

Towards a Social Identity for Europe? A Social Psychological Approach to European Identity Studies

Hakan Ovunc Ongur

Department of International Relations, Middle East Technical University, Turkey

Tel: 90-532-692-9152 E-mail: ovuncongur@gmail.com

Abstract

Unlike traditionally nationalistic, cultural, and ethnic approaches to the discussions over European identity, this paper makes use of Henri Tajfel's Social Identity Theory, and more specifically social identity, in order to have a more coherent and theoretically healthier approach to the concept. Borrowing from Tajfel, it is asserted that even without sharing a common culture, a common history, or a common set of traditions, values and aspirations, Europeans might form ingroups which may temporarily make them able to construct a social identity. Such is simple enough to indulge social comparisons with other social ingroups, making them outgroups, and some of them Other-ed. An historical perspective over Europeanization might establish a valuable field of observation regarding whether a possible European social identity, instead of an immanent one, might be detected since European political integration began in the 1970s.

Keywords: European identity, Europeanization, Othering, Social identity theory

1. Introduction

Since the very beginning, scholars or political elites who contemplate the process and utility of European integration have managed to envision new political tools, vocabulary, and sets of new conceptualizations with which to understand the post-war relationship between European states and European societies (Smith, 2000). Newborn concepts and perspectives, including spill-over, intergovernmentalism, supranationalism, multilevel governance, conditionality, actorness, new institutionalism, new regionalism, democratic deficit, rhetorical action, and many others have become common. Among such conceptualizations, however, Europeanization and European identity are among the most often studied and fashionable concepts in both academia and the media (Mair, 2004; Checkel & Katzenstein, 2009).

This study perceives Europeanization as a historical cross-border process that dates back to Ancient Greece, reviewing numerous incidents, including the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, the French Revolution, the two world wars, and many others. It eventually creates its latest product, the economically, socially, and politically accoutered EU. What is questionable about Europeanization is whether these historical cross-border connections among Europeans create a common European identity. It is a question that is not yet figured by scholars but also by pioneers of the process of European integration. In 1973, for the first time, the European Communities defined a European identity (i.e., an identity for European people) "based on a common heritage: identical attitudes toward life, converging on a creation of a society responding to the needs of individuals; the principals of representative democracy, the rule of law, social justice, and respect for human rights" (Passerini, 2002, p. 194). Since then, similar arguments have been echoed in countless debates and what the term *identity* implied did not truly alter its meaning. Unlike this modernist, nationalistic, cultural, and conventional approach to European identity, this paper introduces the concept of *social identity*, borrowing from Tajfel's Social Identity Theory, and asserts that, even without sharing a common culture, a common history, or a common set of traditions, values and aspirations, Europeans might – discursively or practically – form *ingroups* which temporarily allow the ability to construct a social identity. Such is simple enough to indulge social comparisons with other social ingroups, making them *outgroups*, and some of them *Other-ed*.

In the first part of this paper, Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (SIT) will be introduced. The discussion will define how the concept of social identity is developed and incited in social settings, the sort of a connection that might be found between the identity dimension in the talks of European identity and social identity, and how this detail might be elaborated within the European context. Then, in the second part, the Europeanization phenomenon will be explored with respect to the development of the concept of European social identity. The European integration process since the beginning of the 1950s will be reviewed as it pertains to identity-related matters and,

eventually, through combining a historical comprehension of Europeanization and the idea of European social identity, it will be argued that a selected number of European states and societies today represents an ingroup, whose own social identity and outgroups are in constant flux. Finally, the conclusion will advance the position that the use of social identity in European studies will not solely provide conceptual simplicity and accuracy; rather, it can also help to understand the social, cross-border connections between Europeans, or simply the process of Europeanization.

2. A social approach to identity: Henri Tajfel and social identity theory

In an article published in 1974, Tajfel introduced the concept of social identity to social sciences. His primary aim was stated as to “emphasize the role of ‘men in groups’ rather than men *tout court* in the study of the psychological aspects of intergroup behavior” (Tajfel, 1974, p. 65). In his study, however, the social psychological explanations of intergroup behavior was not prioritized; instead, it was argued that the impact of the social psychological variables was “determined by the previous social, economic, and political processes, so they also acquire[d] in their turn an *autonomous* function which enable[d] them to deflect in one direction or another the subsequent functioning of these processes” (Tajfel, 1974, p. 65). This, perhaps, places Tajfel among the pioneers of those who claim that social, economic, and political processes may influence the formation of identity and the determination of behavior of the groups in their relations with each other.

In 1978, Tajfel edited some selected studies with regard to intergroup relations and, thus, elaborated on the fundamentals of his SIT. This volume basically questioned the conditions through which the intercourse between individuals (inter-individual behavior) was determined by their membership in different social groups (intergroup behavior). Accordingly, SIT describes a group which should include one or more of these three components:

“A cognitive component, in the sense of the knowledge that one belongs to a group; an evaluative [component], in the sense that the notion of the group and/or of one’s membership of it may have a positive or a negative value connotation; and an emotional component in the sense that the cognitive and evaluative aspects of the group and one’s membership of it may be accompanied by emotions (such as love or hatred, like or dislike) directed towards one’s own group and towards others which stand in certain relations to it” (Tajfel, 1978a, pp. 28-29).

At least on the onset, however, SIT does not differentiate between groups that exhibit those elements. Instead, social, economic or political processes are expected to have categorized the groups as they are. The theory, therefore, uses the so-called *minimal group paradigm*, which shows that “mere categorization of people into an ingroup (‘us’) and an outgroup (‘them’) is sufficient to elicit attempts to positively differentiate the in-group from the out-group along available dimensions” (Ford & Tonander, 1998, p. 373).

Differentiating between an ingroup and an outgroup is fundamental for understanding SIT. At the very beginning, Tajfel neither informs members of one group about the other groups nor lets any of the sides interact. He begins by questioning what happens when only a sense of membership to one group is provided for the participants. Even under such minimally informed membership and group categorization, results are copious: First, “most of the subjects act very consistently in the direction of favoring in their decisions anonymous members of their own ‘groups’ at the expense of the anonymous members of the ‘outgroups’” (Tajfel, 1978a, p. 34), and then, “the subjects act in terms of the intergroup categorization provided or imposed by the experimenters, not necessarily because this has been successful in inducing any genuine awareness of membership in separate and distinct groups, but probably because they felt that this kind of behavior [is] expected of them by the experimenters; and therefore they conform to this expectation” (Tajfel, 1978a, p. 35).

These statements confirm that group membership in SIT is contextual (i.e., it is prone to change with respect to the extent to which the awareness of being a member is made clear, or when the positive or negative evaluations of other groups are associated with being involved in one group, or in accordance with the level of feedback that the group members receive for their behavior in turn). The group membership is, therefore, important because of its ability to bypass the inter-individual differences in social groupings and in social identification processes (e.g., depersonalization or “deindividuation” (Abrams & Brown, 1989; Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995)). The major common determinant of social behavior includes “a shared ingroup affiliation of the individuals concerned...; and a shared interpretation of the relations between the ingroup and the outgroup as applied to a particular social situation or to a series of such situations” (Tajfel, 1978a, p. 44).

3. Social identification through a social identity

In post-war society, SIT advances four nested concepts within the process of identification. First, the process of *social categorization* elicits a guide for social action of the individuals as it orders the “social environment in terms of groupings of persons in a manner which makes sense to the individual” (Tajfel, 1978b, p. 61). Second, the *social identity* is conceived “as that *part* of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1978b, p. 63). Combining the first two, social categorization might also be understood as a system that defines the individual’s position in society that is organized into groups. Once a social categorization that provides social identities is established, an inevitable process of *social comparison* begins. Through it, “a group becomes a group in the sense of being perceived as having common characteristics or a common fate mainly because other groups are present in the environment” (Tajfel, 1978b, pp. 66-67); hence, the members of that group compare themselves with other groups in order to verify the group’s own existence. Derrida’s *différance* (1967/2001), an inevitable component of social identification processes, makes such a comparison available, or vice versa. Lastly, once intergroup social comparisons are confirmed which, in turn, influence the intergroup behaviors, *psychological group distinctiveness* clarifies the necessity of positive ingroup images (i.e., the so-called *ingroup bias*) as well as the necessity of the limits of intergroup similarities or, at worse, exaggerates intergroup differences. The concept of social identity, therefore, “is linked to the need for positive and distinctive image of the ingroup; this is why the perceived illegitimacy of an intergroup relationship transcends the limits of intergroup similarity in the relevant social comparisons and reaches out wherever the causes of illegitimacy are thought to reside” (Tajfel, 1978b, pp. 74-75). Hence, in the case of Tajfelian *secure* social identity, the relationship between two or more groups resembles the relationship between *inherently* superior versus inferior groups, and it is almost an empirical impossibility. In the case of an *insecure* social identity, at the opposite extreme, such an inherent psychological distinctiveness (i.e., superior or inferior) does not exist, which is what actually happens in the real world. Therefore, groups are encouraged to either become similar to any other group that they consider to be superior within a given context, or to positively revalue their inferior characteristics, or to come up with new group characteristics that are distinct from, but not necessarily superior to, other groups (Tajfel, 1978c).

The concept of social identity also finds an answer to what Jenkins calls a popular concern about the very concept of identity, which represents

“... a reflection of the uncertainty produced by rapid change and cultural contact: our social maps no longer fit our social landscapes. We encounter others whose identity and nature are not clear to us. We are no longer even sure about ourselves; the future is no longer so predictable as it seems to have been for previous generations. But change – the confrontation of languages, traditions and ways of life; the transformation of divisions of labor; demographic flux; catastrophe and calamity – is not in any sense modern” (1996, p. 9).

The social identity, thus, does not only tidy up all the confusion about self-identity by eliminating the factor of the *individual* from the process of *identification* (e.g., depersonalization), but it also makes it easier for people to find predictable, change-averse identities within social groups. It is considered to be a bridge between “collective phenomena and individual social cognition and behavior” (Hogg & Ridgeway, 2003, p. 97).

Theorizing social identity, nevertheless, diverges from theorizing individual identity. Identity Theory (IT), which is usually associated with the works of Stryker (1968), is considered to be “principally a microsociological theory that sets out to explain individuals’ role-related behaviors, while [SIT] is a social psychological theory that sets out to explain group processes and intergroup relations” (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995, p. 255). Both theories agree on the existence of a *reflexive self* who, in comparison to other social selves, is distinctly capable of categorizing, classifying, and differentiating itself. While SIT depersonalizes the self (i.e., sees it as an “embodiment of the ingroup prototype” (Hogg & Hardie, 1992)), IT self-verifies (i.e., sees the self in terms of the role/position in the given identity standard (Burke & Reitzes, 1981)). SIT calls this process *self-categorization*, while in IT, it is known as *identification*. It is supposedly a representative of an internal-external dialectic of identification: “collective internal identification is ‘group identification’; collective external definition is social categorization” (Jenkins, 1996, p. 87). Yet, instead of such dialectic, “group identification always implies social categorization. The reverse is not always the case. Social categorization, however, at least creates group identification as an imminent possibility” (Jenkins, 1996, p. 89). Identification,

here, has the explanatory potential for the rationale behind the grouping, right before social identity is activated with respect to other group or groupings. Thus, Burke and Stets (2000) link these two theories in order to arrive as a superior method of conceiving of social behavior.

4. Collective categorization of the self and the other

The most far-reaching conceptual elaboration in the SIT research, however, was not materialized as a combination of SIT and IT. Rather, it found its form in Turner's Self-Categorization Theory (SCT). For Abrams and Hogg, SCT is an "aspect of [SIT] that specifies in detail the cognitive underpinnings of social identity processes" (1999, p. 11). Turner's theory develops upon the hypothesis that "to achieve positive social identity, ingroup-outgroup comparisons must yield perceived differences which favor the ingroup" (1978, p. 236). The fundamental assumption is that social identity-building starts with categorizing the social world into ingroup(s) and outgroup(s). The group behavior is only possible if one such cognitive mechanism is established (Turner, 1984). The process of self-categorization is best described as follows by Turner himself:

"[W]here people define themselves in terms of a shared social category membership; there is a perceptual accentuation of intragroup similarities and intergroup differences on relevant correlated dimensions. People stereotype themselves and others in terms of salient social categorizations, leading to an enhanced perceptual identity between self and ingroup members and an enhanced perceptual contrast between ingroup and outgroup members. Where social identity becomes relatively more salient than personal identity, people see themselves less as differing individual persons and more as the similar, prototypical representatives of their ingroup category. There is a depersonalization of the self... and it is this process that transforms individual into collective behavior as people perceive and act in terms of a shared, collective conception of self" (1999, p. 11).

Oldmeadow and his colleagues (2003) detect three probable sources of motivation in the SIT/SCT research. First, according to SIT, "one important reason why people display ingroup bias is that this enhances positive group distinctiveness and social identity, thereby elevating the *self-esteem* [emphasis included] of these group members" (Long & Spears, 1997, p. 296). Second, in SCT, it is implied that "as designated by what is termed the meta-contrast ratio, individuals will identify with a category to the extent that it provides *maximal differentiation* between members of one group and members of another" (Deaux, 2000, p. 10). Both the self-esteem hypothesis and the intergroup discrimination argument, however, are tested either insufficiently or by solely using the minimal group paradigm; hence, the validity of these sources is questionable (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). A third source, on the other hand, provides better results. It initially assumes that interpreting and understanding the world represents a challenging task for individuals, which creates some level of uncertainty. Identifying with a social category, therefore, could be utilized to reduce this uncertainty.

The saliency of the social identity is important since it determines how much that (in)group is capable of affecting the outgroups and, thus, the social life altogether. It is advanced also that "one's identity is affected by one's position within the group as well as the position of one's group. Both are equally 'social' in nature, and involve social comparisons" (Worchel, Iuzzini, Coutant, & Ivaldi, 2000, p. 24). This position might be interpreted such that even if an individual is not satisfied with his/her own individual identity, group identities provide him/her with another chance to be satisfied in comparison with other individuals/groupings by being a member of one group. In a foreign country, for instance, a foreigner who is not completely satisfied with his own personal identity might find comfort in positioning himself with his national group identity. The number, and the content, of examples might easily be boosted.

In a continuum from *who am I?* to *who are we?*, a theoretical combination of SIT and SCT also extrapolates the reasons why people prefer to identify with multiple-identity organizations/groups. Foreman and Whetten suggest that

"a member compares his or her perceptions of an organization's *current identity* (beliefs about the existing character of the organization) with his or her expectations for its *ideal identity* (beliefs about what is desirable, informed by the member's sense of self); and the resulting *identity gap/congruence* (the cognitive distance between the current and ideal identity claims) significantly affects a member's level of involvement with the organization" (2002, p. 620).

The higher the level of *group status* (i.e., a group's "position in the political and socio-economic structure of society" (Turner & Brown, 1978, p. 201)), therefore, the greater is the likelihood that individuals will identify themselves with that particular group in a given time and context. Once such salient identification with a group is

developed, then starts the process called stereotyping. A prototype of the self inevitably leads to a stereotype on the *Other*. The process of stereotyping, which is not necessarily always deemed negative, is quite simply a shortcut belief about specific social groups, or types of other individuals (Stangor & Schaller, 1996). The basic function of it is to propose *a priori* information regarding individuals that is based on their membership into groups, thus to simplify the whole confusing process of social communication.

Though merely explored, the SIT/SCT research is capable of providing many political, social, organizational and cultural implications that nurture from the idea of categorization of groups in daily life. In the field of international politics, Druckman, for example, conducts a valuable study with which he combines both theories and the process of nationalism. The key variable in that study is the ‘loyalty’ that individuals establish toward a group(-ing). Social, political and economic grounds for nationalism are heavily analyzed. What Druckman does, however, is to go with the social psychological roots of the concept. He suggests that

“... [a]t the level of the nation, the group fulfills economic, sociocultural, and political needs, giving individuals a sense of security, a feeling of belonging, and prestige... These needs are not limited to national identifications but have been found to be the basis for group identification in general... [T]he nation achieves personal relevance for individuals when they become sentimentally attached to the homeland (affectively involved), motivated to help their country (goal-oriented), and gain a sense of identity and self-esteem through their national identification (ego involved)” (Druckman, 1994, p. 44).

Tajfel and Turner’s studies enter into the picture at this point, as even if there are no given negative feelings against other nations or individuals of other nationalities, only the knowledge of being involved in one group (i.e., a nation) provides an ingroup bias and, therefore, makes everyone prepared for stereotyping the other (out)groups. Nationalism, as an ideology, is particularly manipulated; to put it another way, it links “individuals’ self-esteem to the esteem in which the nation is held” (Druckman, 1994, pp. 48-49). Being a member of a nation enables people to organize their lives and their societal world which, as a result, increases both their self-esteem and attachment to their nation as the process becomes self-fulfilling. The stereotyped others hence become known as outgroups, as long as this self-fulfilling process alters, or is altered, at some point in time.

The construction of an outgroup does not necessarily result in negative feelings or aggression against it (Brewer, 1999). For that, there must be a need for manipulating a particular difference between the ingroup(s) and outgroup(s). Moreover, as Tajfel and Turner assert, “ingroups do not compare themselves with every cognitively available outgroup; the outgroup must be perceived as a relevant comparison group” (1979, p. 41). This assertion can easily be interpreted such that in SIT/SCT, not all outgroups should be considered as *other(s)*, in a sense that identification with them is encouraged and becomes necessary for, say, a nation’s existence.

5. How to apply social identity theory to European studies?

The remaining task here is to find ways to import the SIT/SCT research to European studies. Can the concept of Europeanization help? It is currently among the most fashionable terms which are studied in Political Science and International Relations research dealing with the subject of Europe. However, because of the difficulty in defining the term (Radaelli, 2004), the meaning of Europeanization changes from one scholar or one paper to another. Some scholars utilize Europeanization to mean a process that has a direct link to the process of European integration since the 1950s, or basically the European Union (EU) (EU-ization), while others see it as a wider historical phenomenon that covers a period of time more than fifty years. The main value of Europeanization in all ends is highlighted when the changes in domestic and, to an extent, international political settings are affected by “something European” (Hix & Goetz, 2000). This assertion also fits the way Europeanization is conceptualized by Radaelli, who refers to “processes of (a) construction, (b) diffusion and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ways of doing things and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU decisions and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourses, identities, political structures and public policies” (2000, p. 4).

Apart from these administrative and normative functions, Europeanization could also be defined as a broader and historical phenomenon, such as Wallace (2000) accomplished, and it might be possibly noted that the development of the EU and its pre-history since 1952 would be regarded as a product of this historical process. By clarifying this perspective, Europeanization should represent an ongoing historical continuum that emphasizes the quality and the quantity of the ever-occurring cross-border connections, not only between geographical borders, but also between the people of Europe. Its direction could go both *within* Europe and *from* Europe to outside its borders, as well as *into* Europe, between societies, institutions, norms, practices and values (Flockhart, 2008).

To historicize Europeanization, Hay (1957) takes the process from the point where the consciousness of *a sense of Europeanness* emerged to this day. In that sense, Europeanization might be traced back to ancient Greece (1200 BC) in terms of the development of commerce, economics, trade and politics (Bussiere, Dumoulin, & Trausch, 2002); to the Roman Empire (27 BC to AD 476) in terms of kindred languages, legal codes, literature, arts, engineering, medicine, and sports (Brague, 2009); to the Enlightenment in terms of cognitive, philosophical, rationalistic, secular, and democratic heritage (Rumford, 2002, pp. 209-237); to the Industrial Revolution in terms of scientific, industrial breakthroughs (Jovanovic, 2008); even to the consecutive world wars in the twentieth century in terms of recognizing the need for all that is European to come together. However, it is important to note that prior to the process of European integration since the 1950s, the word identity was not a popular choice to describe a commonality (a sort of Europeanness) among Europeans. Back then, it was only a common European culture or, at most, a European unity (Heater, 1992) among multiple segments, societies, and nations of Europe that was being referenced (Morin, 1997; Meny, 2001).

Wording with identity, therefore, should be seen as a post-war conceptualization that was inadvertently promoted by the EU-ization genre and, hence, an ahistorical phenomenon, if Europeanization is understood from a historical viewpoint – as this study attempts to do. The possible role that will be attached to the concept of SIT/SCT's social identity might possibly solve this ahistoricity and anachronism while infusing a different perspective into the discussions about European identity and Europeanization. Here, the idea should be highlighted as such that – either economic, political, social, or even only discursive – grouping among Europeans (i.e., European countries) might create a social identity among them; however, this possible result should not be confused with the idea(l) of bringing them together on the basis of a common identity that they have already brought with themselves. To put it into terms of identity studies, whereas a possible European social identity today represents a group of European states and nationals that defend certain common ground, political/economic/social roles, values and morals, an imagined and advertised European identity should necessitate commonalities (e.g., historical, religious, ethnic, etc.) rooted much deeper than simple banalistic motives that keep Europeans together for a reason.

The European integration process might be utilized as a primary example of grouping of European states and societies for certain purposes, be they political (e.g., the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community), economic (e.g., the membership to the European Free Trade Association in the 1970s), strategic (e.g., the peripheral enlargement in the early 1980s), security-related (e.g., the application of the ex-Communist states for the membership to the EU after the end of the Cold War), or a combination of two or more of such categories, fitting the *Zeitgeist* (e.g., the accession of the Eastern and Central European countries in 2004 and 2007). The common motivation of those actors or states to become involved in a group of other actors or states might be explained by the way in which Turner defines a social group as “one that is psychologically significant for the members, to which they relate themselves subjectively for social comparison and the acquisition of norms and values” (1987, p. 1). What the European integration process offers for the states is simply all of those.

Take a country from Central and Eastern Europe, such as Slovenia, as an example. On the material side, just by being involved in the process of European integration (i.e., becoming a member of the EU), Slovenia becomes a part of a big power in the world economy, and comes to possess, for instance, practically two seats in the meetings of the World Trade Organization. It is now militarily and security-wise immune to almost any possible external threat, since there will be some big armies (even at some point possibly a European army) and intelligence services to protect Slovenia from serious collateral damage. Slovenian nationals now acquire EU passports in addition to their national ones that enable them to travel freely all around Europe. Furthermore, they will soon be able to reside and work in other European countries on a voluntary basis as well. They are nowadays using one of the strongest currencies in the world markets for even simple shopping of bread from the closest local market. On the normative side, being a part of Europe makes Slovenia, which, less than two decades ago, was involved in a well-known tyranny of Communism, taken for granted as a democratic country that is respectful of human and minority rights, executes the rule of law, and operates a liberal market economy. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, today Slovenia represents a justified *European* country. Not only is the Slovenian identity closely linked to, or is a part of, the European identity, but Slovenia's citizens are also considered to be European. What does Slovenia give in return for all of these benefits? For a famous Slovenian, the answer is – in capitals – “NOTHING” (Zizek, 2004). Joining to the EU, to put it simply, overwhelms and elevates Slovenia's self-esteem.

A similar scenario might be extended to any other EU member state, regardless of its entrance date, or even to those that are candidates to become members. From the dogs of world-scale wars to the European Coal and Steel Community, from a mere economic market to a political “giant” (Leonard, 2005), from the Treaty of Rome to

the Treaty of Lisbon, from Portugal (i.e., Europe's western border) to Cyprus (its eastern border), from a collection of nation-states to the most developed regional entity in the world, the European integration with all of its involved actors, as a product of Europeanization, represents today an enlarged ingroup in the SIT terminology. For a selected number of individuals from the European continent, no matter how they identify themselves with the whole idea of continental integration, or no matter how the technocrats of the European integration attempt to identify the process with them, a selected number of European countries, in other words, today represents an ingroup.

This ingroup cannot be theoretically differentiated from any other groups, in terms of identification or self-definition. In that sense, though limiting the timeframe into the post-Maastricht era, Flockhart provides an excellent contribution for understanding how the Europeanization process or, better put, the EU-ization process, *defines* the EU with respect to the SIT/SCT data. She interprets the SIT/SCT

“[w]ithin the identity literature of [International Relations]... [that] primary attention seems to be directed towards the role of the ‘Other’ in relation to the ‘Self’/‘We’. However, identities cannot be constructed purely in relation to the ‘Other’. What actually happens is that identities are constructed through complex constellations of ‘we-groups’ in a system of social groups consisting of the ‘Self’/‘We’, placed in a hierarchical system between the ‘Other’ and what I call the ‘Significant We’. The ‘Other’ defines what the ‘Self’/‘We’ is *not* and what it seeks to distance itself from, whereas the ‘Significant We’ defines what the ‘Self’/‘We’ admires and strives to become. The ‘Significant We’ is as important (perhaps even more so) for the construction of identities, as is the ‘Other’” (Flockhart, 2006, p. 94).

In this model proposed by Flockhart, it is assumed that the latest product of Europeanization (i.e., the EU) is an ingroup (i.e., the ‘Self’/‘We’). More specifically, the latest flow of Europeanization has been constructing Europe as an ingroup for a selected number of states and individuals from the European continent. Following the minimal group paradigm that was effectively used in Tajfel's studies, those states and individuals, either discursively or practically, have been taken into the creation of an ingroup in Europe which, as a result, has positively benefited its members with higher self-esteem (i.e., either in the form of an increased negotiating power in world politics, or in the form of material richness), a better cognitive point of social comparison (e.g., Slovenia as a member of the EU vs. Slovenia alone) and, thus, a form of higher-level social identity (e.g., a European identity).

Since it has been overwhelmingly engaged in defining what the EU, its norms, its presence, its discourse, or its values should represent (i.e., the process of “banal Europeanism” (Cram, 2001)), what Europeanization has left questionable particularly concerns the construction of the outgroups of Europe (i.e., *Others* and *Significant We's* of Europeanization). One primary task here is to differentiate between those two outgroups. Two opposing explanations which have been made by those who contribute to the study of the European identity phenomenon and its Others could be categorized. On the one hand, the Waever's (1998) argument reads that a conceptualization of an Other for what is today being constructed as a European identity might be found in the continent's past. Europe, in other words, attempts to identify itself with its non-past, hopefully including the absence of wars, nationalism, sovereignty-obsessed nation-states, security paranoia, and zero-sum power games, and calls for worldwide hegemony. On the other hand, there is another strain of thought that follows Soysal (2002) and claims that European identity is, and should be, future-oriented. It should value the ruling of democracy, respect for human and minority rights, the rule of law, individual freedoms and liberal market economy, hence devaluing, or simply *othering*, the exact opposite implications of those that are exposed in the past. Therefore, the Others of those that are involved in the process of European integration should be the representatives of anti-democracy, anti-liberal nation-states with no respect for human or minority rights, the lack of the rule of law and fundamental freedoms. Although both views provide valuable insight on the identity construction in Europe today, neither manages to represent the category of the Others in Flockhart's model. In the SIT/SCT research, the Others should be considered as immediate threats to one ingroup or as those that carry immediate determinants/characteristics of identification against which one ingroup may manage to establish its own social identity. In Waever's and Soysal's models, however, the non-past or possible future of Europe is neither an immediate threat to the European identity nor does it carry immediate determinants of European social identification. Instead, they represent what the European ingroup today *aspires to* (or *not to*) become. Hence, they better fit the role of the Significant We in Flockhart's scheme (2008).

The process of European integration seeks to become the carrier of all of these appreciated values of the future and not to fall into the mistakes of its own past. The self-definition of Europeanization, to put it another way, does not only manipulate what the European ingroup (i.e., the ‘Self’/‘We’) should represent, but it also sets what

it should and should not become via establishing the Significant We's. What it does not interfere with, however, is simply about how to define its Others. In a recurrent process of the self-defining of Europe, with the banal aspects covertly attached, the process of othering has been arbitrarily carried out by contextually, environmentally, and temporally changing parameters. Consider these instances. Once de Gaulle comes into charge, the United Kingdom becomes an Other that supposedly represents the American market-led interests instead of *une Europe européenne* (Vaisse, 1997). Once the oil prices rise to the roof in the 1970s, the economic interests of the United States become the Other. Then President Nixon becomes perfectly suited for the role of *arch-nemesis* (Akins, 1973) and the United Kingdom changes its status to become welcomed into the European ingroup. Once Thatcher rises to power, the Single European Act and all of its representation of the managed economy that is based on the Keynesian model becomes evil. A couple of years later, however, a more radical initiative of the European Monetary Union is passionately embraced (Sbragia, 1993). Once Germany is re-unified, the previous non-Europeans (i.e., the countries of the Eastern and Central Europe) become the "forgotten cousins" (Schimmelfennig, 2003) and those that are against any more widening of the integration become "betrayers" (Mayhew, 2000). Once the events of September 11 occur, terrorism and terrorist groups become an Other for all Europeans (Gnesetto & Grevi, 2006, pp. 121-122), until they become rhetorically divided in between those that are *old* and *new* (Turkes, 2005). In a nutshell, today European social identity is being developed, not against an immediate set of the Others; rather, as changing outgroups are being made, the Others depend on the contextual and temporal changes in the global or international/regional economy, politics, security, etc.

In order to envision this very flexibly constructed ingroup–outgroup microcosm that Europeanization has pursued for the European ingroup, Flockhart's proposed figure might be further elaborated as the following: Europeanization, here, should represent what Turner would call *the provider of common evaluative dimension for social comparisons*. The participants of the European integration, or the EU, on the other hand, should be considered the ingroup that emerged out of a social comparison. It bears a common social identity that is, at times, secure (i.e., when the process of European integration goes without either deepening or widening processes) and, at other times, insecure (i.e., when it is prone to changes through deepening or widening measurements). The ingroup is surely very flexibly constructed. There is a certain level of *thin culture* (Mishler & Pollack, 2003) that is manipulated by the carriers/technocrats of the Europeanization process, but most of the grouping process is being conducted at the discursive and institutional levels. Europe's aspiring non-past and its post-modern future play the role of the outgroups, called the Significant We's. They are also open and vulnerable towards constant modifications and transformation; however, they are regarded as being resistant to change, since there are a limited number of practices that Europeanization has been able to provide for them so far. At last, the other set of outgroups, called the Others, should almost be seen as being consistency-averse (i.e., they are constructed in a rapid flux with regard to contextual or discursive changes), occurring not only within the continually changing boundaries of Europe, but also at the global scene.

6. Conclusion

If a process of identification needs a reference in order to have some form of *built-in Other*, European integration – lacking one – should be with no identity, or, at least, the attempts to construct one should be regarded more of a self-definition rather than a European identification. This ontological problem might be solved, as this study has attempted to put forward, by applying a sociological phenomenon known as social identity to the discussions over Europe's current condition. Following Tajfel and Turner's valuable SIT/SCT, a social identity should be perceived as a part of an individual's self-concept that is developed due to his membership within a social group(s) to which he attaches a value and emotional significance. Requirements for a social identity are, in fact, lower than what is expected from an individual's identification, and for sure what is expected from the Europeans in the EU. As Tajfel indicates, the simple gathering in a group is sufficient for individuals to form a social identity. Right after this minimal requirement is accomplished, a social categorization into ingroup(s) and outgroup(s) develops, which is followed first by confirmation of this social identity; second, by social comparisons between ingroup(s) and outgroup(s); and, finally, by attachment of psychological group distinctiveness in favor of the ingroup(s). Social actors are expected to be involved among ingroups and outgroup. For one ingroup, there are generally three forms of outgroups: on the one hand, there are the immediate Others, against which, to an extent, that ingroup constructs/imagines its own identity. On the other hand, there are Significant We's, or characteristics of whom that ingroup envies and seeks to emulate. Finally, there are separate, yet ineffective (in terms of social identification) outgroups. Following Tajfel and Turner's SIT/SCT research, it might be as observed that, after WWII, Europeanization took the role of the provider of a common evaluative dimension for a selected number of European states and individuals, which in turn construed

the EU as the ingroup of Europeanization to carry that social identity. The European non-past and the post-modern (i.e., future) Europe imagination, on the other hand, were categorized as Significant We's of that social identity, whereas the construction of the Others remained explicitly associated with ever-changing contextual, spatial and temporal conditions.

The major advantage of applying social identity into Europeanization and European identity discussions is about the theoretical plausibility and accuracy of the term. Whereas identity is a vague, and mostly non-described, phenomenon, social identity comes with a privileged literature that accumulates upon it. Simplicity is another considerable advantage. On the one hand, social identity uses a rather simple mechanism for identification that categorizes social connections into groups according to the minimal group paradigm. On the other hand, identification needs dubious, tacit, and scientifically hollow determinants of, at least, an identifier and an identified. Perhaps more importantly, finally, substituting European identity with European social identity might be anticipated to result in the elimination of expected historical, ethnic, religious, linguistic, or simply modernist kinships/connections among Europeans, and, thus, the replacement with practical, contextual, and functional connections among them. In that respect, it is safe to say that the introduction of the concept of social identity to European studies in general merits further exploration.

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