National interests and identity in the face of the challenges of european integration

Alba ÇERMA[1]

Abstract

National identity and values have been one of the most often studied topics among researchers in international relations throughout the years, from a variety of angles, especially in relation to European democratic ideals. The ideals at the heart of European Integration have been hotly debated in recent years as a result of some significant changes in EU governance. It is well known that European Integration is seen in a wide range of elements. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the best approach to build shared values as a chance to hold European nations and citizens together and to support European public policy was through the expansion of the EU and the established constitution.

The process of Albania's European integration is a significant and ongoing component of the topic of European integration. Since June 1991, Albania has had a relationship with the European Union. In this topic, I've discussed the advancement Albania has made thus far in relation to the requirements it still needs to meet, the Balkan nations that want to join the EU, and Albania's current status aspirations. Considering a country's sovereignty, where sovereignty currently stands in relation to the European Union and its integration, and the relationship between European and National identity, the study of this topic modestly brings the interaction between national identity and values with European identity and European standards.

[1] Alba Çerma is graduated in 2021 in MSc.International Relations at the European University of Tirana. Her thesis is supervised by Prof. Dr. Kristaq Xharo, Lecturer at the Applied Social Sciences Department, Faculty of Law, Political Sciences and International Relations, European University of Tirana.

Introduction

When it comes to the Western Balkans, it only takes a brief look at current events to realize that every state in the region has shared and still shares the same outlook on the future: participation in the European Union. Since the European Union first began expanding into Central and Eastern Europe, having good ties with neighbors has been one of its requirements. However, in recent years, the settlement of conflicts in the Western Balkans has emerged as a crucial and heavily stressed prerequisite for the European Union's further growth.

The Western Balkans can be divided into groups based on how much the EU affects how they handle unsolved conflicts with their neighbors. The current national interest has a new hue and perspective now that EU membership appears to be moving away from the stage of a romantic fantasy and toward a livable reality. The nature of the interaction between national and European identities is significantly influenced by culture. The intention is not for national identity to stand in the way of the formation of a European identity. A brief study on this subject connects the key concepts discussed above with the European Union and its function. The case study application indicates a qualitative approach, which is investigated in the gathering of various data. For this study, facts and information are gathered from a variety of documents, publications, and books. The primary data pertinent to the subject of this research were extracted after the finding materials had been processed.

This paper aims to analyze key elements such as national identity, national interests, sovereignty and European integration, interweaving them with European identity and European standards, to highlight where they can stand together and where European identity aims to have dominance. The research question: "Are national interests and identity, and essentially the sovereignty of a country, affected by integration into the European Union?" Research hypothesis: National identity and national interests lie at the core of a sovereign state, but the integration into the European Union and the growing power of the EU raises many questions whether the European identity will replace or dominate the national one.

National Identity

A nation's perception of itself as a coherent whole, characterized by its customs, cultures, and languages, is referred to as its national identity. (2021; Oxford

Languages) Constructivism has largely become a rationalist component of international relations theory, particularly the way it approaches a state's identity. Constructivist thinking holds that while state identities are dynamic during interaction, state interests are determined by those identities. As malleable as the culture that defines it, national identity is. Researchers concur that it is challenging to examine and provide clear definitions for terms like "nation," "nationality," and "nationalism." Although a "scientific definition" of the nation cannot be developed, the phenomena has occurred and continues to exist (Watson, 1977, p. 5).

Nationalism must be emphasized when considering national identity. We can name some theorists who have contributed to the nationalist discussion. According to Hobsbawm (1990), nationalism is the achievement of political rights by the general populace inside a sovereign state and ff nationalism were a modern invention, so would nations: the nation-state was the result, not the origin, of a nationalist discourse". Further, Anderson (1983), presented nationalism as a process of "imagined communities". In his book "Imagined Communities", he asserts that a nation is essentially always an imagined community that gives its citizens a sense of identity. and belonging. Anderson defines the nation as an imagined community since "members of a nation, however small, will never know, meet, or even hear of most of their fellow members never for them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of the common community. National identities are created and form imaginary communities" (p.15)

Language is an essential element of the nation, because it is precisely what makes the difference in relation to other communities. Meanwhile, Hobsbawm (1990) has written that he was quite skeptical about the close interaction that exists between language and nations, and claims that it is no more than a generalization to say that individuals who speak the same language are somehow friends, while those who speak in foreign languages would be hostile.

Smith (1992) argues that identity operates on two levels, individual and collective, which are often confused in discussions of ethnic and national identity. Connor (1993) asserts that "If we look at countries today, many of them seem to build their perceived internal similarity on a premise of common ethnicity. A belief in the unique origin and evolution of the group is an important component of national psychology. This belief in the origin and evolution of the group is the basis of ethnic identity, and ethnic identity seems to constitute the essence of nations" (p.377). Further, Smith (1992) makes the connection of the origins of modern nations and underlines that nations emerge from existing ethnic groups. He proposed that every ethnic group should have, at least, a myth that identifies it with common ancestry, with common historical memories, a collective name and a society with a certain territory. Smith paid attention to symbols, which according to him play a special importance in determining identity. According to

him, national identity is built through specific social dramas and events in which the meaning of the nation is contested but above all potentially transformed.

European Union and European Integration

The European Union is an integration of European states that includes different histories, institutions, political systems and economies. The EU currently consists of 27 member states. Published on the EU website, the objectives of the European Union are to establish European citizenship, ensure freedom, justice and security, promote economic and social progress and affirm Europe's role in the world.

The EU remains focused on making its governing institutions more transparent and democratic. More powers have been given to the directly elected European Parliament, while national parliaments play a greater role, working together with European institutions. The EU is governed by the principle of representative democracy, with citizens directly represented at the EU level in the European Parliament and Member States represented in the European Council and the Council of the EU.

While the above description for the EU comes from the publications of the European Commission, researchers in the field share different opinions about this. Leonard (2005) has argued that the EU has been in a state of crisis since the beginning. One of the main problems facing the EU in the 21st century is the ever-increasing level of unemployment affecting most member states. Barroso (2007) stated that nearly 20 million EU citizens were classified as unemployed. Another important issue facing the European Union is security. Wallstrom (2007) argues that although Europe's passport-free travel policy is beneficial for business and tourism, it allows cross-border terrorists and criminals freedom of access within member states. Terrorism is a major issue because the lives of innocent people are at risk. Schilder & Hauschild (2004) note that EU states are also used as a base to plan and design terrorist attacks.

Another security concern for the EU is technological advances in modern weapons. This calls into question the current EU security measures. The flow of trade and investment within European countries has caused the prosperity of EU residents. However, despite the advantages that free trade has brought, it has also increased the threat of domestic terrorism. Europe is now a playground for organized crime and is rife with drug trafficking, illegal immigrants, and prostitution (Schilder & Hauschild, 2004). Cross-border and neighboring threats also add to the European Union's security concerns. The disputes in Kashmir and the Korean Peninsula as detailed by Schilder & Hauschild (2004) affected EU member states directly and indirectly. European integration is the product of the selective pooling

of national sovereignty, or ultimate jurisdiction over a body politic, by post-war European nation-states. It has given rise to the European Union (EU), the most successful experiment in international cooperation in modern history. European integration poses formidable challenges for political science as a discipline.

Any nation with a democratic government and good economic principles is eligible to join the European Union. Of course, the Western Balkan nations continue to be the main emphasis. offered that the Western Balkan nations were offered the chance to join at the Thessaloniki summit in 2001, the EU has clearly been a driving force in the resolution of ethnic disputes and bilateral difficulties in the region. The nations of the Western Balkans can be categorized based on how much the EU influences how they handle unsolved conflicts with their neighbors. Bosnia and Kosovo are still a long way from membership even if they are not even EU candidates. North Macedonia and Albania are EU applicants who are not yet engaged in membership negotiations. The start of negotiations appeared to be approved in March, but as was indicated earlier when discussing Albania's membership in the EU, the bilateral disagreement with Bulgaria is still proving to be a barrier because of North Macedonia.

Albania and other countries of the Western Balkans on the way to the EU

When it comes to the Western Balkans, a simple observation of current events is enough to understand that all the states of the region have shared and continue to share a common perspective for the future: that of membership in the European Union. The member states of the European Union, the President of the European Commission, and government representatives of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Montenegro and Serbia, in 2003, gathered in Thessaloniki for a Summit of the joint Balkans-EU, as an opportunity and effort to implement the goal of including the Western Balkans in the European Union. (EU Commission, 2003). The EU took many actions to involve itself more in the Western Balkans in the years that followed. It is important to note the Stabilization and Association Process in this context, as well as the Stabilization and Association Agreements that have been struck with several Western Balkan nations. However, just one nation has so far joined the EU, notably Croatia in 2013. Four countries from the Western Balkans now hold the status of candidate countries for the European Union and are engaged in active discussions as they continue their journey to meet the Copenhagen Criteria.

First, the conflict between Serbia and Kosovo continues to be the most difficult to resolve of all the interactions in the Balkans. The answer to these ostensibly

practical concerns depends on the parties' ability to agree on government policies, even though there are many technical issues that both sides must address. On the other hand, as a conflict that has been resolved, we can point to the Prespa Agreement between North Macedonia and Greece, which was signed in June 2018. This agreement is already complete, but it has open discussion points about how to continue to work productively because it became tense again after France blocked the start of membership negotiations with North Macedonia (Huzkza, 2020). But given that Bulgaria's VETO was a significant factor in the commencement of negotiations being delayed, North Macedonia's relations with Bulgaria continue to be the key topic of discussion in recent negotiations. Threats to North Macedonia's EU integration process therefore exist in its relations with Bulgaria, just as they did with Greece. Like the Greeks, the government of Bulgaria and others have questioned the identity of the Macedonians, particularly the existence of a distinct nationality and language.

Albania's current situation towards EU Integration. Conditions that must be met to join the EU

The decision to open negotiations on March 25, 2020, as we mentioned above, marked a key and historic moment for our country, since the current strategic goal of Albania and the Albanian Government is EU membership. But the euphoria lasted a little because, something that was somewhat expected), at the General Affairs Council of the European Union, gathered in Luxembourg on June 22, 2021, it was decided to postpone the first international conference on Albania and North Macedonia, leaving the opening of negotiations is still pending and unclear even for Albania. While all 27 EU ministers in the case of Albania, and 26 in the case of North Macedonia, agreed that both countries have met the criteria for starting talks, the Bulgarian veto blocked this time the progress of both countries on the road to the EU -'s. Since Albania and North Macedonia are together in the European Union accession procedures, Albania is currently blocked due to disputes between North Macedonia and Bulgaria, and why, as mentioned in this meeting, Albania has fulfilled the conditions for the opening of negotiations. (European Council, 2021)

The main bases of these criteria remain three:

- Political Criterion - To provide institutions to guarantee democracy, rule of law, human rights and respect and protection of minorities.
- Economic Criterion - To ensure a functional market economy capable of facing competition in the EU market.

- Legislative Criterion - To have administrative and institutional capacities capable of implementing EU legislation (acquis) and to be able to assume the obligations arising from membership. (Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2019

So, based on the Copenhagen Criteria, the candidate country must have:

- stable institutions that guarantee democracy, the rule of law, human rights, respect and protection of minorities.
- a functioning market economy, as well as the ability to withstand the pressure of competition and market forces operating within the European Union.
- the ability to undertake the obligations of membership, the political, economic and monetary union objectives. (EMA, 2021)

Albania must meet 12 conditions to join the EU, which are:

- Initiation of investigations into corrupt judges and prosecutors fired by the vetting process.
- Tangible results for the fight against corruption and organized crime at all levels, including the initiation of investigations and the completion of the first investigations into senior officials and politicians.
- Tangible progress in public administration reform, the implementation of electoral reform and a final decision on the legality of the June 30 elections.
- The fight against illegal asylum seekers and their repatriation.
- Amending the media law according to the recommendations of the Venice Commission. The Commission will report on these two issues, including the progress made during the presentation of the legal framework of the talks."
- Approval of the electoral reform in accordance with the requirements of the OSCE-ODIHR, such as transparency in the financing of parties and the election campaign, the continuation of the implementation of the reform in justice.
- The progress of the justice reform, especially the vetting process and the normal functioning of SPAK.
- The establishment of the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court, considering the opinion of the Venice Commission, and the establishment of specialized structures for the fight against corruption and organized crime.
- Strengthening the fight against corruption and organized crime with concrete results, implementing the plan drawn up by the Financial Task Force of the EU

- Adoption of the law on the general census of the population in accordance with the recommendations of the Council of Europe and continue with the registration of properties.
- The implementation of the electoral reform as well as the establishment of the Constitutional and Supreme Courts, according to the opinion of the Venice Commission on the Constitutional Court, was postponed until June.
- Implementation of the law on the general census of the population and the law on the rights of minorities under the pressure of member countries such as Greece and Bulgaria.

But, as mentioned by many researchers in the field, Albania is far from fulfilling many of these conditions. It should be underlined that the 2019 earthquake, which was followed by the Covid 19 pandemic, had a powerful shock on many aspects for Albania. Furthermore, in the Progress Report on Albania by the European Commission for 2020, the challenges of Albania to overcome the difficult situation with the earthquake and the pandemic are clearly mentioned, specifically saying that "Despite the challenge of dealing with the emergency situation, the Albanian authorities have maintained a commitment continuous and strong public towards the country's strategic goal of European integration. In general, Albania has increased its efforts and has provided other tangible and sustainable results in the main areas identified in the EC Conclusions of June 2018". (EU Commission Draft for Albania, 2020)

The relationship of the concepts in the binomium between National and European identity

Sovereignty and theoretical debates on it.

For years and even decades, sovereignty as a concept has become the subject of great discussion within the field of international relations. The debate among contemporary scholars has focused on new meanings of sovereignty in different political and historical contexts. Sovereignty refers to "the power of a country to control and direct its own government" (Cambridge Press, 2021). So, it is about the quality of having independent authority in a certain geographical territory. Former European Court of Justice's judge Schiemann simply suggests that "asking questions about the sovereignty of States produces as reasonable instinctive reactions as asking questions about a man's manhood" and he elaborates on that and says that "a challenge to a man's masculinity can result in a bloody nose. A challenge to a country's sovereignty can result in a war with millions of dead" (2008). Therefore,

one of the great defenders of sovereignty, Thomas Hobbes, mentioned at Zagorin (2009) argues that the unconditional or "unlimited" power of the State and the sovereignty of the State are a necessity for reliable politics and for human security. Along the same lines, an analogy has been made between the relations of individuals at the national level, the so-called democracy, and the relations between states at the global level. He emphasized that, "the duty of every Constitution is to see the degree of deprivation of individual liberty which is necessary to secure a broad measure of liberty to each. The same fundamental problem confronts the States in their relations with each other".

The origin of sovereignty takes us back in time to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. There is a strong argument that the "Westphalian" world surrendered to supranational organizations in favor of the "regime of international rights". Change is inevitable. In this post-Westphalian world, states no longer require absolute decision-making ability when providing for the basic needs of their people. Bartelson (2006) describes this phase as "death from the Westphalian world" and he adds briefly that "we live in a world in which territorial differentiation into separate nation-states is being challenged by a functional differentiation in particular issue areas, but we also live in a world in which the sovereign equality of states no longer forms the basis for further stratification according to wealth and relative power". According to the European Union, "the governance process is no longer carried out exclusively by the state", but by a variety of supranational, state and non-state actors in a "polycentric and non-hierarchical" system of governance (Jachtenfuchs 1995, p. 115).

From this perspective, "political supremacy seems to lie neither in the member states nor in the supra-state bodies of the EU, but between them all in different ways and combinations by policy area" (Bellamy 2003, 187). Who decides and how is not always clear in a policy that brings together 27 member states, a wide range of institutions, bodies, expert committees, national agencies and national institutions in constant interaction with their counterparts at the domestic and international levels. As a relation of authority, sovereignty possesses domestic and foreign purposes. Internal sovereignty, as Krasner (1999) explained, defines the ultimate or highest authority within a state to whom all compliance rests. In this regard, sovereignty implies a hierarchical relationship between the sovereign and the subordinates (Lake, 2003). Internal sovereignty requires effective control over the territory claimed by the sovereign (Lake, 2003). In the absence of such control, there can be no ultimate authority and, thus, no sovereign. External sovereignty means a government which exercises de facto administrative control over a country and is not subject to any other government in that country or a foreign sovereign state.

*National interests and identity in relation to European identity
and democratic standards*

A nation's national interests and identity are of utmost significance since they set one country apart from another. The question of whether the process of forging a European identity necessarily necessitates the 'dilution' of national identity to the point where European identity would supersede it is at the center of the current discussion about identity in the European Union. It is relevant to discuss the idea of European identity since I discussed national identity and interests in the previous chapter. Patterns in the construction of European identity are strikingly comparable to those in the construction of national identities. Naturally, certain components are more developed than others because this process is still in its early stages. However, what we can observe in the European Union is that there are sets of collective legal rights and obligations that take the form of institutionalized structures, as well as from a subjective perspective, the development of political community loyalty using the same elements for symbolic selection, myths, pertinent symbols, etc. Like national initiatives, the driving forces behind the European Union are factors that develop gradually but have a significant impact on the character of the participating states (Risse, 2005).

The types of relationships that exist between various identities depend on the categories to which those identities belong. There is a difference between contrastive and non-contrastive identities; the former allows for identification with groups falling under the same category, whereas the latter relates to groups falling under other categories (Sen, 2006). Such a reevaluation of identities may be caused by elements like migration, economic collapse, and other factors. According to Smith (1992), such circumstances are crucial and national identities cannot be sacrificed in the pursuit of European identity.

Conclusions

There will always be discussions regarding national identity and national interests, particularly considering the expansion and strengthening of the European Union. The EU is described as a distinctive political and economic cooperation between 27 democratic states in Europe with the goal of promoting peace, prosperity, and freedom for their populations in a more secure and just global environment. Terms like national identity and national interest assume a unique significance as our nation moves closer to entering the European Union. European identity is based on "constitutional patriotism" and individual freedoms, as opposed to national

identity, which depends on shared culture to unite people. This paper's study demonstrates that national interests and national identity will always be significant and critical factors in discussions on the European Union and its impact on a state's sovereignty. There will still be discussions about how the conventional idea of sovereignty has changed as a result of the influence of the European Union. However, just because the European Union and its impact on world affairs are expanding does not indicate that a country's national identity would gradually disappear and be replaced by the European one. It also requires a shared "culture" to bring people together on an emotional level because European identity is largely built on the concepts of popular sovereignty and citizens' rights.

References

Addison Wesley. Wendt, A. (1992). Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics. International Organization 46:391–425.

Anderson, Benedict. (1987). Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. New York: Verso.

Bellamy, R (2003) 'Sovereignty, Post-Sovereignty and Pre-Sovereignty: Three Models of State, Democracy and Rights within the EU', in Sovereignty in transition. Essays in European law edited by Walker, N. (ed) Portland, Hart Publishing, page. 167-189.

Brass, Paul. 1991. Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison

Carrey, Sean. 2002. "Undivided Loyalty: Is National Identity an Obstacle to European Integration?".

European Union Politics. 3, 4: 387-413.

Eisenstadt, S. and Geisen, B. (1995) 'The Construction of Collective Identity'. European Journal of Sociology, Vol. 36, page. 72–106.

Fligstein, N. (2008) Euro clash: The EU, European Identity and the Future of Europe (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Jachtenfuchs, Markus, Thomas Diez, and Sabine Jung. 1998. "Which Europe? Conflicting Models of a Legitimate European Political Order." European Journal of International Relations 4:409-445.

Krasner, S. (1999). Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Lake, D. (2003). The New Sovereignty in International Relations. International Studies Review, 303-323.

National identity. 2021. https://www.oxfordreference.com/

Sen, A., (2007). Identity and violence: the illusion of destiny. Norton Company, New York

Seton-Watson. H. (1977). Nations and states: an enquiry into the origins of nations and the politics of nationalism. Westview Press

Smith, A., (1992). National Identity and the idea of European unity, Oxford University Press, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2620461?origin=JSTOR-pdf

Smith. A. (1986). The Ethnic Origins of Nations. Oxford University Press

Contemporary international relations. Textbook. Moscow: 2000.

Risse. Th. (2001). "Neofunctionalism, European Identity, and the Puzzles of European Integration". Journal of European Public Policy, page. 291-309

Lake, D. (2003). The New Sovereignty in International Relations. International Studies Review, 303-323.

Bellamy, R (2003) 'Sovereignty, Post-Sovereignty and Pre-Sovereignty: Three Models of State, Democracy and Rights within the EU', in Sovereignty in transition. Essays in European law edited by Walker, N. (ed) Portland, Hart Publishing, page. 167-189.

Seton-Watson. H. (1977). Nations and states: an enquiry into the origins of nations and the politics of nationalism. Westview Press