje, Republic of Macedonia.

¹ Antoni Smitih. Nacionalni identiteti, Biblioteka XX-vek, Beograd, prev. Slobodan Djorgjevic(1998): 15.

4. Rights and duties of all members of the nation;
5. Joint economy and territorial mobility of the members of the nation.²

The first feature of the national identity means that there must be compact, self-contained, defined territory. The people and territory must belong to each other. But that territory must not be any, neither to be located anywhere. It must be the "historic land" or the "historic home" of the nation. The "Historical country" is the country where over several generations lived. The homeland becomes a repository for historical memories and associations, a place where their sages, saints and heroes worked, fought, prayed and lived. All this makes the homeland unique. The homeland is a community of laws and institutions, united by a single political will. It entails at least some social rules of conduct which are the expression of common political feelings and goals. Parallel to the growing sense of legal and political community, you can follow the development of feelings of legal equality of the members of that community. Their full expression is different types of "rights based on citizenship": civil, political, economic, social, cultural, etc. It involves a minimum of mutual rights and obligations of the members of the nation and correlating the exclusion of the strangers.

It is considered that the legal equality of the members of the political community in its delimited territory is joint value and tradition among its residents. In other words, nations must have common culture and certain civil ideology, common notions and aspirations, feelings and ideas that link citizens to their homeland. The task of providing a common public culture is delivered to the holders of popular mass socialization, particularly to the public education system and mass media. Nations according to the Western model of national identity are perceived as cultural communities whose members are united by common historical memories, myths, symbols and traditions.

The national identity is a kind of collective identity that according to Karl Deutsch represents a group of people aspired to gain power through the mechanism of coercion, strong enough to be able to apply regulations to avoid arbitrariness and to practice alignment with them. "But in order to achieve this, there must be unity among members of different social groups. In that case, "national identity then indicates the alignment of the low and middle class with regional centers and social groups through communication channels of social and economic discourse center".³

The theory of Karl Deutsch can be helpful in giving an explanation for the process of creating the European identity. If there is a European national identity, it was created by people who associate transcending national borders and pooling experience in a positive way. The development of European economic, social and political fields, contributes to the daily interaction of members of different societies. They are the ones who see themselves as Europeans, involved in European national project. They can recognize the similarities that exist in other countries, and to connect with them as part of a large group of Europeans.⁴

1. Functions of national identity

The national identity and the nation are complex structures composed of multiple interconnected components - ethnic, cultural, territorial, economic, legal and political. They indicate the links of solidarity between members of communities that are united by common memories, myths, traditions and more. The nation appears as a mixture of two different

² Ibid.

³ Neil Fligstein; Who are the Europeans and How Does this Matter for Politics, European Identity, Jeffrey T. Checkel and Peter J. Katzenstein, Cambridge University Press, New York, (2009):132.

⁴ Ibid.

components – (civil, territorial, ethnic or other) that vary from case to case. In fact, the multidimensional characteristic of the national identity is its enduring force in modern life and politics that successfully connect the national identity with other powerful ideologies and movements.

The multiple power of the national identity can be illustrated by examining the functions that the identity has for groups and individuals. In accordance with the above-mentioned dimensions, the functions of national identity are divided into external and internal.⁵

The *external* features of the national identity are territorial, economic and political:

- The territorial characteristic refers to the social space where the holders of the national identity live and work;
- In economic terms, the national identity embraces the pursuit of territorial control over resources, including also the workforce.
- In political terms, the national identity relies on the state and its organs. It includes the selection of the political staff, the regulation of political behavior and appointment of the government, based on the standards of national interest, which presumably reflects the national will. Accordingly, the most important political function of the national identity is its identification with the common rights and obligations of legal institutions that on the other hand determine the values and character of the nation through centuries. Today, the reference to national identity is the main identification of social origin and solidarity.

The national identities also have *interior* features important for the members of the community:

- The most obvious one is the socialization of the members of the nation as "nationals" and "citizens". Today this is achieved with the mandatory, standardized, public mass education systems. In this manner, the state officials expect to instill national commitment and particularly homogeneous culture, an activity that most regimes performed with many energy, influenced by nationalist ideals of cultural authenticity and unity.
- Also, the national identity establishes a social link between members of different classes, connecting them on the basis of common values, symbols, traditions etc. Symbols, flags, coins, anthems, uniforms and monuments remind the members of the nation on their common heritage and past. Their sense of common identity and belonging encourage and uplift the members of the nation.
- Finally, the sense of national identity is a powerful tool for identifying and locating individuals in the world through the prism of culture.⁶

II. THEORIES OF EUROPEAN IDENTITY

Although this is a new field of interest, so far several different theories that explain the nature and creation of the European identity have been developed. In this context, the first important theory is the theory of social constructivism introduced by Thomas Risse. "It is based on sociological ontology, which assumes that people cannot exist independently of

⁵ Antoni Smtih, *Nacionalni identiteti*, Biblioteka XX-vek, Beograd, prev. Slobodan Djorgjevic (1998): 31.

⁶ Ibid.

their social environment and their joint collective system of meanings (culture in a broad sense).⁷ He further argues that "social identities first of all contain the ideas that describe and categorizes individual membership in the social group or community, including emotional, affective and evaluative component."⁸ This author also suggests three potential forms of European identity: 1. Nested; 2. Model cross road; 3. "Marble cake".⁹

It is necessary to emphasize that the theory of social constructivism is of greater assistance when we have to explain why we need to study the European identity than when we have to explain what the European identity is. The forms of identification that were introduced by Thomas Risse are of great help for the research of the relationship between the European and the national identity.

Bernard Giessen uses the so-called procedural model of collective identity to explain the European identity. This author also uses the term "Verfassungspatriotismus" or "constitutional patriotism" introduced by J. Habermas. This theorist tries to explain the European identity as a "constitutional patriotism", which according to him does not mean love or commitment of someone to his homeland, but love or commitment to its constitution.¹⁰ He claims that the collective identity, as described in his procedural model, is "an attempt to link politics with political tradition". It is evident that this model gives advantage to the process and practice of the EU membership. B. Giessen concludes that the European identity is based on a common system of common political ideals, not on a common culture or history.

Richard Munch develops a theory for European identity on multiple levels. He claims that there is not one monolithic European identity, but there are many trans-European identities based on narrow individual interests. Furthermore, this author claims that the EU has not been established by the sovereign nations, but the Union is based on the strong social support of its citizens, which has been supported by more than a dozen associates.¹¹ The European society is developed in a society composed from several levels.¹² This explanation of the European identity underlines the multiplicity of identities, which together create meta-identity or the European identity. These identities are not equal in their interactions, some are more developed than others; on some is given more weight than on the others, and that is how more levels of identities are created. The claim that European identity means different things to different people is true, but claiming that it is a set of identities means denying the civil elements found in its roots.

Thomas Risse says that there is "identification with the EU as a separate civil and political entity," although he also claims that there is identification with "wider Europe as a cultural and historical social space."¹³ Here he claims that it should not be confused the existence of the civil European identity with the lack of the European cultural identity. However, the civil European identity grows at the expense of the European cultural identity, and according to Risse, dominates in the current discourse. He argues that "Thanks to the

⁷ Risse, Th. *Social Constructivism and European Integration*, European Integration Theory, eds. Anje Wiener and Thomas Diez, Oxford, Oxford Univ. Press, (2004):160.

⁸ Thomas Risse; *Social Constructivism and European integration*, European integration theory, eds. Anje Wiener and Thomas Diez, Oxford, Oxford Univ. Press, (2004):167.

⁹ Thomas Risse; *Social Constructivism and European integration*, European integration theory, eds. Anje Wiener and Thomas Diez, Oxford, Oxford Univ. Press, (2004):168.

¹⁰ Bernhard Giesen "The Collective Identity of Europe: Constitutional Practice or Community of Memory?", *Europeanisation, National Identities and Migration* eds. Willfried Spohn and Anna Traianafyllidou, London, Routledge (2003): 22.

¹¹ Munch, R. „Democracy without Demos“, *Europeanisation, National Identities and Migration* eds. Willfried Spohn and Anna Traianafyllidou, London, Routledge. (2003):58.

¹² Richard Munch, see page 61.

¹³ Thomas Risse, see page 170.

connection with the new Europe, the European constitutional patriotism became dominant European identity”.

Bernard Giessen claims that the European identity is built on a staggered traumatic past.¹⁴ He argues “the nations of Europe have been affected by the collective torture or guilt, especially for the Second World War and the Holocaust, during the past decade”. He also argues that this identity of collective trauma and guilt has cultural foundations in the Christianity.

From the above-mentioned theories of the European identity, we can conclude that there are two approaches: the constructivist approach argues that the collective identities can be created on an elementary level. In contrast to this theory, the essentialist theory negates the ability to create identities and indicates that there are only limited opportunities. The essentialist opinion is dominant in everyday life and among the common people, while those dealing with research of the identity usually accept the constructivist theory. Samuel Einshtat and Bernard Giessen¹⁵ came to three conclusions from constructivist perspective, referring to the European identity: 1. Its appearance is possible; 2. The national and the European identity are compatible; 3. The European identity can be encouraged by providing access to those resources that allow creation of supranational identities. Jürgen Habermas in this context asks “why it would not be possible to an identity to be created beyond the national borders, in the same way that the European countries in XIX century have created the national identity”.

III. CONCLUSIONS

Once reviewed all the important concepts for the national identity, the question arises whether they can be applied in the context of European identity. If we consider the markers of national identity, which according to Anthony Smith are important in determining the nation - named population, (which has a common area called homeland), common myths and historical memories, a mass public culture, a common economy and common rights and obligations that apply equally to all the members of the nation; and to make an effort to fill the content of the European identity – we will come to a conclusion that it is mission impossible. Namely, what corresponds to the national identity does not correspond to the European identity. For example, we can see that in the first integral element of the national identity: "named population". When we try to put this element in the context of the European identity a problem appears. That is because in the case of the EU, we are talking about the Europeans, but the question is what are they? When it comes to national identity, we refer to the Dutch, Germans, and British etc. Identity marker identifies members as members of these nations. In each of these cases there is a national language and a native country, where the national identity is original. Europeans do not possess a common language or a fixed historical territory. The European Lingua Franca, as the Latin language was considered in the past, cannot be put into use again. The other three languages spoken across Europe (English, French and German) still have limited use – the English language is increasingly applied in commercial and scientific sense, while the German language is more commonly used on the territory of Central Europe. However, none of these languages can be accepted for Lingua Franca. Some researchers argue that in the case of the European identity, the second element

¹⁴ Giesen, B. 2003: “The Collective Identity of Europe: Constitutional Practice or Community of Memory?”, *Europianisation, National Identities and Migration* eds. Willfried Spohn and Anna Traiandafyllidou, London, Routledge: 31.

¹⁵ Eisenstadt, Sh. Noah and Giesen, B. 1995: *The Construction of Collective Identity*. *European Journal of Sociology*, 36(1995) :72-102.

“common territory” is disputable in a European context. It primarily concerns the Eastern European borders, when in certain historical periods, Eastern Europe and Russia belonged to Europe, and in other times did not belong. Language and territory are visual markers of the national identity, which cannot be applied in the case of the European identity.

According to some authors, one more marker of the national identity, defined by Anthony Smith, is controversial when set in the context of the European identity. It is about the legal norms that should apply to all members of the community. In 2007, the results from a survey were presented, conducted in several member states (Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic and Great Britain), which concerned the legal rules regarding the non-governmental organizations, the legal restrictions on their operations, the rules establishing NGOs, etc. The results from the survey showed that there were different legal rules, which applied in various Member States of the Union. Thus, for example, in all Member States there was obligation for registration of an NGO, but in each of the Member States the procedure was different.

Another marker of the national identity given in the definition of Anthony Smith cannot be applied when it comes to the European identity. That marker is consisted of common myths and history. The defenders of the European identity emphasize the fact that the Europeans have a common European heritage- the Christianity, which has been an important factor in identity building in Western Europe in the past. But how about the Western Balkan countries aspiring for EU membership, which for many years in the past were part of the Ottoman Empire and under the influence of the Islam?

Here it is necessary to ask the question: Does the theory of European identity oppose the traditional theories of identity? If European identity is defined as a collective identity that is based on the common system of political values, it is because it is associated with a unique political organization, and that is the European Union. Just as the national identity is linked to the nation-state, the European identity is associated with the EU. While the national identity is closely associated with the nation-state, historical examples of identities associated with multinational political organizations are those of empires. However, we cannot compare the EU with an empire, because the Member States are there on a voluntary basis. There is only one European identity unlike most often conflicting national identities, which existed in the empires.

We come to a conclusion that we cannot give a definition for the European identity through the definition of national identity because these two identities cannot be compared. The European identity is a special kind of identity that is a product of the existence of a special type of organization such as the European Union. Some authors say that it is a *sui generis* organization and this leads to a conclusion that the European identity is a *sui generis* identity that does not deny the existence of the national identity. The European identity and the national identity are not rivals but counterparts and can coexist together.

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