EUROPEAN IDENTITY AMONG ROMANIAN TEENAGERS: FACT OR FICTION?

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Abstract

At a time when the European Union’s future is dominated by uncertainties, the role of the citizens in supporting this ambitious project and securing its continuity seems to become more important than ever before. The present empirical study addresses a segment of the young population – 11 and 12-grade students – which is often left out of surveys which generally focus on university students when trying to establish the views or profile of the European youth. The paper aims to determine the degree of identification with the European Union of Romanian teenagers and their image of this political entity. From the large body of literature on European identity, the study focuses on the national-European dichotomy supporting the theory of multiple identities. Moreover, the paper tackles three different approaches to European identity: cultural identity, civic identity and instrumental identity. Resorting to a quantitative research method, the paper presents the findings of a survey carried out in six Romanian high schools and targeted at 11 and 12-grade students. The findings reveal if the teenagers see themselves as Europeans, their degree of attachment to the European project and the values associated to it.

Keywords: European youth, European identity, multiple identities, European values

Introduction

At a time when the European Union’s future is dominated by uncertainties, the role of the citizens in supporting this ambitious project and securing its continuity seems to become more important than ever before. After all, as Fligstein (2008) remarks, the political schemes, strategies and procedures developed in Brussels – important as they may be – are overshadowed by the citizens who come across as the most important determinants of the European project. The fact that today’s teenagers are coming of age at a time when the EU is facing one of its most severe crisis is not without consequences since adolescence is considered a decisive period for the developing of a (supra)national identity (Ross, 1999; Barrett et al., 2003). Thus, acknowledging the fact that “Europe’s future depends on its youth” (COM(2009) 200 final, p. 2), the EU’s vision for young people, stated in official documents, focuses on “promoting the potential of young people for the renewal of society and to contribute to EU values and goals” (COM(2009) 200 final, p. 4).

The present empirical study addresses a segment of the young population – 11 and 12-grade students – which is often left out of surveys which generally focus on university students when trying to establish the views or profile of the European youth. The paper aims to determine the degree of identification with the European Union of Romanian teenagers and their image of this political entity. From the large body of literature on European identity, the study focuses on the national-European dichotomy supporting the theory of multiple identities.
according to which national and European identity are not opposing concepts since people can hold more than one identity which, pending on circumstances, vary in saliency. Moreover, the paper tackles three different approaches to European identity: cultural identity – which refers mostly to the European continent and is based on the exclusion on non-Europeans – civic identity – which refers to citizenship norms and constitutional order – and instrumental identity – which rests on the pragmatic costs-benefits analysis.

Resorting to a quantitative research method, the paper presents the findings of a survey carried out in six Romanian high schools and targeted at 11 and 12-grade students. The findings reveal if the teenagers see themselves as Europeans, their degree of attachment to the European project and the values associated to it, providing valuable information on the type of feedback and support the European project will receive from the next generation of Europeans, a generation that will have an important say on the future of this ambitious project. As theoreticians observe, young people react more vehemently than older citizens to their political and socio-economic environment (Flanagan, 2009) and thus, they are the ones who “hold the key to the future” because “older people are, on the whole, too set in their ways to be responsible for social or political change, so most long-term change comes about by way of generational replacement” (Franklin, 2004, p. 216).

**General Considerations on Identity**

From a theoretical perspective, the term “identity” has come to emulate the enticement that “El Dorado” once exercised since academics from various fields strive to determine once and for all its meaning, its attributes, its determiners and its evolution. Nevertheless, in spite of their strenuous efforts, identity remains a “hopelessly ambiguous” term (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p. 6) that has come to represent “such a variety of things that it makes no sense to ask what it really means” (Kamphausen, 2006, p. 24). The challenges posed by the study of identity in general are augmented by the framing of the term in European context, considering that Europe itself can be perceived as a vague term. According to Timothy Baycroft (2004), it can be used “to describe the continent in general, […] or to refer more specifically to the territory which has developed the institutional structure known as the European Union” (p. 145). Therefore, reputed scholars, such as Katzenstein and Chechel (2009), argue for the advantages of a multidisciplinary approach when studying identity in Europe since examining “EU institutions and their effects on identity in isolation from broader social and political processes” (p. 217) no longer leads to reliable results and since it is no longer sufficient “to examine nationalist movements as if they exist separate from European institutions” (p. 217).

However, despite the debates, certain theoretical approaches have gained ground. One of the most cited theories on identity rests on the principles of social constructivism. According to this approach, identity is not a natural, pre-established given, but it is formed by social processes and reshaped by social relations (Berger, Luckman, 1966, p. 194). Following this line of thought, a potential definition of identity is offered by Shin and Jackson (2003) who view identity as “a social construct that affects how people behave and communicate” (p. 212). Being “not a pure fact, nor a simple phenomenon” (Ferencová, 2006, p. 5), identity is perceived not as a static “thing”, but as an open process susceptible to change and shaped by the constant negotiation with people around us, “the product of agreement and disagreement” as Jenkins (2000, p. 12) sees it. Being mainly “constructed” and shaped through interaction and institutionalization (Jenkins, 2000: 12), scholars notice that „very often identity construction begets a process of “othering” ” (Udrea & Corbu, 2010, p.68).
Identity has often been conceptualised as a perception of self in relation to the others (Turner et al., 1987; Shore, 1993; Mummendey & Waldzus, 2004, Fligstein, 2009) leading, thus, to a process of classification that implies operations of inclusion and exclusion. Referring to this process of classification, Bruter (2005) describes identity as “a network of feelings of belonging to and exclusion from human subgroups” (p. 8) while Fligstein (2009) remarks that “our idea of who we are, is usually framed as a response to some ‘other’ group” (p. 135). From this perspective, otherness becomes a source of identity construction considering that, “in order to define us, there must be a corresponding them, against which we come to recognize ourselves as different” (Shore, 1993, p. 782). In other words, elements of the outside world construct people’s perceptions of themselves (Mummendey & Waldzus, 2004, p. 466). This theory is also supported by Huyst (2008) who remarks that “a certain identity always implies a notion of what you are not” (p. 287), a process of self and other-categorization that also applies at European level. Some scholars stress the similarities and consider that “the values and characteristics that are common to all Europeans, despite their regional, national or local differences become prominent as opposed to those of significant others” (Udrea, 2011, p. 7) while others accentuate the sense of distinctiveness and argue that, faced with its inability to generate a strong sense of collective self – since similarities are not strong or unitary enough – Europe constructs its identity by means of its interaction with significant others (Triandaffylidou, 2008, p. 280).

Underpinned by the principles of social constructivism – according to which identity is shaped and reshaped in interactions with significant others – the theory of multiple identities has also gained ground in the academic world (Smith, 1993; Risse, 2004; Bruter, 2005; Fligstein, Polyakova, & Sandholtz, 2012). From this perspective, the various layers of human identity are not presented in an antagonistic relation since, being highly “contextual” and “situational”(Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Brutter, 2004), they “cross each other and coexist in a sort of equilibrium” (Udrea & Corbu, 2010, p. 67). Therefore, in a conversation with a European, one may choose to identify as Romanian, while, when talking to somebody from Asia, the same person may prefer to identify as European. Thus, this approach cancels any potential opposition between different levels of identity, such as local, national or European identity because “individuals accentuate the various layers of their identity at a time, choosing and oscillating between their multiple identifications” (Udrea, 2011, p. 2).

European Identities

Starting from the theory of multiple identities and the afore-mentioned ambiguity of the term „Europe”, theoreticians claim that “there is no one European identity, just as there is no one Europe” (Katzenstein & Checkel, 2009, p. 213). However, opinions regarding the very existence of European identity, let alone its nature, remain highly divided. While some authors are convinced of its existence and regard media coverage of European issues and migration as a proof of its well established presence (Trandafioiu, 2006, p. 91), others are more reserved and see European identity as a circumstantial, secondary identity that is starting to take shape (Baycroft, 2004; Brutter, 2005; Risse, 2010). Moreover, a third category of researchers regard it as a theoretical concept devoid of meaning and content that is “neither a real entity waiting to be explored, nor a feature firmly attached to individuals” (Ferencova, 2006, p. 4).

However, for the purpose of this paper, European identity is perceived as a “multilevel identity” which “does not exclude other “identities”, other “loyalties”, from local ones to
national ones, from the “Western” one to the “Atlantic” one” (Varsori & Petricioli, 2004, p. 90). Visualizing the different layers of identity, Risse (2004) presents the image of the concentric circles in which the inner circle outlines the strongest identity form and the outer circle the weakest one (p. 250). Other graphic representations of the fact that “identities do not wax or wane at each other’s expense” (Katzenstein & Checkel, 2009, p. 9-10) are the models of the “Russian doll” and the “marble cake” proposed by Herrmann, Risse and Brewer (2004). While the “Russian doll” model suggests that identities exist independently from each other, the “marble cake” highlights the fact that multiple identities influence each other and intermingle, various aspects becoming salient in various situations. The latter theory is also supported by studies on young Europeans which show “no antagonism between the various aspects of geo-political identity: Youths tended to attach either rather low or rather high importance to all geo-political units, e.g. their birthplace, their region and country of residence, and the EU” (Boehnke & Fuss, 2008, p. 475). Thus, “European and national identities tend to be positively correlated rather than opposed” (Bruter, 2003, p. 1154).

Nevertheless, as stated above, many scholars agree that European identity is mainly activated as a secondary identity (Risse, 2010), that is, individuals tend to identify primarily as members of their nation state but also as Europeans. Going back to the concentric circles model, studies show that European identity is associated with the outer circle (Huyst, 2008), while attachment to the state, which is represented by the inner circle, “remains the final term of reference” (Pagden, 2002, p. 2). Therefore, ethnic and national identity remain the primary forms of identification due to certain advantages: “they are vivid, accessible, well established, long popularised, and still widely believed, in broad outline at least” (Smith, 1992, p. 62), unlike European identity which is more abstract and less accessible to the mass of the population.

Considering that being European is “not a simple or an obvious matter” (Arts & Halman, 2006, p. 195), theoreticians have tries to find out why some people feel more European than others. Fligstein (2009) concludes that feeling European is a privilege enjoyed by the elite, that is “the owners of businesses, managers, professionals, and other white collar workers who are involved in various aspects of business and government” (p. 136). These people, who are well educated and have higher incomes, usually speak foreign languages, travel abroad regularly or live abroad for short periods of time and interact with their counterparts from other countries often discovering common interests and similar perspectives. This conclusion supports the view that European identities emerge “at the multiple intersections of elite projects and social processes; at both supra-national and national-regional levels; within EU institutions but also outside them; in daily practice and lived experience” (Katzenstein & Checkel, 2009, p. 226). While the construction of European identities by means of political projects is the prerogative of political, economic or academic elites, as social practices, European identities can emerge from a multitude of daily processes, such as following international media or sports competitions. Nevertheless, theoreticians highlight the importance of involving regular citizens in such activities, because the views on Europe of blue collar workers or peasants may differ considerably from those of the elites (Smith, 1993, p. 133-4).

Another category of people who are likely to feel more European are “young people who travel across borders for schooling, tourism, and jobs (often for a few years after college)” (Fligstein, 2009, p. 137). Favell (2009) calles them “Eurostars” and defines them as young and mobile Europeans “who are at the heart of the EU Commission’s efforts to build
Europe through dynamic mobility policies” (Favell, 2009, p. 178). Living in “Eurocities – a network of cosmopolitan places” (Favell, 2009, p. 178), these skilled, educated and ambitious young people are ready to move wherever their interest takes them as they “encourage the circulation of “talent” in a “knowledge economy”” and “belong to the generation of new Europeans and have to be taken into account when discussing the dynamics creating European identities in contemporary Europe” (Udrea & Corbu, 2010, p. 79). The characteristics of the so-called Eurostars underline the importance of education systems in constructing and promoting European identities, an idea supported by Kamphausen (2006) who claims that “no one should forget the importance of the school in the formation of European awareness” (p. 31) although other authors argue that national education systems “are run by and for national states” (Smith, 1992, p. 72). Nevertheless, studies reveal that, apart from facilitating intercultural contact and changing perspectives towards Europe and the EU, educational mobility programs increase students’ interest not only in other countries and cultures, but also in EU affairs (Udrea, Udrea, Țugmeanu, 2013; Mitchell, 2012).

Academics who agree that European identity exists beyond theory (Bruter, 2005; Risse, 2010; Wintle, 2011) “remain divided over its significance in everyday life” (Van Mol, 2011, p. 31). Analysing the different characteristics of European identities, certain scholars make a distinction between cultural, civic and instrumental identity (Ruiz Jimenez et al., 2004; Bruter, 2005). According to this approach, cultural identity “applies to Europe as a whole, as a continent of shared civilization” (Udrea et al., 2013, p. 22) and is manifested as attachment to Europe and fellow Europeans as opposed to non-Europeans. Civic identity, on the other hand, refers mainly to a sense of belonging to the EU, implies commitment to the duties and rights brought by European citizenship and to the shared values of the EU, such as peace, democracy or solidarity (Udrea et al., 2013). Instrumental identity depicts another pragmatic type of identity since it derives from an evaluation of EU membership based on a cost-benefit analysis (Huyst, 2013).

While it is true that there is no strict delimitation between the three types of identity and they often overlap (especially civic and instrumental identity), scholars argue that cultural identity refers mainly to national identity and to European civilization at large (Ruiz Jimenez et al., 2004; Bruter, 2003) while civic and instrumental identity usually relate to the EU because “people often come to identify with a group of others because we share common interests (material and otherwise)” (Fligstein, 2009, p. 138). So, people who enjoy the benefits of EU membership the most, are also more likely to support it especially since European identity – unlike national identities – is a non-emotional one “defined by the sharing of a specific political culture and the desire to benefit from the economic advantages derived from EU membership” (Guibernau, 2011, p. 40). Moreover, studies reveal that “citizens predominantly consider the institutional, rather than the cultural factor in their answers” (Bruter, 2003, p. 1165) when they are asked whether they “feel European” or not. Romanian students seem to confirm this trend as they tend to “associate the European identity with several benefits that were available to them in the recent past” (Udrea et al., 2013).

The present study seeks to determine whether Romanian teenagers, who have not yet benefitted from extensive foreign study experiences, see themselves as Europeans or not and whether they preserve the non-emotional component of European identity and evaluate the European Union from the same pragmatic perspective as older and more experienced Europeans. The 17 and 18-year-olds represent a segment of the population which is either integrated into a much larger age group (15 to 24 or 18 to 25/30) or left out of surveys which
generally focus on university students when trying to establish the views or profile of the European youth.

**Methodology**

Employing the method of quantitative research, the paper presents the findings of a survey conducted between November 24th – December 5th, 2014, in six Romanian high schools from Bucharest, the country’s capital, chosen at random. In each high school, the questionnaire was completed by 11 and 12-grade students from six classes, totaling a number of 36 classes and 1022 respondents. The number of students in a classroom varies from 20 to 30. The questionnaire was applied by form masters – teachers in charge of a certain class – during classes, which led to a response rate of over 90% although no incentives were offered to students. The following research questions represent an adapted version of the ones used in the Flash Eurobarometer 395 (2014) that focused on the European youth and in the extensive research project financed by the European Commission - “Orientations of Young Men and Women to Citizenship and European Identity” (Jamieson et al., 2005).

Research questions:

Q1. Do Romanian 11 and 12-grade students see themselves as Europeans?  
Q2. How attached are 17 and 18-year-olds to the European project?  
Q3. What values do Romanian teenagers associate to the European Union?

**Findings**

In order to determine whether 11 and 12-grade students see themselves as Europeans or not, they were presented with a question that permitted them to manifest both their national and European identity, in terms of first order and second order identity, without opposing the two concepts (Fig. 1).

Figure 1. National and European Identity

![Chart showing national and European identity perceptions]

At present, do you feel...?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Romanian, but also European</td>
<td>63.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romanian only</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European, but also Romanian</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European only</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>3%</td>
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As it can be easily observed, an absolute majority of respondents define themselves first as Romanians and then as Europeans (63.7%) confirming the literature in the field according to which European identity has exceeded the limits of a theoretical concept and has started to be perceived in the material world by regular citizens. Another theory confirmed by these results is the fact that European identity is mostly experienced by Romanian teenagers as a second order identity that does not collide with national identity – which seems to maintain its primary position in the hearts and minds of young Europeans.

The findings also show that the number of exclusive nationalists (22.4%) – who do not hold another identity apart from the Romanian one – is considerably lower than the European average for the age group 15-24 (33%) (EB 83, 2015). The difference could be explained by the fact that Romania is an East-European country that has recently joined the EU (in 2007) and the social, political and most of all economic advantages brought by this event are still fresh in the mind of the population. This attitude points to a civic and instrumental type of European identity based on a costs-benefits analysis. Moreover, the number of those who manifest a strong European identity (8.9%) – who see themselves only as Europeans or as Europeans first, but also as Romanians – is slightly higher than the European average for the age group 15-24 (8%) (EB 83, 2015).

In spite of these differences, when comparing the answers given by 17 and 18-year-old high-school students from Romanians to those provided by European students (EB 83, 2015), the similarities are more than obvious. While 63.7% of the respondents in this study feel Romanian, but also European, 61% of the European students define themselves first by their nationality and then as Europeans. Even the difference regarding exclusive nationalists – signalled in the previous paragraph – is reduced. While 22.4% of the teenagers identify only as Romanians, 25% of the European students see themselves solely as citizens of their country marking a decrease by 8% compared to the European average for the age group 15-24 (33%). The difference could be explained by the fact that students often enjoy the benefits of educational mobility, speak foreign languages and interact with people from other countries, many of them being part of the “Eurostars” that Favell (2009) was talking about.

In order to establish whether 11 and 12-grade students from Romania feel European or not, they were also asked a question related specifically to the European Union, a question designed to determine their perspective on the concept of European citizenship (Fig. 2).

Asked whether they feel they are citizens of the EU or not, as many as 38% of the respondents gave a negative answer, a percentage that exceeds the European average of 31% (EB 83, 2015). The 7% difference is also maintained in the case of those who do see themselves as citizens of the EU – 60,4%, this time the number being lower than the European average of 67%. What is more, there are considerable differences in percentage distribution too. While 53.7% of the Romanian teenagers feel European to a certain extent, only 6.7% of them are adamant about their European citizenship. However, at European level, 40% of the total population identify as European citizens to a certain extent, while as many as 27% feel strongly about their rights and duties as European citizens (EB 83, 2015). If we refer to the 15-24 age group, the difference increases since 76% of the respondents acknowledge their European citizenship and only 22% deny it.
If the answers to the previous question, related to national and European identity in general, were in line with results registered at European level for the socio-professional category of students, things look totally different this time. The Eurobarometer survey (EB 83, 2015) shows that students are the ones that are most aware of their European citizenship (82%), with only 17% of respondents in this category saying that they do not feel they are citizens of the EU. As already mentioned, results confirm the theory that young people are likely to feel more European because they have access to information and speak foreign languages, they are educated and ambitious, interact with people from other countries and, being mobile and ready to move wherever they find better working and living conditions, they enjoy the most the benefits of free movement.

As for Romanian teenagers, their limited perception of themselves as European citizens may be justified by the fact that Romania is a new member of the European Union and citizens may feel that the integration process is not yet complete. Therefore they may feel that they do not have full access to the rights and advantages that European citizens from older member states are entitled to. Their perspective on this matter could also be influenced by the concept of “second order European citizenship” and the perception that other European citizens have of Romanians, the views of the “others” – often perceived as discriminative – being mostly expressed in the context of talks regarding the Schengen area and migration issues.

Seeking to determine how attached 17 and 18-year-old Romanians are to the European project and if European identity maintains its non-emotional characteristic compared to national identity, respondents were asked how attached they feel to four geo-political units: their locality, their region, Romania and the EU (fig. 3).
The findings show that the number of respondents who feel a strong attachment towards the EU (9.1%) is considerably more reduced than the number of those who feel a similar type of attachment towards their locality (43.2%), Romania (32.5%) and their region (28.5%). Thus, results are in line with the literature which states that European identity is a non-emotional one since people have not developed feelings of attachment towards the EU as they have towards their nation or their locality. Going back to the concentric circles model, proposed by Risse (2004), the data suggest that European identity is indeed associated to the outer circle. The inner circle appears to be represented by the locality since attachment to this unit is the most accentuated (78.8%). Once again, results are in line with the literature (Boehnke, K. & Fuss, D., 2008) which argues that European young adults identify most strongly with their immediate others (p. 471).

The fact that the emotional component is more accentuated in national identity than in the more abstract European identity and that the nation remains an important point of reference for the citizens is also illustrated by the fact that strong and moderate attachment to Romania amounts to 68.9% which exceeds strong and moderate attachment to the European Union – 40.4%. The 28.5% difference exceeds the difference registered among European youth between the same types of attachment (21%) (Boehnke, K. & Fuss, D., 2008). Results also show that the locality – in this case, Bucharest, the country’s capital – and even the region, which is not such a meaningful unit in Romania, trigger more intense feeling than the EU. As stated above, 78.8% of the respondents feel attached to their locality and 69.2% of them have the same feelings towards their region.

Moreover, the number of young Romanians who claim to feel no attachment to the EU at all (18.9%) represents more than double the number of teenagers who confess that they are
not emotionally linked to Romania (8.5%). Adding the number of the “not at all attached” to that of the “not very attached” to the EU we get a score of 56.4% which shows that more than a half of the 11 and 12-grade students questioned do not manifest attachment towards the supranational structure represented by the EU although the majority of them (63.7%) claim to feel Romanian, but also European.

Asked about their feelings in case the EU disappeared (fig. 4), teenagers reveal their pragmatic but also contradictory perspective on the EU. The number of respondents who would be sad if the EU disappeared (41.9%) exceeds by only 3% the number of the indifferent (39%) in spite of the fact that as many as 60.4% of them perceive themselves as European citizens entitled to certain rights and obligations derived from this statute. Moreover, adding the people who claim that they would be happy if the EU disappeared – a minority of only 3.7% – to the “indifferent” category, we get a value of 42.7% which slightly exceeds the sad category (41.9%). These unexpected results render the mixed feelings that teenagers have towards the EU: they do identify as Europeans (instances of cultural identity which refers to Europe as a continent of shared civilization could also be included), most of them feel that they are citizens of the EU but they seem to regard it from a strictly pragmatic perspective devoid of any emotional attachment.

Figure 4. Disappearance of the EU

The high percentage of “don’t know” answers (15.4%) could, on the one hand, point to the improbability of the scenario according to which the EU could one day disappear. This suggests that the EU is taken for granted or perceived as a natural given. On the other hand, the “don’t know” answers could signal a lack of interest on the part of Romanian teenagers in this supranational organisation. There is no consideration given to the subject because it is not perceived as important or the respondents are too unfamiliar with the implications of such an event to assume a position. Either way, the lack of information reveals a deficiency of the
education system which, according to the literature, has a central role in constructing and promoting European identities.

In order to determine the values that Romanian students associate with the EU, they were asked to indicate – by means of a variable with 14 attributes – what the EU represents for them personally (fig. 5). The “Other” category was also included but it was only selected by two respondents. One of them associated the EU with the loss of the sovereign powers of the people arguing that the course of action is now decided by supranational structures and the will of the people is ignored. In order to sustain the argument, the respondent evoked the case of a national referendum on the impeachment of the President in office that was invalidated by the Constitutional Court in 2012. The other respondent who chose the “other” category associated the EU with economic downturn, not a surprising answer considering the severe economic crises that affected many of the European countries.

Figure 5. European values

Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of respondents (92.7%) associated the EU with “freedom of movement”, one of the biggest and most accessible advantages of EU membership. This choice suggests, again, an evaluation of the EU from the civic and instrumental perspective that focuses on rights and material advantages. At European level, freedom of movement is considered the most positive result of the EU, especially among
young people in the age group 15-24 (61%) and among the socio-professional category of students (63%) (EB 83, 2015). Peace, valued by 55% of the Europeans as the second most positive result of the EU, occupies the 5th position in the hierarchy of values associated to the EU by 17 and 18-year-old Romanians probably representing one of the values that are taken for granted by the new generation of Europeans who have had the privilege to grow in a relatively peaceful environment. At European level, 36% of the total population consider peace and human rights the values that best represents the EU (EB 83, 2015). Here, too, the generational gap is obvious. While 40% of the respondents in the age group 15-24 vote for human rights and 33% for peace as the value that best represents the EU, in the over 55 category, 34% vote for human rights and 41% for peace.

Cultural diversity and democracy, two of the classic values promoted by the EU, occupy the second (80.7%) and third position (75%) in the hierarchy created by the answers of Romanian teenagers. The fact that they associate the EU with cultural diversity suggests the popularity and the success of the Union’s motto: “United in diversity”, launched in the year 2000. Democracy is also a predictable response considering that it also occupies the second/third position (31%) at European level as the value that best represents the EU, after human rights and peace which have the same score (36%).

The high percentage of “don’t know” answers with respect to matters such as bureaucracy (31.1%), waste of money (19.5%), unemployment (18.2%), social welfare (15.6%) or more influence in the world (15.3%) point to a concerning lack of knowledge regarding the functioning and the procedures of the EU as well as its relation to other international organisations and its influence on the world stage. Once again, the deficiencies of the education system are revealed.

Romanian teenagers were also asked to indicate a value that the European Parliament should defend as a matter of priority (fig. 6).

Figure 6. European value defended by the European Parliament
The findings show clearly that the protection of human rights constitutes a priority in the eyes of 11 and 12-grade students from Romania, 39.5% of them choosing it as the value that the European Parliament should defend primarily. Results are in line with those registered at European level where the protection of human rights is the most appreciated value at personal level by young Europeans in the age group 15-24 (44%). Moreover, as stated before, at European level, peace and human rights were designated as the values that best represent the EU by 36% of the total population (EB 83, 2015).

The second position is occupied by solidarity between EU member states, chosen by 17.3% of the respondents. This time, things look different at European level where this value did not even make it in top 3, occupying the 5th position (EB 395, 2014). The difference in perspective could be motivated by the fact that Romania, a country from Eastern Europe, is a new member state (it joined the EU in 2007) and, keeping in mind the fact that the integration process is not complete, citizens may be more aware of the fact that some countries need the support of other member states in order to reach the level of the more developed states of Western Europe.

The third position is occupied by freedom of speech (16.2%) followed, at a considerable difference, by gender equality (7.5%) and solidarity between the EU and 3rd world countries (7%). The order is maintained at European level (EB 395, 2014) but the positions differ being all shifted to the right. Thus, freedom of speech occupies the second position followed by the other values enumerated above. The dialogue between cultures and religions occupies the 5th position at European level but, although the EU is associated with cultural diversity by 80.7% of the 11 and 12-grade students from Romania, this value is not viewed as a matter of priority and is ranked 7th in the hierarchy of values that should be defended by the European Parliament (2.9%). Since the death penalty has been abolished in all the countries that are part of the EU, it is not considered a priority of the European Parliament, neither in Romania, nor at European level and it consequently occupies the last position (1.9%).

In the “other” category, respondents have included: animal protection laws (2 responses), the fight against corruption (2 responses), investment in young people (2 responses), life (one response), the voice of the people (one response) and the increase of production (one response).

Conclusions

Both European officials and theoreticians agree that “Europe’s future depends on its youth” (COM (2009) 200 final, p. 2) and regard mobile and educated young people as “Eurostars”, namely individuals that are more likely than others to feel European and to secure the future of the European project. One of the theories supported by most scholars argues that people’s perspective on and attitude towards the EU is greatly influenced by social interactions. Therefore, since it is situational and context dependent, theoreticians do not speak of a single, absolute European identity, but of multiple identities that coexist and get activated in different contexts. However, the multiple crises experienced in the last few years by the EU might leave their mark on the future generation of Europeans.

Findings reveal that European identity preserves its secondary identity status among Romanian teenagers who identify primarily as Romanians, but also as Europeans. The
number of those who identify solely as Europeans or as exclusive nationalists is relatively reduced suggesting that the EU is not perceived in radical, absolute terms, as a friend or as a foe. Moreover, the fact that the number of exclusive nationalists – who do not hold another identity apart from the national one – is more reduced in Romania than among the European youth could be explained by the fact that Romania joined the EU in the recent past and the social, political and most of all economic advantages brought by this event are still fresh in the mind of the population. This attitude points to a civic and instrumental type of European identity based on a costs-benefits analysis. However, the fact that Romania, an East European country, is a new member of the EU has consequences on 17 and 18 year-olds perception of themselves as European citizens, which is more reduced than the level of identification as both Romansians and Europeans. Citizens may feel that the integration process is not yet complete and they do not have full access to the rights and duties that European citizens from older member states are entitled to.

With respect to 11 and 12-grade students’ level of attachment to the EU, results are in line with the literature which states that European identity is a non-emotional one since people have not developed feelings of attachment towards the EU as they have towards their nation or their locality. So, strong and moderate attachment to Romania exceeds similar types of attachment to the EU and, what is more, over a half of the respondents do not manifest attachment towards the supranational structure represented by the EU. The reactions triggered by the potential disappearance of the EU reveal young people’s mixed feelings: they do identify as Europeans (instances of cultural identity which refers to Europe as a continent of shared civilization could also be included), most of them feel that they are citizens of the EU but they seem to regard it from a strictly pragmatic perspective devoid of any emotional attachment.

The evaluation of the EU in term of costs and benefits, which points to civic and instrumental identity, is reinforced by the fact that most respondents associate the EU with “freedom of movement”, considered, at European level, the most positive result of the EU. However, while older generations of Europeans place special value on peace, young people seem to take it for granted. Nevertheless, they concentrate on the protection of human rights, the vast majority of respondents considering that the European Parliament should defend it as a matter of priority. One thing that sets Romanian teenagers apart from European youth is the special attention given to solidarity between EU member states. They seem to be aware of the fact that the integration process is not complete and Romania needs the support of other member states in order to reach the level of the more developed states of Western Europe.

However, the relatively large number of “don’t know” answers registered could signal a lack of interest on the part of Romanian teenagers in the unique supranational organisation represented by the European Union. It appears that there is litter consideration given to European issues, either because they are not perceived as important or because the respondents are too unfamiliar with the functioning, the procedures, the structure and the role of the EU to assume a clear position. Either way, the lack of information and interest reveals a deficiency of the education system which, according to the literature, has a central role in constructing and promoting European identities.
References


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