

POLITICKÉ VEDY / POLITICAL SCIENCES

Časopis pre politológiu, najnovšie dejiny, medzinárodné vzťahy, bezpečnostné štúdiá / Journal for Political Sciences, Modern History, International Relations, security studies

URL časopisu / URL of the journal: <http://www.fpvmv.umb.sk/politickevedy>

Autor(i) / Author(s): Požarlik Grzegorz
Článok / Article: Európske občianstvo ako nová sociálna konštrukcia: dopady na vytváranie kolektívnej identity v súčasnej Európe / European Citizenship as New Social Construct: Implications for Construction of Collective Identity in Contemporary Europe
Vydavateľ / Publisher: Fakulta politických vied a medzinárodných vzťahov – UMB Banská Bystrica / Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations – UMB Banská Bystrica

Odporúčaná forma citácie článku / Recommended form for quotation of the article:

POŽARLIK, G. 2011. European Citizenship as New Social Construct: Implications for Construction of Collective Identity in Contemporary Europe. In *Politické vedy*. [online]. Roč. 14, č. 2, 2011. ISSN 1338 – 5623, s. 18 – 26. Dostupné na internete: <http://www.fpvmv.umb.sk/userfiles/file/2_2011/POZARLIK.pdf>.

Poskytnutím svojho príspevku autor(i) súhlasil(i) so zverejnením článku na internetovej stránke časopisu Politické vedy. Vydavateľ získal súhlas autora / autorov s publikovaním a distribúciou príspevku v tlačenej i online verzii. V prípade záujmu publikovať článok alebo jeho časť v online i tlačenej podobe, kontaktujte redakčnú radu časopisu: politicke.vedy@umb.sk.

By submitting their contribution the author(s) agreed with the publication of the article on the online page of the journal. The publisher was given the author's / authors' permission to publish and distribute the contribution both in printed and online form. Regarding the interest to publish the article or its part in online or printed form, please contact the editorial board of the journal: politicke.vedy@umb.sk.

EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP AS NEW SOCIAL CONSTRUCT: IMPLICATIONS FOR CONSTRUCTION OF COLLECTIVE IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPE

Grzegorz Pożarlik*

RESUME

With the adoption of the principle of European citizenship in the Treaty of Maastricht a scholarly debate has been accelerated as to whether the concept and substance of this fundamental principle depicting the character of European collective identity has been elaborated to the extent that we can clearly see the junctim between expected European demos-building function and day-to-day practice verified by participation of EU citizens in democratic life of the Union. In order to be able to answer such question one should define precisely the scope of the very notion of European identity as it has been the subject of permanent disagreement among scholars dealing with the nexus between democracy, citizenship and identity in the EU. Following this conceptual clarification I will then outline the two leading working hypotheses of this analysis, namely: European identity is being constructed in a process of symbolic othering. European 'we feeling' is primarily though not exclusively defined in opposition to significant others; and European identity is discursively constructed collective identity based on European citizenship.

Key words: European collective identity, European citizenship, symbolic interactionism, significant other

Identity – an *unidentified* social construct

The concept of identity is becoming pretty ambiguous and confusing in contemporary social science. This conceptual confusion results in polarisation of analytical perspectives, which takes a form of 'thick' versus 'thin' identity discourse. Just as 'thick' identity discourse is based on assumption that there exists a single, real, objectively categorised and empirically verified sense of individual and collective identity, the 'thin' identity discourse is framed by the assumption of parallel character of identity forms embedded within the individual, in first place, but also within the collective.

* Dr. Grzegorz Pożarlik is Associate Professor at the Institute of European Studies of Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland, e-mail: pozarlik@ces.uj.edu.pl.

Or, to put it other words, while a 'thin' identity discourse assumes existence of petrified, well-structured system of beliefs and norms understood as frame of identity reference, a 'thick' identity discourse, on the other hand, emphasises a need to see identity as permanently becoming, thus changeable, subjectively constructed and meaningful social reality.

The ongoing process of transnationalisation of economic, political, social and cultural patterns of every day life in contemporary societies in Europe - with decisive role of European citizenship based on individual freedom of movement within the EU - reinforces the need to adopt a thin identity discourse as more relevant in understanding the scope and meaning of identity transformations. This brings us to the imperative to redefine the balance of identities within the individual and the collective. Consequently - as **Brubaker** and **Cooper** (2000) argue: "these multiple identities are not attributes that individuals possess but rather frames of reference projected into specific patterns of behaviour".

Here we arrive at a central epistemological assumption of social constructivism, which constitutes the main theoretical framework of this analysis as exemplified in symbolic interactionism perspective: "Identity is a process. Formation of identity is a sort of symbolic activity" (Mach, 1993). The result of this process is emergence of the "self (we)" in relation to the "other (they)" image.

One of the crucial features of identity transformation is its contextuality. This applies particularly to collective identity. It can be built at different levels, depending on the gravity of mutual resemblance of the "we" category and a community of interests in relation to partners that are socially important in a given situation ("they") (Mach, 1993). Identities can be more or less meaningful at a given time and circumstances for particular individuals and collectives.

Let us examine explanatory value of major hypotheses formulated from the perspective of social constructivism, symbolic interactionism in particular, as they refer directly to the question of an impact of Europeanisation processes on identity transformation in an enlarging EU. In doing so we shall refer to subsequent hypotheses, namely: (1) European identity is constructed in a process of *symbolic othering*, which leads to emergence of European 'we feeling' being primarily though not exclusively defined in opposition to significant others; (2) European identity is a discursively constructed collective identity based on European citizenship.

Hypothesis one: *European identity is constructed in a process of symbolic othering. European 'we feeling' is primarily though not exclusively defined in opposition to significant others.*

In social science, sociology, anthropology, political science, social psychology more specifically, there has been a long tradition of reflecting on the role of boundary drawing in socially constructing significant differences between social groups and their impact on construction of collective identities. **Gerard Delanty** for that matter claims that: "all identities are based on some kind of exclusion, as the identity of the self can be defined only by reference to a non-self" (Delanty, 2000, p. 115). **Zygmunt Bauman** goes much further when he explains the Holocaust as an extreme consequence of a basic human instinct to divide 'others' into friends and enemies (Bauman, 1998). Along the same line of argumentation we find **McCrone** who claims that: "nationalism grows best in a medium in which there is an Other – an enemy against which we can measure and develop our identity" (McCrone, 1998, p. 184). Consequently, European identity may evolve as reaction to essentialistic understanding of national identity, which is a basis for negative *othering* being base for xenophobia and racism.

A very representative position within the constructivist perspective on formation of collective identity was introduced by **Shmuel N. Eisenstadt** and **Bernhard Giesen** (Eisenstadt, Giesen, 1995), who claim that collective identity is first and foremost a social construct which has no fixed ontological structure.

The sense of collectivity emerges when a group begins to believe that it shares the same perception of social world around and it considers itself distinct from other collectives. We cannot identify, according to this perspective, a single establishing myth, which would be referred to as the beginning of the "we" feeling. Rather, **Eisenstadt** and **Gissen** seem to argue that we should consider the "we" feeling to be in a permanent state of becoming. The concept of the society itself is based on such assumption according to **Eisenstadt** and **Gissen**. The main research task in this context is to find indicators of the common understanding of the group in the "we" category terms as opposed to the "them" - others.

From yet another perspective, **Roger Brubaker** and **Frederick Cooper** (Brubaker, Cooper, 2000), we find a separation of two analytical notions, namely identity and identification. It needs to be emphasised that we are frequently

being confronted with simultaneous application of these two terms in anthropological research which leads to a conceptual confusion and it limits an explanatory value of a given research. By identification, **Brubaker** and **Cooper** understand a process of internalisation of norms and values, which leads to their manifestation in attitudes being adopted in concrete social interactions. Identity, on the hand, denotes a particular state of reflection of the subject, who relates him/herself to the outside world.

Here we need to emphasise yet another important conceptual clarification introduced by **Brubaker** and **Cooper** in *Beyond Identity*, namely the meaning of categorisation for self-identification. Just as we are being categorised - in an objective sense - by institutions of public life as subjects belonging to certain economic or demographic segments of the society, we tend to identify ourselves and others; thus we categorise ourselves and others as belonging to a certain social categories. It is also important in this context how - we believe - others categorise ourselves. We observe this categorisation at all levels of public life, beginning with local community, through national-state level and finally the EU-level.

On the other hand, there has been, however, an alternative approach within a social constructivist paradigm to the question of boundary drawing in socially constructing significant differences between social groups and their impact on construction of collective identities. **Fuss** and **Grosser** (Fuss, Grosser, 2006), for that matter, claim it is essential to differentiate between construction of the self and the other as relatively separate from the process of defining a sense of belonging together – “we-feeling identity”. As **Fuss** and **Grosser** argue, “Being categorised does not automatically mean to take on this label as an aspect of self-identity or to see oneself as sharing something with others so categorised. If and only if the category has profound consequences in terms of changed patterns of social interactions (does) the assignment to a certain category become relevant for self-identity” (Fuss, Grosser, 2006, p. 213).

Irrespectively of scholarly dispute over cognitive ambiguity of collective identity, a question of conceptual interdependence between cognitive perceptions of collective belonging translate into emotional “we-feeling” remains one of the leitmotifs of contemporary social science. The significance of this question stems from the assumption that specific value of communities results from feelings of mutual commitment between the group members (Citrin and Sides, 2004, p. 165; likewise Kaina, Karolewski, 2009, p. 14). As **Kaina** and

Karolewski argue convincingly, “Due to these feelings of commitment, the *awareness of belonging* is tantamount to the *awareness of togetherness* which, in turn, provides the background for one’s willingness to show solidarity as well as the readiness to make a personal sacrifice for the well-being of the collective and fellow group members (Kaina, Karolewski, 2009, p. 14).

Summing up the argument put so far, we may conclude that the key contribution of social constructivism to European identity discourse is that it emphasises much more explanatory value of inter-subjective identification (which is processual and contextual) rather than objective belonging (which is fixed and replicable) in studying identity construction patterns (Wendt, 1994).

Hypothesis two: *European identity as a discursively constructed collective identity based on European citizenship.*

Fundamental assumption behind the thesis about European identity being in first place a discursively constructed collective identity goes in line with the perspective of symbolic interactionism, which sees actions taken by individuals and groups to be determined by emerging definitions of situations formulated in the course of an interaction process.

Elżbieta Hałas (Hałas, 1987, p. 107) explains that “defining a situation consists in locating significant objects important to the person taking the action due to the purpose of his/her action, which, thanks to the situation definition, may become coherent and organised, in social time and space.”

A fundamental interactionist assumption is that all dimensions of identity are socially determined. **Richard Jenkins** is outspoken in claiming that “All human identities are in some sense – usually a stronger than a weaker sense – *social identities*” (Jenkins, 1996, p. 4). Consequently, “a sense of awareness of the continuity of self as a human being who is unique and separate but also has something in common and connection with others is *the primary identity* for all of us” (Jenkins 1996, Jamieson, 2002, p. 3).

Having assumed that, we may argue that in the context of European integration process the critical condition in this context has been construction of *sui generis* European identity, being a “sound basis for the citizenship, for specifying the rights and duties of the members, and for setting the terms of inclusion/exclusion” (Eriksen, Fossum, 2007, p. 26).

However, the latter imperative of European identity - according to **Eriksen** and **Fossum** – manifests itself in the form of a deficit of European 'we identity' or a lack - at European level - of what **Karl Deutsch** described as a 'sense of community' – "a matter of mutual sympathy and loyalties, 'we-feeling', trust and mutual consideration, partial identification in terms of self-images and interests, mutually successful preconditions of behaviour and co-operative action in accordance with it" (Deutsch, et al., 1957, p. 36).

This assumption seems particularly relevant when applied to processes of construction of a European *we feeling* or European *demos* as one may put it. Collective *we feeling*, understood in Deutschian terms, constitutes a condition critical for societal recognition of the legitimate character of public power exercised within a given legal and political system.

The EU presents here itself as a *genus proximus* and *diferentiam specificam* of this rule. The backbone of this construct is citizenship, which serves as a forum for manifestation of collective sense of belonging to the political community (Mach, Požarlik, 2008). First and foremost, citizenship is the strongest factor influencing a given type of collective political identity. This assumption is particularly relevant for understanding of dynamics of European identity construction in the light of the EU eastern enlargement (Deutsch, et al., 1957, p. 36).

Mutual interdependence between citizenship and collective "we feeling" has been convincingly presented by Maas who rightly observed that "citizenship is, in its fundamental meaning, comprised of rights, which are subject of constant reconstruction through historically changing social, political and legal interactions. European citizenship introduced formally in the Maastricht Treaty established a framework for common European supranational identity. From the perspective of changing dynamics of European political identity, establishment of such European rights altered the political environment and generated demands for extending and expanding the content of the original free movement rights. This process contributes to the fragmentation of the system in which policies and social interactions develop beyond the exclusive control of any single member state". (Maas, 2002, p.14)

Consequently, it becomes more evident that European citizenship has been constructed to complement member state national citizenship by encompassing EU citizens with additional frame of reference while exercising civic rights within the domain of democratic life of the Union. Here we find **Rey**

Koslowski (Koslowski, 1999) who makes it clear that: "...extension of rights creates a divergence between nationality and citizenship – categories that traditionally coincide in the context of nation states. This divergence corresponds with the co-existence of multiple political identities, national and European. Moreover, by extending democratic participation, EU citizenship represents a potential source of legitimacy for the integration process as a whole; it is therefore more than empty symbolism".

Consequently, we see how political collective we feeling transcends the boundaries of the nation-state. As **Joseph Weiler** put it convincingly: "the normative or in that sense constitutive aspect of European citizenship dissolves interdependence between citizenship and nationality within the supranational constitutional sphere which in turn leads to establishment of a Union composed by citizens, who by definition do not share the same nationality" [...] The substance of membership (and thus of the demos) is in a commitment to shared values of the Union as expressed in its constituent documents, a commitment, inter alia, to the duties and rights of a civic society covering discrete areas of public life, a commitment to membership in a polity which privileges exactly opposites of nationalism - those human features which transcend the differences of organic ethno-culturalism" (Weiler, 1997, p. 119).

In similar tone we find **Jürgen Habermas** who introduced a concept of "post-national constitutional patriotism" (Habermas, 1992) based on assumption that popular identification with the values embodied in its constituent documents – in the Charter for Fundamental Rights in particular – provides a normative source of legitimacy whereas the complementary source is to be found in the day-to-day implementation of the code of European citizens' rights within the jurisdictional spaces created (Pożarlik, 2010).

By way of conclusion let us refer again to **Rey Koslowski** (Koslowski, 1999) who argues that just as the very notion of citizenship was attributive for the concept of state itself in the Aristotelian times, national citizenship was inherently incrustated within the ideal of modern nation state, European citizenship based on the principle of free movement of persons symbolises a new meaning of democratic polity in contemporary Europe.

References:

- BAUMAN, Z. 1998. *Globalisation: The Human Consequences*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- BRUBAKER, R., COOPER, F. 2000. "Identity", *Theory and Society*, Vol. 29, No. 1. pp. 1-47.
- CITRIN, J., SIDES, J. 2004. "More than Nationals: How Identity Choice Matters in the New Europe", in *Transnational Identities: Becoming European in the EU*, (eds.) Herrmann, Richard K.
- DELANTY, G. 2000. *Citizenship in a Global Age: Society, Culture, Politics*, Buckingham: Open University Press.
- DEUTSCH, K. 1957. *Political Community in the North Atlantic Area: International organization in light of historical experience*, Princeton University Press, NJ
- EISENSTADT, S. N., GIESEN, B. 1995. "The Construction of Collective Identity", *European Journal of Sociology*, 26(1), pp. 72–102.
- ERIKSEN, E. O. & FOSSUM, J. E. 2007. 'Reconstituting Democracy in Europe', in E. O. Eriksen (ed.) *How to Reconstitute Democracy in Europe? Proceedings from the RECON Opening Conference*, RECON Report No 3, Oslo: ARENA.
- FUSS, D., GROSSER, M. A. 2006. "What Makes Young Europeans Feel European? Results from a Cross-Cultural Research Project", in *European Identity: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Insights*, (Eds.) Karolewski, Ireneusz Pawel, Kaina, Viktoria, pp. 209–242.
- GELLNER, E. 1991. *Narody i nacjonalizm*, Warszawa: PWN.
- GIDDENS, A. 2006. *Nowoczesność i tożsamość*, Warszawa: PWN.
- HABERMAS, J. 1992. 'Citizenship and National Identity: Some Reflections on the Future of Europe', *Praxis International*, 121, pp. 1-19.
- HAŁAS, E. 1987. *Społeczny kontekst znaczeń w teorii symbolicznego interakcjonizmu* Lublin, Redakcja Wydawnictw Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego.
- HALL, S. 1996. 'Introduction: Who Needs Identity?', in S. Hall and P. Du Gay (eds.) *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London: Sage.
- JAMIESON, L. 2002. "Theorising Identity, Nationality and Citizenship: Implications for European Citizenship Identity", *Sociologia* 2002, Vol 34, n° 6, pp. 507-532.
- JENKINS, R. 1996. *Social Identity*, Routledge, London.

- KAINA, V., KAROLEWSKI, I., "EU governance and European identity, Living Reviews in European Governance", 19 May 2009, in: www.livingreviews.org.
- KAROLEWSKI, I. P. 2009. *Citizenship and Collective Identity in Europe*, London: Routledge.
- KOSLOWSKI, R. 1999. "EU Citizenship: Implications for Identity and Legitimacy", in: T. Banchoff and M. P. Smith *Legitimacy and the European Union*, London, Routledge.
- MAAS, W. 2002. "Free Movement and EU Enlargement", paper presented at 5th Biennale Conference of the European Community Studies Association, Toronto, 31 June 2002.
- MACH, Z. 1993. *Symbols, Conflict and Identity. Essays in Political Anthropology*, Albany, State University of New York Press
- MCCRONE, D. 1998. *The Sociology of Nationalism*, London, Routledge.
- POŻARLIK, G. 2008, "Collective identity formation in the process of EU enlargement: defeating the inclusive paradigm of a European democracy?", RECON Working Paper, ARENA Oslo.
- POŻARLIK, G. 2010. "Collective identity and the challenge of axiological pluralism in the new Europe", in: *Collective Identity and Democracy*, red. Zdzisław Mach & Magdalena Góra, RECON Report 12, ARENA, Oslo 2010.
- SHORE, C. 1996. "Imagining the New Europe: Identity and Heritage in European Community Discourse", in C. S. Gamble, P. Graves-Brown and S. Jones (eds) *Cultural Identity and Archaeology: The Construction of European Communities*, London, Routledge.
- WEILER, J. H. 1997. "The Reformation of European Constitutionalism", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 35(1/3), pp. 97-131.
- WEILER, J. H. 1999. *The Constitution of Europe. Do the New Clothes Have an Emperor? And Other Essays on European Integration*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- WENDT, A. 1994. "Collective Identity Formation and the International State", *American Political Science Review*, 88(2), pp. 384–396.