

A European identity?

Democratic legitimacy needs to be grounded in the collective will of the members of a political community. European integration has transformed the old Europe of independent nation states and the European Union has formally embraced democratic principles and procedures. However, it has not yet consolidated a democratic practice bringing forth citizens' trust and solidarity.

One might say that the search for democracy in the EU is connected to the search for an expression of the shared identity of the European people. To what extent does such a European identity exist? And if so, how can we see it? How does it affect identification with the nation state?

The aim of RECON in this research field is to understand and explain interrelations between collective identities, European integration and democracy. RECON investigates how collective identity is expressed and reshaped in the enlarged Europe. While the nation state has traditionally been the main frame of political reference to most Europeans, political processes are increasingly taking place within a European sphere. As a consequence, European integration influences individuals by altering their political frames of reference, and further, which political community individuals identify with. European integration thus challenges old concepts of collective identity, and also the kind of legitimacy on which a democratic order and political institutions can be built.

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Selected findings

- **Collective identity should be understood as evolving through democratic processes, not as based on historically and culturally rooted identities**
- **European identification supplements and reshapes national identification**
- **Young Europeans exhibit a broad and inclusive identity which goes beyond national identity, indicating a move towards a European collective identity**
- **Structural and cultural changes in Central and Eastern Europe and in Turkey are closely related to values identified as ‘European’**
- **As Turkey increasingly moves towards the EU’s democracy standards, underlying anti-democratic tensions in domestic politics become visible**
- **NGOs contribute to reshaping collective identities and building a more inclusive and equal society**



*'I love Europe' by Diana Jung
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Read more on the findings in the following pages

More details and publications from the research field ‘Identity Formation and Enlargement’, including all RECON reports and working papers mentioned in the below, are available at:
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Identity formation in Europe

Collective identity evolves through democratic processes taking place in the public sphere, where the collective will of members of a European political community are expressed.

Despite growing mobility and interaction between citizens in the EU, as well as political processes increasingly taking place at the European level, there is still no *European people*.

Collective identity has traditionally been understood as something that is based on historically and culturally rooted identities, such as national identities. In order to understand and explain collective identities beyond the nation state, RECON introduces a new conception of collective identity, arguing that democratic legitimacy is achievable despite the lack of a European people. Collective identity should be understood as arising through conversations

and narratives about identification and belonging to a political community, undertaken in a European public sphere. Change in identity and belonging – identity transformation – may be seen as an open-ended process, where the outcome depends on the process. In a European public sphere identities may be reshaped, and the degree of attachment may be strengthened or weakened throughout the democratic processes.



Read more

Collective identity and democracy in enlarging Europe, Magdalena Góra/Zdzisław Mach/Katarzyna Zielińska (eds), Peter Lang, 2011

The nexus between democracy, collective identity formation and EU enlargement, Petra Guasti/Jessie Hronesova/Zdenka Mansfeldova (eds), Institute of Sociology of Sciences of the Czech Republic, 2011

'Situating the demos of European democracy', Magdalena Góra/Zdzisław Mach/Hans-Jörg Trenz, in *Rethinking democracy and the European Union*, Eriksen/Fossum (eds), Routledge, 2011

New generations find their way

Young Europeans support a democratic order within the confines of the nation state. Yet they show signs of a broader, more inclusive identification and belonging to Europe as a whole.

A study on identity patterns among students in Germany, Hungary and Poland reveals a strong identification with universal values, diversity, pluralism and peaceful solutions through democratic processes. Yet, the students' identity is affected by their university affiliations, access to unrestricted information via modern technology, desire to gain experience and explore the world, cross-border mobility and ever increasing contacts with people from various cultures, nationalities and backgrounds. This provides for the development of a broader, more inclusive sense of belonging. Young people in Europe are recreating their stories of belonging with European and universal identifications supplementing the national ones.

Further RECON studies on young urban dwellers in Poland find that they have generated new narratives about their identity. These challenge the traditional, nationality-based identity in Poland. This may be the beginning of a development towards a new, more fragmented and fluid Polish collective identity.

Read more

Identity and democracy in the new Europe: The next generation finds its way, Olga Brzezińska/Erika Kurucz/Ulrike Liebert/Rosemarie Sackmann (eds), RECON Report, 2011

'Urbanity and identity after the accession of Poland to the EU', Marcin Galent/Paweł Kubicki in *Collective identity and democracy in enlarging Europe*, Góra/Mach/Zielińska (eds), Peter Lang, 2011

Anti-democratic tensions in Turkey

As Turkey moves towards meeting the EU's democracy standards, underlying anti-democratic tendencies and tensions in domestic politics, which might threaten the basis of individual rights and liberties, come to the fore.

The unsettled relationship between Turkey and the EU provokes debate about the relationship between a *liberal* model of an open democratic society, based on Enlightenment values, and a *traditional* collectivist vision of the state, based on religious heritage and ethnic nationalism.

Europe as a concept and European institutions as actors create new frames for such debates. Struggles of modernisation versus tradition, and of preserving national sovereignty versus building an open European society and polity, come to the fore. A case study investigates the trade-offs between secularism and democracy, and the extent to which the EU's political conditions has made Islam more visible.

This tendency is also revealed in findings from research on women's rights in Turkey. This study indicates ambivalence in Islamist perspectives on women's rights. As Turkey moves closer to EU membership, tensions regarding gender equality become more visible. Whilst secularists of all ideological backgrounds agree with the European position in this matter, the Islamist perspectives are ambivalent regarding women's rights and sexuality in Turkey.



Read more

'Turkey in cosmopolis? Turkish elite perceptions of the European project', Meltem Müftüler-Baç/Nora Fisher Onar, in *Collective identity and democracy in enlarging Europe*, Góra/ Mach/Zielińska (eds), Peter Lang, 2011

'The European Union and Turkey: Democracy, multiculturalism and European identity', Meltem Müftüler Baç, *RECON Online Working Paper 2011/20*

'Women's rights in Turkey as gauge of its European vocation', Meltem Müftüler-Baç/Nora Fisher Onar, *RECON Online Working Paper 2010/04*

NGOs as change agents

A study of NGOs in Poland finds that excluded groups, such as women and sexual minorities, turn to the EU in their quest for diversity and equality.

The shared agenda of these NGOs is to make the Polish state and society more open to diversity, and to make the state more inclusive by guarantees of equality. When national NGOs experience limitations of state policies and funding that hinders their growth and cooperation, they turn to the EU and the European institutions to induce changes on Polish government. Findings reveal that NGOs find it easier to challenge national policies when they are supported by common European initiatives such as non-discrimination policies. Similarly, NGOs report that influencing social attitudes is much more difficult without the support of shared European social policies.

Read more

Extending the boundaries of civic membership: Polish NGOs as change agents, Beata Czajkowska (ed), RECON Report 2011