Does more knowledge about the European Union lead to a stronger European identity?
A comparative research among adolescents in 21 European member states.

Soetkin Verhaegen, Marc Hooghe, Yves Dejaeghere

Centre for Political Research, KU Leuven, Belgium
(Correspondence: Soetkin.Verhaegen@soc.kuleuven.be)

Paper presented at the ECPR Graduate Conference 2012
Bremen, 4 July – 6 July 2012
Abstract

Strengthening European identity is often considered as a ‘cure’ for the democratic deficit and the lack of legitimacy of the European Union (European Commission, 2001; Habermas, 2011). We distinguish two possible ways to strengthen European identity: a cognitive one (more knowledge about the EU leads to a stronger identity) and a utilitarian one (inhabitants of countries that benefit more from their EU-membership have a stronger feeling of European identity). We apply a multilevel analysis on the results of the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study to test both explanatory models. 70,502 adolescents from 21 European member states were questioned in this study. The analysis shows that knowledge about the EU only has a limited effect on European identity. The degree in which a member state contributes to the European budget does not seem to have an effect on the strength of European identity. The analysis rather shows that trust in national political institutions is the most important determinant for the development of European identity. Future research is needed to explain this relation.

Keywords:

European identity, European Union, ICCS 2009, political knowledge, multilevel government
Introduction

One of the most important problems the European Union (EU) is confronted with is its lack of democratic legitimacy (Hobolt, 2012; Scharpf, 2009). Several authors have showed that a sense of a supranational identity is only modestly developed in Europe and that the Union suffers from low levels of input legitimacy. This lack of involvement expresses itself by a low voter turnout for European elections and a manifest Eurosceptic climate in a number of member states (Leconte, 2010). As we will develop further in this paper, European identity is seen as one of the main components of European citizenship, next to the juridical component of rights and duties. This conceptualization implies that if there is a lack of European identity, the sense of European citizenship is underdeveloped as well. Taking into account the importance of democratic citizenship for the functioning of political institutions, this lack of a ‘full European citizenship’ can be considered as a potential threat for the future stability of the European Union. Especially now the European Union systematically expands its economic and financial competences, the question is raised whether the democratic legitimacy of this institution is high enough to hold these powers.

Already in 2001 the European Commission (EC) had put the strengthening of European citizenship on its list of most important priorities in its White Paper on European Governance (European Commission, 2001). Jürgen Habermas (2011), e.g., argues that this can only come about when a European patriotism based on abstract constitutional principles is advanced. In other publications authors stress the importance of education and knowledge (Inglehart, 1970; Gabel, 1998; Faas, 2007; Thorpe, 2008; Philippou, Keating & Ortloff, 2009). It is expected that the more familiar younger generations get with the European institutions and the way the European Union works and the better knowledge they have about this policy level, the stronger their identification with the EU will be (Gabel, 1998; Hooghe & Marks, 2005). However, the empiric validity of this cognitive path to the development of European identity has not yet been analyzed in a systematical and empirical way. This is why we intend to evaluate the extent to which knowledge about the European Union is accompanied by a stronger degree of European identity. More specific we will use a large-scale comparative European research among adolescents. We opt for this approach since adolescents are systematically exposed to information about the function of the European institutions at school (Philippou et al., 2009). This implies that we can optimally inquire if in practice an improved knowledge about Europe also leads to a stronger identification with Europe.
We will start the article by sketching the importance of the conception of identity and its relationship with citizenship, and more specifically for the European Union in the context of the search for a solution of the legitimation problem of the EU. We will apply recent data from an exceptionally comprehensive comparative study among adolescents in 21 European member states. Not only does this study include unique information about knowledge and identity, adolescents are also the ideal sample to assess this relation. In most member states, curricula pay attention to the functioning of the European Union. Furthermore most adolescents grew up in the EU, so we could expect the strongest measure of European identity among this age group. Following we will present the data and methods of this comparative research. After this we will assess the relationship between knowledge and identity. We conclude by stating a number of remarks about how European identity could (not) be strengthened.

*European citizenship and the legitimation of the European Union*

The observation that the EU is suffering from a lack of democratic legitimation, caused both an academic debate about the potential solutions for this problem and proposals from the European institutions themselves. One example is the direct election of the European Parliament since 1979 to strengthen the democratic support for this institution (Schmitt, 2005). However, the voter turnout for these elections decreased every new election round, which shows that there is only a modest interest of European citizens in this policy level (Franklin & Hobolt, 2011). Neither the gradual increase of policy competences of this democratic elected institution seems to narrow the gap between the citizen and the European institutions. This could be an indication that merely providing juridical instruments does not suffice to create a citizenry. The identity component has to be strengthened too. In 2001 the European Commission presented its *White Paper on European Governance*, in which several concrete proposals were formulated to strengthen European citizenship (European Commission, 2001).

In the academic literature as well, a number of arguments can be found for the importance of citizenship, more specifically in the European context (Bellamy & Warleigh, 2001). Almond and Verba (1963) developed the idea that full citizenship is an important condition for a stable political system. This is even more true for a relatively recent political
system as the European Union, which can be regarded as a political order *sui generis*. The European Union cannot count on a historically accumulated reservoir of loyalties. It should actively build this legitimacy itself. This process, however, is particularly problematic: already in 1992 Habermas stated that the economic integration of the EU moves faster than its democratic integration. He regards the strengthening of a common European identity as the only fundamental solution for the strengthening of the European policy level as a democratic institution (Habermas, 2011). Only if Europeans feel connected, they will be willing to respond in solidarity to the current worldwide economic crisis. For Habermas the Union should not just be a bureaucratic elite project. It should also be carried by the European citizens themselves: “Die Europäische Union wird sich langfristig nur stabilisieren können, wenn sie die unter dem Zwang ökonomischer Imperative fälligen Schritte zu einer Koordinierung der relevanten Politiken nicht im bisher üblichen gubernativ-bürokratischen Stil, sondern auf dem Weg einer hinreichenden demokratischen Verrechtlichung vollzieht” (Habermas, 2011, p. 55). We can conclude from this that, just as every other political system, the European Union needs the construct of an active citizenship as a source of diffuse democratic support for the functioning of the system.

*Citizenship: rights and duties and a shared identity*

The ongoing discussion about the importance of the development of a European citizenship obviously has to be seen in the light of a broader theoretic discussion about the importance of the citizenship concept.

The classical starting point for this debate is Marshall’s (1950) statement that citizenship can be seen as the full membership of a social and political order, which is accompanied by the formal adoption of the rights and duties of the community. Although van Gunsteren (1978) stated some decennia later that the study of citizenship no longer belonged to the core business of political science, the concept revived in the 1990's (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994). It was no coincidence that the European Union just in that time officially established European citizenship in its treaties by adopting it in the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 (Painter, 1998). Motivations for this renewed attention for the concept were theoretical discussions between liberals and communitarian authors about the concept of citizenship, electoral apathy in the United States of America and the flare of nationalism in Eastern
Europe after the implosion of the Soviet Union. This relatively unexpected revival of nationalism demonstrated that a democracy not only needs transparent and legitimate rules, but also needs to construct a common identity (Mulhall & Swift, 1996, Shore, 2004).

Weiler (1997) stated in this period that the European formula to develop a European citizenry grounded on legal rights and duties, but without a common *demos*, will not be sufficient to democratically legitimize the EU. For each of these components of European citizenship, we find authors who define citizenship based on one of these components.

Like Marshall (1950) who stressed rights and duties, Jürgen Habermas (1992) claims that a European citizenry can be formed when an agreement is made between free and equal citizens who decide to organize their community in a peaceful way. This shared agreement is the cornerstone of political culture: “[T]he political culture must serve as the common denominator for a constitutional patriotism which simultaneously sharpens an awareness of the multiplicity and integrity of the different forms of life which coexist in a multicultural society.” (Habermas, 1992, p. 7). It follows that citizens of a political entity are not connected by ethnic or cultural values, such as a national identity, but by a common set of basic rules for their shared community, which causes the existence of constitutional patriotism. Weiler (1997) follows this same stance.

On the other hand we find authors who stress that citizenship should not be reduced to a solely juridical interpretation. Turner (1994), e.g., stresses the importance of culture as a socializing system. Ideally this is a heterogeneous culture that takes into account a plurality of societal values so that it is possible to develop an inclusive citizenship. As a result, a shared culture and identity appear as a condition for a shared citizenship. Another example of this trend can be found in Smith’s work (1992) who claims that a European identity is not possible without a shared culture and shared values. Shore (2004) responded to Weiler’s (1997) idea of a European citizenship that is merely based on a feeling of belonging based on commitment to constitutional rules by stating that citizenship cannot be decoupled from its emotional dimension.

To study the juridical component of European citizenship, one should study European treaties and policy statements to see how European citizenship develops. In this paper, however, we will focus on the identity component. It has been argued that juridical rights are not sufficient (Mulhall & Swift, 1996; Weiler, 1997; Shore, 2004). The rich ICCS-dataset gives us the opportunity to perform a large-scale comparative study about the development of a European identity among our future generation of citizens. Furthermore we see different
degrees of European identity across member states, while the same rules apply for all citizens. An analysis of existing EU policy regarding to citizens’ rights and duties would not be able to explain this variance.

**The development of European citizenship**

In the more empirical literature about the development of European citizenship we see an opposition between cognitive and utilitarian approaches. According to the cognitive model, knowledge about the EU will lead to a more positive attitude towards Europe, while the utilitarian model states that a larger economic benefit from membership will lead to a stronger attachment to the EU.

The cognitive explanation is in casu followed by the European Union itself. The Union believes that spreading more and adequate knowledge about the institutions will lead to the strengthening of a European identity and a more active citizenship (Directorate-General for Communication, 2011). Academically there is the work of Delli Carpini and Keeter which points at the importance of political knowledge: “Democracy functions best when its citizens are politically informed.” (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996, p. 1). Citizens can use this knowledge to make the political choices that fit best with their expectations, implying that – if all citizens make a well-considered decision – the decision that will be made will be the one that fits best for the community as a whole. Concerning the European elections, the principles of transparency and accountability can only be fulfilled when citizens base their choices on European voting motives and when they do not regard these European elections as second order elections for national political power relations. Those European voting motives imply that voters have at least some knowledge about European policies (Van Aelst & Lefevere, 2012). The considerations made during these first order European elections create a public sphere in which the EU is discussed and in which a shared European identity can be developed. But there are more ways in which knowledge about the EU can lead to a stronger European identity or citizenship. Inglehart (1970), for instance, states that cognitive mobilization is an important factor for the development of European citizenship: “One must become aware of it [the European Union] before one can develop a sense of commitment.” (Inglehart, 1970, p. 47). The more one knows about the EU, the more aware one is about the functioning of the Union and the easier it gets to feel part of the EU (or to run explicitly
against it). Faas (2007) nuances this conclusion. In his comparison between German and British education projects, he concludes that a positive relationship can only be expected between knowledge and European identity when the educational system consciously proclaims a positive image of Europe (as in Germany). When, on the other hand, the general picture is negative (as in the UK), this relationship will be negative. Therefore it is of great importance not just to expect a linear effect of education, the content of education about the EU also has to be taken into account. Thorpe (2008) also nuances the relationship between knowledge about Europe and identity. He states that only for adolescents from social classes who appreciate this knowledge and attach status to this, knowledge about the EU will lead to a stronger European identity. For them, knowledge about and experience with the EU are some kind of moral benefit. Therefore we will control for socio-economic status. However, these were qualitative studies based on the experiences of a limited number of adolescents, the latter only in Britain. The ICCS 2009-data that we will use, on the other hand, do allow for a large scale quantitative analysis among adolescents in different member states.

The utilitarian model, in contrast, departs from an enlightened self-interest. In this model, one assesses if there is an effect on European identity of the rational evaluation that European citizens make about the economic benefits their country receives from the European cooperation (Cinnirella, 1997; Fligstein, Polyakovo & Sandholtz, 2012; Gabel, 1998). Identification with Europe is thus only seen as the result of an economic cost-benefit analysis. According to Gabel (1998) this is a robust model that keeps ground statistically and substantially over the whole period (1978 to 1992) and all the different member states he studied. From this model follows the expectation that citizens, who live in a member state that has a net gain from European integration, will develop a more positive attitude towards the EU than inhabitants of member states that make a net contribution. Duchesne and Frognier (2008) argue in this context that “support for the European Union should be analysed as a European identity-building process rather than as a set of tolerant attitudes towards a remote and foreign object” (Duchesne & Frognier, 2008, p. 144). We replicate this hypothesis in our study of the development of a European identity. In the case of this utilitarian argument as well, it is important to remember that clear differences can occur across member states. Strictly speaking, one can argue that it is not the actual net contribution to the European budget which is important, but the perception by the public opinion, which can differ from the real situation. Since this perception was not measured in the ICCS 2009 survey, we will restrict our analysis to the factual data about the contribution to the European budget.
**Duration of membership**

Concluding we will take the duration of membership into account as a variable on the country-level. Gabel (1998) observed a different effect for older and newer member states on support for European integration. Risse (2010) concluded that European identification in the newer member states from Central and Eastern Europe is lower than in the older member states. He explains his finding with the ‘institutionalist argument’ that EU membership matters. Citizens get socialized into the norms and rules of the EU. This causes a common idea of moral validity and correctness so that collective identities are developed. The longer one is part of the European Union, the stronger one is embedded in its rules. Although there is no linear relation between how long a country has been a member state and the strength of European identification, citizens of new member states feel less European. Thus, we expect to find a positive relationship between duration of membership and European identity. To test this hypothesis we will differ between the six founding members (1957), a second group of nine member states that accessed between 1973 and 1995 and the last group of twelve new member states that accessed since 2004.

From this literature we pose following hypotheses:

1. More knowledge about the European Union relates to a stronger European identity.
2. Living in a member state that benefits from its membership will relate to a stronger European identity.
3. Living in a member state that has been part of the EU for a longer time will relate to a stronger European identity.
Data and methods

The data in this article are derived from the recent International Civics and Citizenship Education Study 2009 (ICCS 2009) (Schulz, Ainley, & Fraillon, 2011), that was conducted in 21 member states. The ICCS questionnaire included extensive information on various topics of citizenship education. The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) conducted the study. National research agencies cooperate within the framework of this international organization to conduct research about educational outcomes. The data on which this article is based were collected in 2009 among 70,502 pupils with an average age of 13.5, residing in 21 different European member states\(^1\). They filled in a self-administered questionnaire at school and each time the whole class was surveyed. At least 150 schools were selected in each country, using a random sample. The chance for a school to be selected depended on the number of students in the school. The aim was to question 3000 pupils in each member state. All educational types were included in the sample and only pupils with physical or mental disabilities and pupils that did not speak the survey’s language were excluded. A response rate of 85% was aspired. The lower bound for an acceptable response rate was set at 75%. The average response in the countries included in this article was, after replacement, 89.5% and it has to be remembered in this regard that the survey in most countries was conducted by the educational authorities themselves thus contributing to the willingness of school principles to participate in the study.

An average age of 13.5 years old among respondents is rather low for a study about political attitudes. Nevertheless, this provides valid results (Van Deth, Abdendschön & Vollmar, 2011). Jennings and Niemi (1981) concluded that political orientations develop on an early age. Inglehart (1970) and Block, J. and Block, J.H. (2005) also state that political preferences develop on an early age and that they do not change much later on. Inglehart (1970, p. 62) argues that this is especially applicable to the identity of a youngster: “[A]n individual’s sense of national identity is part of a basic set of political orientations established relatively early in life which tends to be increasingly difficult to change thereafter.” This is why we expect that a European identity can be measured in an early stage. Block, J. and Block, J.H. (2005) showed in their study of infants that even at this age reliable indicators exist for the political orientation later on. This shows that at the age of fourteen, as earlier research demonstrates, this certainly is the case (Torney-Purta, 2002).
The ICCS data contain sufficient indicators for knowledge about Europe, as well as for the feelings of European identity. This implies that we can use these data to inquire the relationship between both variables adequately. As these variables both relate to the individual level (70,502 respondents) and the level of the political system (21 member states), we will use a multi-level analysis that takes individual- and country specific information into account. The adoption of the country-level is also necessary since levels of European identity vary among member states (Risse, 2010). The programme MLwin was used for this analysis. We applied MPlus for a confirmatory factor analysis on the knowledge items.

**Operationalization**

An extensive battery of knowledge questions about the EU was included in the ICCS-study, of which a factor analysis selected six items which measure knowledge about the EU in a one-dimensional, and thus reliable, manner (Kerr, Sturman, Schulz & Burge, 2010). Typical questions were e.g. about the meeting place of the European Parliament, the enlargement of the EU and European competences. A factor analysis showed that these six questions were highly consistent, so they can be considered as a correct operationalization for the latent concept ‘knowledge about the European Union’. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for binary variables showed that the 16 items did not suffice to be used as one single scale (CFI: 0,72, TLI: 0,70, RMSEA: 0,039). A scale of six items was formed by adjustments based on modification-indices. This scale did satisfy the goodness-of-fit criteria of a CFA-analysis (CFI: 0,96, TLI: 0,94, RMSEA: 0,024). We will use these six items as a sum scale in following analysis (see Appendix 1 for the full text of the questions).

Average scores on this cognitive test (Table 1) show that the knowledge-level among these pupils is high, with an average of 4.89/6. Respondents from new member states Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia seem to be the best informed, while we measure the lowest score in the English education system. Earlier findings suggested that there is a difference in political knowledge between girls and boys. In this research we find a significant (p < .01), though small difference between the score of 5.00 for boys and 4.97 for girls.
Table 1  Total score 6 knowledge questions per member state and according to gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>St.dev.</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>St.dev.</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>St.dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>5.02</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>5.04</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>5.15</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>5.04</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>5.04</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>5.04</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>5.06</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>4.94</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>5.26</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>5.14</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>4.87</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>5.05</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>4.97</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>4.97</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>5.37</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>5.37</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>average</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>4.97</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ICCS 2009. N boys= 33,904; n girls= 34,265. Numbers are average scores (0-6) and standard deviations.

We also have a number of possible indicators for the operationalization of the notion ‘European identity’. Weiler (1997) stated that the hopes set in European citizenship are “(a)
that citizenship reinforces and renders more tangible the individual’s sentiments of belonging to the Union; (b) that citizenship confers to the individual citizen rights which tie him to the Union” (Weiler, 1997, p. 500). The latter is expressed in the legal rights that EU treaties grant to European citizens. These are the same for citizens of all member states, so we exclude them from the current analysis. The former should be measured among citizens. Do they feel they belong to the EU? This aspect is measured in the ICCS 2009 survey. By measuring this ‘feeling of belonging’ to Europe and the European institutions, we follow empiric researchers as Dejaeghere and Quintelier (2008) and Thorpe (2008). Michelat and Thomas (1966) already showed that being proud about one’s own nation is the best indicator for the feeling of belonging to this group. This is why we expect that the statements ‘I am proud that my country is a member of the European Union’ and ‘I am proud to live in Europe’ from the ICCS 2009 survey will measure a feeling of European identity. Since these questions consist of a four point Likert-scale, we can use a principal component analysis. This analysis shows that the items ‘I feel part of the European Union’, ‘I am proud that my country is a member of the European Union’, ‘I am proud to live in Europe’ and ‘I feel part of Europe’ all measure the same concept. This factor has an Eigenvalue of 2.536 and an explained variance of 63.4 percent. This demonstrates that we can use these items for the operationalization of European identity (Table 2). However, we are aware of the limitations of this measurement. Citizenship measured as a sense of belonging to the EU and Europe measures the political identity of the respondents. With this measurement, we are not able to make any claims about the meaning that adolescents give to this European identity (e.g. cultural, political, cosmopolitan, moral or pragmatic).

Table 2  Factor analysis European identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>European identity</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am proud to live in Europe</td>
<td>.797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel part of Europe</td>
<td>.828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am proud to be a member of the EU</td>
<td>.784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel part of the EU</td>
<td>.774</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ICCS 2009. N= 70,017. Principal Component Analysis. Cronbach’s Alpha: 0.806. Eigenvalue 2.536, Explained variance 63.4 %.
Control Variables

For both the cognitive and the utilitarian model, it is important to take a number of control variables into account in our analysis. In this light we pay attention to political trust. Granovetter (1985) states that sense of community, a common identity and trust are related. Trust is required for a well-functioning community and for the legitimation of the political system (Marien & Hooghe, 2011). People cannot trust each other in the Hobbesian ‘state of nature’ as they lack institutions to guarantee agreements between individuals. When, in contrast, citizens trust the political institutions, it will be easier for them to trust each other. This opens the path for a common identity and in the case of the EU also towards the vision that a well-meaning European community exists (Muñoz, Torcal & Bonet, 2011). To illustrate this, we refer to the research of Nezi, Sotiropoulos en Toka (2009) that applies trust as an indicator for positive attitudes towards the EU. Trust in political institutions is expected to lead to a stronger sense of belonging since civic and juridical conceptualizations as constitutional patriotism suppose that a political identity is not based on (ethnic-)cultural elements, but on a commitment to specific constitutional rules and political institutions (Habermas, 1992; Weiler, 1997).

Trust was measured as trust in local, national and international political institutions. The question posed for the five institutions in table four was: “How much do you trust each of the following institutions?” The response options were: “completely” “quite a lot” “a little” and “not at all”. The principal component analysis shows that trust in political institutions forms one concept (Hooghe, 2011). The Cronbach’s Alpha of .814 demonstrates that these items are a reliable measure for trust in political institutions (Table 4).

Table 4    Factor analysis trust in political institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trust in national government</th>
<th>.807</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trust in local government</td>
<td>.718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in political parties</td>
<td>.804</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in national parliament</td>
<td>.836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in United Nations</td>
<td>.618</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ICCS 2009; N= 68,973, Cronbach’s Alpha: 0.814. Principal Component Analysis. Eigenvalue: 2.893, explained variance: 58%.
Especially for the cognitive model, we have to take the expectation of a strong correlation between political interest, educational level and political knowledge into account (Eveland & Scheufele, 2000). Since one can have no knowledge about the EU without getting in contact with it, it is important to assess how interested respondents are in politics. Interest indicates motivation, so it is an indicator for the extent to which respondents are open to information about the EU (Prior, 2010). As a consequence, it is important to control for general political interest if we want to ascertain the influence of political knowledge on European citizenship.

To measure political interest, we use the factor scale presented in table 3. The items, measured by a four point Likert-scale, probed about the interest of the respondents in a wide range of political and social issues. The factor analysis shows that these items form a highly reliable indicator for interest in political and social problems since they clearly form one component and Cronbach’s Alpha is .89. For the validity of the final analysis it is important to remark that interest in European politics makes full part of this factor and does not form a separate variable.

Table 3 Factor analysis political interest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Political interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interest in political issues in community</td>
<td>.759</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in political issues in country</td>
<td>.850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in social issues in country</td>
<td>.782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in politics in other countries</td>
<td>.784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in international politics</td>
<td>.830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in European politics</td>
<td>.803</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ICCS 2009. N= 70,502. Principal Component Analysis. Cronbach’s Alpha: 0.888. Eigenvalue 3.856, Explained variance 64.3 %.

When we interpret a cognitive explanation, we have to keep in mind that there is a substantial imbalance. In general, adolescents with the highest educational level and the highest socio-economic status will also have more knowledge. This makes it difficult to differentiate between relations. Educational level for instance plays an important role for the formation of an attitude about the EU, regardless of the specific knowledge level (Inglehart, 1970; Gabel 1998). Income and education – indicators for the social-economic status of the
family in which an adolescent grows up – are the strongest indicators for an attitude towards the EU, according to Gabel (1998) and Inglehart (1970) and Thorpe (2008) and Faas (2007) demonstrated that education about the EU does strengthen the European identity of adolescents. Thorpe’s (2008) conclusion that adolescents with more knowledge about Europe also identify more positively with the EU, for instance, is limited to adolescents with a bourgeois status in Britain. He found different results for adolescents with different socio-economic backgrounds. Educational level measures socio-economic status. However, we do not know which will be the final educational level of the respondents, as they are still in secondary school. The survey probed about the educational level the respondents expected to reach in the future. Response options were lower secondary school, upper secondary school, non-tertiary post-secondary or vocational tertiary education and having finished theoretically oriented tertiary studies or a post-graduate. Other international research has shown that the expected educational level of adolescents is widely applied as a proxy-indicator for academic orientation (Andrew & Hauser, 2011). Respondents were also asked about the educational level of their parents. The variables ‘educational level father’ and ‘educational level mother’ correlated strongly (correlation = .581), so we combined both measurements in a sum scale. Except for not finishing lower secondary education, this question had the same response options. These variables will be used as an indicator for educational level and socio-economic status of the family of descent.

Other commonly used control variables in this field are age and gender. We cannot take up age as a variable since respondents were selected on class level. The variable gender is adopted in the dataset as a binary variable. Boys have code 0 and girls code 1.

*Country-level variables*

Since some previous studies observed a different effect for older and newer member states, while others did not, we split up the member states into three categories to test this relationship (Gabel, 1998, Hooghe & Marks, 2005; Risse, 20110). We took the founding members (Treaty of Rome in 1957) as the reference category. Following, we grouped the member states that accessed between 1973 and 1995 and the new member states are the ones that accessed during or after 2004³.
In the footsteps of Gabel (1998) and Inglehart (1970), we also split our respondents according to net contribution to the EU-budget. As a measure for the expectation that citizens make a rational cost-benefit calculation when they are asked how strongly they feel European, we calculated the net contribution to the EU-budget for every member state in our sample (Figure 1). The net contribution is presented as a percentage of the gross national income (GNI) of each member state in 2008. We choose the year before the survey took place since this was the most recent finished year when the pupils were questioned. The net contribution was calculated as the total contribution of a member state minus the total amount of incomes generated from the EU by that member state (European Commission, 2009). A negative net contribution implies that a country received more than it contributed to the European budget. While Sweden and Denmark make a net contribution to the Union (but both less than one percent of their national income), Lithuania, Greece and Luxembourg relatively receive the most from the EU-budget.

Figure 1   Net contribution to the EU-budget

Source: European Commission, 2009. Percentage of the gross national income of a member state that went to the EU (positive figures) in 2008 or that was received from the EU (negative figures).
Analysis

Given that our dependent variable ‘European identity is continuous, we can run a linear regression, be it with independent variables on two levels. One level is that of the respondent, the other is the member state of the respondent. The analysis was carried out in two steps. In Model I we only take the individual independent variables into account; the country specific variables are added in Model II.

Since the difference between the Null-model and Model I is significant (Table 5), we can say that the inclusion of a second level is an improvement for the model. Model I shows that knowledge about the EU does have a significant effect on European identity, but this effect is limited to a standardized coefficient of .052. In this interpretation we have to take into account that due to the large sample, significance levels are easily met. This implies that we also have to consider the size of the effect. We should conclude, therefore, that knowledge makes a modest contribution to the development of European identity. Somewhat surprisingly, we see that trust in political institutions on the other hand has the largest effect on the development of European identity. The standardized effect is .245. Also trust in the own national political institutions seems to have an important positive effect on European identity. Further we see significant effects of political interest, while the influence of expected educational level is rather limited. The parental educational level has no significant influence on EU identity along the own expected educational level. Finally we see that political interest also has a limited, though clear influence on European identity. Model explains 11.6 per cent of variance, which is a reasonable proportion.

We add the country-variables in Model II. We see that this addition has no influence what so ever on the included individual variables: even here we witness an important influence of political trust and a rather limited influence of political knowledge. The duration of membership does not seem to have a significant effect on the strength of European identity. Coefficients do indicate a lower average score when a respondent lives in a country that accessed later, but there is still a large internal spread among these countries. This explains the non-significance of the coefficient. Also the net-contribution of a member state to the European budget has no effect on the European identity of 13.5-year olds.
We further examined the possibility that the effect of knowledge is different in the various groups of member states, so we made a separate analysis where the slopes could vary freely for every country (random slopes model). This analysis demonstrates that the spread in coefficients was rather limited and that the effect is similar for most member states. The difference was too small to justify further analyses. The regression lines of Figure 2 demonstrate that the relation between knowledge and European identity is positive in all member states, with only a limited variance in correlation. Anyhow there is not a single member state where more knowledge about the EU would lead to a weaker European identity.

Figure 2 Regression lines by member state

Source: ICCS 2009. n(individual level)=70,502; n(country-level)=21. The lines demonstrate for each member state the predicted value for European identity, based on a model with one intercept and one independent variable (knowledge) which can vary freely on the country-level.
# Table 5: Multilevel Regression model for European identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Null-Model</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B (SE)</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>B (SE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-0.005 (0.049)</td>
<td>-0.331*** (0.051)</td>
<td>-0.218 (0.126)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU-Knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.051*** (0.004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political trust</td>
<td>0.245*** (0.004)</td>
<td>0.245***</td>
<td>0.245*** (0.004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental education</td>
<td>0.002 (0.002)</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.002 (0.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political interest</td>
<td>0.091*** (0.004)</td>
<td>0.091***</td>
<td>0.091*** (0.004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0.074*** (0.008)</td>
<td>-0.037***</td>
<td>-0.074*** (0.008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected educational level</td>
<td>0.026*** (0.004)</td>
<td>0.027***</td>
<td>0.026*** (0.004)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Country variables:*

- Contribution to the EU-budget: -0.01 (ns) (0.039) -0.012 (ns)
- Accessed between 1973-2004: -0.117 (ns) (0.138) -0.052 (ns)
- Accessed after 2004: -0.160 (ns) (0.128) -0.082 (ns)

e(ij)                | 0.952 | 0.845 | 0.845 |
u(0j)                | 0.049 | 0.040 | 0.037 |
ICC                 | 4.90% | 4.52% | 4.20% |

*Source:* ICCS 2009 (n(individual level)=70,502; n(country-level)=21). The difference in deviance statistics between the null-model and the 2nd model is 28,521 which is significant on the .001-level. The decline in unexplained variance between the null-model and model 2 is 11.9%. Significance: *** p<0.001; ** p<0.01; *p<0.05.
Discussion

We started our analysis from the expectation that more knowledge about the European Union relates to a stronger European identity. It is easier to identify with a political community when you know more about it. This hypothesis is confirmed, although we should remark that this conclusion needs some nuance. More knowledge about the functioning of the European institutions has only a limited effect on the notion of European identity. This means that the possibility to strengthen European identity by a direct transmission of knowledge is rather limited. If European institutions hope to broaden democratic support for further European integration, this analysis only partly supports this method. Moreover, hypothesis 2 was not confirmed at all: there is no significant relation between the contribution made by a member state to the European budget and the level of European identity among its adolescents. This means that we can conclude that adolescents do not make an economic rational cost-benefit analysis as a basis for the extent to which they feel European. We underline that we based our analysis on the objective numbers of the net-contribution and not on the perception of the public opinion. The remark has been made that the perception of these transfers is more important than the actual flows and this needs to be studied in the future. However, we can exclude that the objective transfer to the EU has an influence on the European identity of adolescents. Third we see that, when we measure European identity, the duration of membership does not have a significant effect. We therefore reject the hypothesis that living in a member state that has been part of the EU for a longer time relates to a stronger European identity. For the adolescents in our sample, the institutionalist argument that a stronger embeddedness in the values and norms of the EU will lead to a stronger identification with the EU does not seem to hold.

Even though we could only confirm one of the hypotheses that we stated at the beginning of this study, we see that knowledge makes a small contribution to the explanation and financial contribution does not have a substantial effect. Also the period of membership to the EU does not have a significant effect. In general we can conclude that boys, who are interested in political and social matters, know more about the EU, expect to be highly educated and have more trust in political institutions have a stronger European identity than their counterparts without these characteristics.
The strongest variable in the whole analysis is political trust. We can operationalize this variable in different ways. In the analysis reported in Table 5 we limited ourselves to five political institutions. We left the European Union and the European Parliament out of our analysis. When we do take these items into account (which means that we would expand the scale of political trust to seven items), the effect only gets slightly stronger from .245 to .273. This increase is limited so we can exclude the possibility that we only found a circular relation, namely that the ones who trust the European Parliament and European Commission, also have a stronger European identity. Trust in European institutions was not even adopted in our analysis, and if we would have done this, it would only make a limited contribution to the development of European identity. This indicates that the explanation for this strong effect should be found elsewhere. It is quite surprising that there has been little theoretical and empirical research on the relation between political trust and (European) identity so far. This leads us to the conclusion that for the explanation of the strong effect of political trust, further research is needed.
References


Appendix 1: Used items in the ICCS 2009 survey

Knowledge about the EU and its institutions

Are these statements true or false?

a) <country of test> is a member of the European Union

What is the flag of the European Union?

![Flag options]

Which of the following cities is a meeting place for the European Parliament?

- Rome
- Berlin
- Paris
- Brussels

Here are some statements about the possible enlargement of the European Union (i.e. the possibility of more countries joining the European Union). Which of the following statements is true?

- The European Union has decided not to accept any more countries as new members
- The European Union may accept more countries in the future but there are currently no countries being considered as candidates for membership
- The European Union may accept more member countries in the future and is currently considering granting membership to some specific countries
- The European Union has decided to only accept new member countries if any existing member countries decide to leave the European Union

Knowledge about European laws and policies

Are these statements true or false?

- The European Union aims to promote peace, prosperity and freedom within its borders
- All European Union countries have signed the European Convention on Human Rights
Endnotes

1. The research was carried out in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, United Kingdom, Spain, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden. It is important to remark that the national educational authorities were responsible for financing this research. More precisely this meant for Belgium that only the Dutch language Community participated. The French speaking community did not allocate financial resources to participate. In the United Kingdom only England participated, not Wales, Scotland and Northern-Ireland. The Netherlands originally did take part in the study, but the Dutch research team failed to meet the necessary response rate and therefore the Dutch data are not included in the dataset and the current analysis.

2. Hooghe and Dassonneville (2011) also included variables that measure how often adolescents watch or listen to the news broadcast and talk about politics. There appeared to be multicollinearity between these variables and the variable interest in our model. We keep the variable interest in our model because this measures more directly respondents’ interest than when we measure interest more indirectly by looking at media use.

3. The original member states that are included in our sample are Belgium, Luxembourg and Italy. Between 1973 and 1995 we have Austria, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Spain, Sweden and England that accessed. The new member states in our sample are Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

4. The revenue of the EU-budget for each member state consists of the expenditure domains sustainable growth, preservation and management of natural resources, citizenship, freedom, security and justice, the EU as a global partner, administration and compensations (European Commission, 2009). The contribution to the EU-budget of every member state is the sum of the contribution based on GNI, of the contribution based on VAT-revenue, of the correction for the UK, Denmark and Ireland and of certain by the EU determined levies that member states can collect at their ports, airports and borders which they have to send through to the EU.