



POLICY BRIEF

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European Integration: A matter of acknowledging identities

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Questions of identity and an integrated European Union

How can we turn Europe's increasing cultural diversity into an economic and social asset

Society must recognise certain differences between its individual members

Summary This policy brief is informed by the publication *Identity Processes and Dynamics in Multiethnic Europe* (Amsterdam University Press forthcoming). Edited by Charles Westin et al., the volume provides a cutting-edge account of how individual and collective identities are intrinsically associated with the differential distribution of power in society. How this correlation affects the labour, housing and education opportunities of Europe's migrant and minority populations has particular salience in light of the European Union's stated aims to integrate new and old member states. If the EU seeks to create an economically strong, democratic and administratively well-functioning union of independent states that peacefully co-exist, policymakers must validate the complexities of identity issues in an increasingly multiethnic Europe. This policy brief addresses questions of identity at the European, national and local policy levels.

European integration means national integration Policies concerned with European integration must be considered in relation to policies that aim to improve social cohesion at the national level. It is a fact that practically all EU member states are facing immigration flows of documented as well as undocumented migrants. It is also a fact that almost all member states have an aging population, and labour recruitment is foreseen as being necessary to sustain current welfare systems. It is therefore important to consider how Europe's increasing cultural diversity may be turned into an economic and social asset, rather than be seen as a societal problem. Therefore, immigration policies should go hand in hand with policies of diversity and multiculturalism. National, ethnic, cultural and religious identities are at the heart of this matter.

The aim of European integration is intrinsically linked to a task that almost all 27 EU member states now face on the home front. That is, developing policies for the social inclusion of linguistic, religious, cultural and traditional ethnic minorities as well as of a steadily growing number of residents of migrant origin. Identity issues are at the core of integration because integration implies that society must recognise that certain differences actually do exist between its individual members, be they in terms of age, gender, sexuality, religion, language, ethnicity or

Differences should not lead to differential treatment

culture. Integration, moreover, implies that differences be recognised though not taken to be the grounds for differential treatment. Empirical case studies of ethnic minorities and migrant communities across Europe provide experiences that policymakers and researchers, alike, can take valuable cues from. There is much to be learned both from traditional migration countries such as France, the United Kingdom and Germany, and relatively new immigration countries such as Spain.

The EU employs various instruments to pursue integration:

- **A common institution**

Tools for integration The EU employs various instruments to pursue integrational objectives. One essential tool that current member states lack, however, is a common constitution. Such a document would provide a joint frame of reference that all national legislations would be expected to accommodate. Past proposals to meet this need have thus far been rejected: first when the French and the Dutch voted against a European constitution in 2005 and, more recently, by the Irish veto of the Lisbon Treaty. According to some commentators, the outcome of the three referenda was hardly surprising. Rejecting proposals for a European constitution, however, had little to do with technical, legal or political considerations. National identity was the issue at hand.

National identities seemed to have blocked this instrument

Negative outcomes of earlier referenda may be similarly explained. Denmark's and Sweden's resistance to changing local currency to the euro and the UK's decision to opt out of joining the Eurozone were not so much motivated by concern about government controlling national economic policies. It had more to do with the symbolic importance of national identities that people attach to their country's currency.

- **European citizenship**

Another tool still being developed is a framework for a common European citizenship based on allegedly shared European values. In technical terms, the task would call for coordination and homogenisation of the rights and obligations that are part and parcel of national citizenships in the current member states. As a first step, this 'European citizenship' is defined as an annex to national citizenship. National citizenship would thus remain a necessary requirement for enjoying European citizenship so long as member states maintain national sovereignty. Rights and obligations are undeniably important for regulating the relationship between the individual and the state. However, strip away the legal and political aspects of citizenship, even for a moment, and one finds strong emotional attachment at the core of most people's sense of citizenship. It is this attachment to which citizens attribute their national belonging – in other words their national identity. Yet again, though, national identity becomes a possible stumbling block in the EU's road of ambitions towards an integrated Europe.

National identity becomes a possible stumbling block

European nation-states had immense success in fostering a sense of national identity

National identities European nation-states have had immense success in fostering a sense of national identity and allegiance to the state. The nation-state ideal – of one people in command of a specific territory – had its roots in nineteenth-century political Romanticism. Some European states such as France, the Netherlands, Portugal and the Scandinavian countries evolved quite easily into nation-states by the early nineteenth century. Others were ethnically and culturally complex entities comprising polyglot peoples who each identified themselves as a distinct ethnic group. This was the case for Belgium, Russia, Spain, Switzerland and the UK. The idea of establishing nation-states was one of the guiding principles of the Versailles Treaty, upon which the Habsburg and Ottoman empires' Central and Eastern European territories were transformed into Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Albania, Rumania and Bulgaria.

National identities are the result of over 150 years of country-specific developments

National identities, thus, are the result of at least 150 years of country-specific industrialisation, democratisation, education programmes and welfare systems. Compulsory schooling, already introduced by the early nineteenth century, brought literacy to the population at large, and led to the standardisation of language. The popular press, too, had immense significance in developing what Benedict Anderson has termed the 'imagined community'. The World Wars also served to mobilise national loyalty. Indeed, the nationalising projects that individual European states have taken upon themselves is considerably older than any of the grand schemes pursued by the EU.

An increasing number of Europeans feel excluded

Non-national identities Not all citizens of Europe, however, identify fully and unconditionally with the dominant groups found in their nation-state. There is an increasing number of Europeans who today feel excluded by the dominant national community of the state in which they hold citizenship.

One category of such individuals comprises ethnic and religious minorities whose identities were not fully recognised by the national movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This includes Romas, Jews, Britons, Sorbs, Basques, Catalans, Saami and Catholics from Northern Ireland. Such peoples are European by the very fact that they have lived in Europe for centuries, though they may not identify themselves with their respective country's predominant national identities such as Hungarian, Dutch, French, German, Spanish, Swedish or British. Some ethnic minorities have struggled centuries long for recognition of their cultural, linguistic and/or religious distinctiveness. In some cases, the struggle has included pleas for regional autonomy. An even more significant number of people in Europe are of (fairly recent) migrant origin. In many cases, they enjoy citizenship in their current country of residence, but nevertheless experience exclusion from certain aspects of the national community. For instance, people of migrant origin tend to be underrepresented in politics at

national as well as local levels. A third notable category are peoples permanently residing in a country of immigration though they are not citizens of that country. This status may be the result of emotional reasons that prevent an individual from giving up his or her original citizenship (should the host country not permit dual citizenship) or because the country has highly restrictive naturalisation laws.

The EU must realise social cohesion in culturally diverse member states

The EU not only faces the challenge of developing policies to enhance the integration of all member states into a common democratic, economically viable and socially well-functioning whole. It must also provide strategies to facilitate social cohesion in culturally diverse member states, while simultaneously lending support to regional development across national boundaries. National, ethnic and religious identities are the source for strong bonds of solidarity and loyalty. At the same time, however, these identities can become minefields in the battle of misguided identity policies. Informed identity politics are thus of great policy relevance.

Identity issues are crucial to the democratic development of present-day Europe

Identity politics and social cohesion Identity issues are crucial to the social cohesion, integration, recognition and democratic development of present-day Europe. The Continent is setting off in an opposite – if not altogether oppositional – direction from a Europe of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, where national homogenisation was the ready answer to problems of social cohesion. Strengthening democracy calls for the recognition of minority positions throughout the EU. This implies greater acceptance of a plethora of identities. Such differences are not only defined in terms of ethnicity, culture, language or religion. Besides the by-now obvious importance of gender identity, we must also accept that sexuality among Europeans does not take a homogenous form. Identities arising from various forms of disability are also meaningful, while age and generation serve other collective identities and social categories that call for recognition.

Collective identities and social categories call for recognition on EU level

Opinion-moulders, journalists and the media today tend to emphasise the problematic dimensions of relations among peoples of diverse origins in contemporary European societies. They highlight problems pertaining to various aspects of social exclusion such as racism, discrimination, segregation, xenophobia, ethnocentrism and other forms of inequality. In this regard, it is absolutely essential to install powerful anti-discrimination legislation. Acknowledging identities in a spirit of diversity will inevitably call into question those quarters and situations where ethnic and/or cultural conflict produce discrimination.

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The concept of interethnic relations also encompasses processes of social inclusion (referred to under various headings in different countries: incorporation, insertion, acculturation, assimilation, integration and absorption). Interethnic relations can thus refer to the rigid preservation of national, cultural and religious boundaries between groups

as well as to processes of cultural development, innovation and societal transformation. Broadly speaking, interethnic relations may be understood as concerning failed or successful forms of diversity management.

A common vision guides work towards European integration but not national efforts

Conclusion: Rewriting the national story Issues of social cohesion at the national level and issues of integration at the European level go hand in hand. At present, we might acknowledge that a common vision guides work towards European integration, with an aim to even out differences between poorer and richer member states and enforce the responsible and efficient handling of their national economies. However, there does not seem to be any corresponding vision guiding national efforts at improving social cohesion. In some respects, this may be explained by the fuzzy relationship between promoting national values and identities, on the one hand, and seeking to promote acceptance for diversity, on the other.

The national stories of individual member states play a crucial role

One example to learn from is the Parekh Report published in 2000 by the Runnymede Trust in London.* The report clearly states that an outstanding task for British society is to identify, explain and disseminate a vision of what a future multiethnic UK could be. Here one of the most crucial elements at stake is to rethink the national story. The national story is a historiographical narrative justifying all the past conquests, agreements, rulings and decisions that have made the society what it is today. The story, however, is written by the conquering power, not by the conquered people. Rewriting the national story would thus mean including the perspective of peoples whose voices usually go unheard. These recommendations are undoubtedly applicable to all EU member states in the context of identities. Following Lord Parekh's recommendations, the national stories of each individual member state of the EU should be rethought. This should be done not only to enable inclusion of ethnic and migrant minorities in the national community, but also to introduce a dimension in the national story that facilitates understanding of the commonalities of Europe.

Including the perspective of the 'unheard' in national stories will foster European integration

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* *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: The Parekh Report, (2000), The Runnymede Trust, Profile Books Ltd: London*

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