

## What identity for Europe? Communication, memory, and citizenship

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this article is the debate around the European identity. Two types of political identification are taken into account, sustaining the idea of the nation from a cultural and ethnic point of view or from a civic and political perspective. From here, the discussion will center on the possibility of a European identity and to what extent that identity will be shared by citizens from different nationalities. As will be demonstrated, communication plays a crucial role: as a form of participating and asserting the difference, and associating the universalism of the normative principles to the particularism of the concrete forms of identification. Finally, we suggest the conception of a European identity that reflects, simultaneously, a historical and cultural ballast in which people can trust, and on its own civic culture that, respecting the identities recognizes sensibilities, interests, the arguments.*

*Keywords: European identity, national identity, ethnicity, constitutional patriotism, communication.*

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## Introduction

The quick steps taken during the last few years geared towards European integration led to a spectacular resurgence of intellectual debate concerning the notion of political identity and its articulation with other identities, whether national, cultural, or others.

On one hand, the scheduled expansion of the European Union stimulates questions as to the eligibility criteria for new countries and on the true meaning of a "European" designation. And from here the questions: what do we mean when we talk about a political community; an enlarged family of States or an association of interests? When talking about Europe, are we referring to a geographical space, a civilization model, a political project, a new historical reality or a mere philosophical thought? On the other hand, it has been ascertained that as the European Union assumes a growing role in the everyday life of the people of the member States, it is accused of still not providing an identification mechanism that affects the civic body as a whole. A concerning aspect refers to the fact that the increased formal legitimacy of the European institutions, provided by the treaties of Maastricht and Amsterdam, seems to go side by side with a decrease in the legitimacy of a European integration in the eyes of public opinion.

We witness, today, a growing abyss amongst what Michael Walzer (1997) designates as the moral community (referring to the social, geographical, and cultural unity where the individuals share understandings) and the legal community (defined as the reach of the political measures that legally tie a community of citizens together). Walzer noted that if the overlapping of these two dimensions is not complete, individuals will begin to question the legitimacy of the policies under which they live – resulting in political risks we will come back to.

A famous definition provided by Ernest Haas defines political integration as "the process through which political actors in different national spaces are persuaded to re-direct their loyalties, hopes, and political activities towards a new center, with institutions that proceed or exercise jurisdiction over the preexisting national states" (1958: 16). This process allows considering the enunciation of two types of political identification that correspond to two identity types. The first identity sends us to the sphere of ethnic nationalism of a specific people, within a certain territory, culture, language, history and common destiny. The second identity concerns civ-

ic nationalism that has as its historical subject not so much a specific people, but a political community that shares a certain group of general values. It is under the framework of this dual picture that we can have a sustained discussion on the conditions for a possible European identity and on the degree to which this identity would be shared by citizens of different nationalities.

Once the consequences and the validity of the two previous proposals have been assessed, we will try to answer the following question: Can a European identity be conceived in terms that are simultaneously inclusive (universalistic) and that guarantee a pluralistic capacity (providing attention to specifics)? From this question, another is deduced, drawing upon the political perspective of a recognition theory: in political terms, Where is the balance point, in the formulation of the European identity, between global expression and localized voices? As will be demonstrated, communication plays a crucial role in the answer to this question: on one hand, as a form of participating and asserting difference; on the other hand, associating the universalism of the normative principles to the particularism of concrete forms of identification.

### An “ethnic model” for Europe

In general terms, the ethnic model sees cultural identities as the result of generations of shared experiences and memories. Collective identities are the product of traditions, values, memories, and symbols from social, political, and cultural sources that, on a popular level, are consolidated throughout time, forming a common inheritance. In this perspective, and on a theoretical plane, a European identity will appear as a result of shared experiences, values, memories, traditions, and values, articulated with myths and symbols that unify several generations of European people. This materialization will grow in a slow, flowing process, basically without a planned strategy –in spite of conscious attempts towards this.

With this theoretical model as a background, it is important to ascertain if in Europe there is a pan-European base of values, symbols, experiences, and popular traditions available, which could serve as a mold for European construction and integration. This is a central issue, which several authors attempt to provide answers to - those dependent essentially on the theoretical place where they are located. Anthony Smith considers

that we can only foresee a true European cultural identity, at a popular level, as a result of shared experiences, memories, and values, as well as myths and symbols that unify various generations of the people of Europe –without which we will be merging politics and culture, levels that although strictly related in some particular cases, should be maintained separate. Thus, his arguments are strongly skeptical as to the success of a Europe that surpasses nation-States (cf. 1997: 215).

There are two main problems that the ethnic approaches identify relative to the European integration process and to the definition of a European identity, as we witness today.

The first problem resides in the "reversed" nature of the European unification, developed through elite (business, administrative, and intellectual) actions and programs, with needs that were not already satisfied within the context of the national State, and which, therefore, tried to build an infrastructure and a favorable political framework through the creation of a wider European union. Additionally, the logic behind this approach is intended to prevent War, not negatively, maintaining separate States, but positively, articulating them in united strategies. The European Union would thus become the comfortable answer to renouncing violence to solve conflicts, and would represent the victory of political reason over national passions and selfish interests; economic dimensions, more than the main objective, would be nothing other than subterfuges. Integration is achieved by implementing a common jurisdiction, at the same time that supranational institutions act over States as national institutions over the nation, with the same unifying purposes. Acting as social bodies, those institutions would be at the root of the formation of the European citizens, united in spite of their different nationalities for European interest, defined from now on as general interest (cf. Kastoryano, 2004: 23). In accordance with this perspective, an entire culture of masses proceeds behind elite political and economic action, and after a stabilizing period, begins accompanying economic and political changes. In other words: where politics directs, the masses will proceed, with some delay, as a result of a "downward filtering" of new elite ideas, practices, and institutional standards.

The frailness of an approach like this has been noted for quite some time. This is related with the excessive trust that this interpretation attributed to the role of the elite and to leadership –which, without the "capacity of vision" of previous generations (sixties), are finding great skepticism today relative to their proposals, and are, thus, facing serious difficulties in

mobilizing the popular masses (cf. Hoffman, 1994). As demonstrated by the popular answers to the Treaty of Maastricht in Denmark, France, and United Kingdom, as some cooling off is noted with regards to the European project in the Scandinavian countries and since (surprising only to a few) some popular referenda on the ratification of the European Constitution took place, particularly in France and Holland, governments may lead, but their people do not always seem anxious in following them in the sense of a European Union formed within these molds.

In general, empirical data reveals the great distance between the consensual support granted by the elites to the European project and the wide skepticism noted throughout the popular masses. According to Risse, the different identification levels with Europe ascertained by the elites and citizens can be explained largely by "how real Europe is for each person." As is thoroughly demonstrated (Gellner, Anderson), an imagined community becomes real in people's lives when they share cultural values, identify a common destiny, and know the delimitation line of that community; therefore, the European identity is very real for the political, economic, and social elites, but distant and thinly outlined for citizens in general (cf. Risse, 2005: 297). In A. Smith's words, there is "a calculating side to attitudes regarding Europe in many quadrants that suggests an absence of deep cultural or emotional ties amongst the people of the European continent and little notion of any specific value or belief system exclusively shared by the European people" (1999: 108). In sum: if many Europeans have a desire to cooperate and live together, it is questionable if at the basis of that desire is a popular idea of unification insofar as culture, values, ideals, and traditions, and much less a strong feeling of belonging to a family of European people.

The second problem, which is very much related to the situation described above, has to do with the difficulty of defining the nature of "European ties" and its specific culture. In order to achieve this definition, cultural nationalisms on a large scale attempted, many times, to bring together States and people on the basis of criterion of a shared culture and common cultural inheritance, trying to unite them in a single supranational entity—we refer to "pan-nationalist" movements, amongst which pan-Turkism, the pan-Slavism, the pan-Africanism and also the pan-Europeanism of Counhove-Kalergie, Jean Monet and the European Movement founded in 1948 in The Hague (cf. Smith, 1999: 108-109). In this same sense, within the cultural domain, a "cooperation" principle was introduced amongst States in 1983, with the proposal to "Europeanize culture", through stand-

ardized teaching and information programs that assured cultural flows and contributed to the emerging of a "euro culture" meant to make Europe a distinctive unit (cf. Kastoryano, 2004: 24).

However, in spite of the grandiose ideals that serve as support to pan-Europeanism (that in its limit seeks to institutionally promote the figure of a new man, "the European man"), this is also a downward move, in a process that begins at the top and works its way down to society, where institutions, norms, leaders, and elite reflect in a planned manner a message of European unity and the appeal for the creation of European ties as a unique answer to contemporary challenges. As Hoffman writes, "especially in times of unhappiness and domestic difficulties, there is no hope of a popular push towards a wider unit, of a movement sprouting from below towards a wider and deeper Union. As in other historical moments, initiatives must come from the top (...) it is up to the elite and the governments to take the decisive steps" (1994, s/p). Noteworthy is that from the top, what we witness are ambivalent signs. On the one hand, statements associated to the construction of an identity and the correlative civic community, of values and traditions, are provided but, on the other hand, they exalt the nation-State in the relationship with Brussels and, to locally justify community decisions adopt the populist rhetoric of "community impositions" (cf. Risse, 2005: 297). Thus, the problem appears precisely when we try to define European ties -delineated from a system of values and common experiences that sustains the consolidation of an identity-, when it is difficult to stabilize repertoires of memories, symbols, myths, traditions, and projects with enough strength to awaken a sense of loyalty (and no rivalry) amongst the inhabitants of modern Europe.

In a certain way, many experiences, traditions, symbols, and shared values possess an "ambivalent facade", with an equal capacity to separate and unite, as they also illustrate the diversity of Europe, revealing an entire kaleidoscope of different ethnicities and counter-cultures of minorities, immigrants, foreigners, as well as the socially excluded. As a result, the task at hand includes a simultaneous process of forgetting and remembering, that is, of remembering what is common to an entire European culture and forgetting all that along history has divided it. However, this effort possesses a correlative risk: of remembering divisions and forgetting shared ties - an option that is particularly valued as a safety measure in times of greater difficulties. Thus, any European identity project should include, besides remembering and forgetting, the task of conceiving, in the sense of imagining new alternatives and mobilizing possibilities (cf. Schlesinger, 1991).

Given this, in its intangibility, the European identity is seen today as vacuous and imprecise, as a true arena or field for demonstrating strength, for identities and cultures in conflict: "to speak about Europe is to enter into a battlefield of discourse", to which each intervening party is committed both cognitively and emotionally. In the simultaneous game of memory and amnesia, to provide light also leads to the emerging of shadows, and, as a result, the search for a common identity faces the risk of reviving different nationalist identities (cf. Schlesinger, 1992). If many cultural and political traditions appear marked by ambivalence and few (and unevenly) mobilize Europeans, in general, any attempt to build a European identity around these shared cultural elements needs to compete and coexist with myths, values, and preexisting memories, deeply rooted in nations and ethnicities.

However, according to Smith, within this dynamic game, on a collective level, loyalty to a nation overlaps all other forms of identification and this shall continue throughout the predictable future. From an ethnic point of view, a European identity still has a long way to go - centuries, if we want it to be genuine. At present, a European political community with popular resonance should be founded by a movement capable of forging memories, values, myths, and symbols from the common inheritance, so that these do not compete with national cultures that are still powerful and vigorous; only in this way will it be possible to create a new type of collective identity that embraces, but does not abolish, national identities (cf. 1997: 210-2).

### The Constitutional Patriotism model

In response to ethnic model, constitutional patriotism thinkers have essentially two types of arguments concerning Europe.

Firstly, they assume the impossibility of a European Union divided into multiple cultures and national sub-cultures, associated to any mythical ideal of an ancestral European homeland, also refusing the hypothesis of a European nation. It is neither reasonable nor desirable to assume that the secular phenomenon of building a nation should take place on a European scale; we should remember that national institutions have been created, in general, with a more or less variable dose of internal and external violence, which makes this phenomenon currently inconceivable

(cf. Lacroix, 2002: 946). Secondly, a peaceful strategy to construct an identity, sustained by traditions and cultural ties, is also not very appealing because it is chauvinist, and would have as a result the "duplicating of national principles on a supranational level" (Ferry, 1992: 53).

Jürgen Habermas refutes, precisely as the starting point for his proposal, the ethnic argument of the inexistence of a European people. If what is lacking is the actual subject of the self-constitution process of the European identity, a people capable of defining itself as a European "nation", Habermas considers that a nation of citizens should not be confused with a destination community configured by an origin, a language, and a common memory. The idea of a European identity should emerge from a democratic process and must reflect, on the one hand, the historical path of European nation-States and, on the other, the fact that democratic citizenship could foster an abstract, legally-mediated solidarity amongst unknown individuals (cf. Habermas, 2001).

Democratic citizenship should not be sustained on the individuals' national identities: social ties in the democratic-liberal states must be legal, moral, and political, more than historical, cultural, and geographical (cf. Ferry and Thibaud, 1992: 174). According to the post-conventional stage of development of an individual identity, Habermas suggests a phase for the moral development of societies, characterized by a collective identity through which modern universalistic principles would finally achieve a facticity that responds to the promises. Current society conditions, with pronounced differences and complexity, determine an inevitable pluralism in the ways of life. In contemporary societies, rights are not characteristics that the individuals possess naturally, they are, instead, relationships based on dynamics of mutual recognition (Habermas, 1998a:131, 134-135).

According to this model, individuals mutually confer each other rights as of the moment that they agree to regulate their common life through Law. It is in this framework that the political identity of the citizens from a post-national community, as is the European Union, should be channeled to a "constitutional patriotism", that is, to a form of political identification that is not sustained by any particular ties (ethnic, language, historical), but by values and ideals, as is the case of human rights. To achieve this purpose, political thought must abandon the idea that politics is anything other than a communication exchange that has as basic requirement to reach a rational agreement on what we want to say when we speak to others. Within this perspective, the political dimension is impossible to distin-



guish from the communication modality of everyday conversations. Just as with everyday language, the individuals' goal should be to make the communicative nucleus of politics more efficient, because that will automatically strengthen each citizen's identification with his/her community based only on its constitutional rules.

In a liberal democracy, the common pattern demanded from individuals is loyalty to the Constitution, understood as the political incarnation of an ideal of a moral community, with standards and practices that are completely accepted by its members. Loyalty to the Constitution means loyalty to a society in which an agreement is reached amongst all free and equal partners independently of imposition and manipulation. In this perspective, the Constitution of a democratic republican State is suggested as the most sophisticated model of discursive validation. Constitutional procedures are what enable the majority to remain critically involved in all decisions –recognizing themselves in them and feeling recognized by them. Noteworthy is the effort to associate the universalism of democratic and liberal normative principles to the particularism of each concrete form of identification– a tense and conflicting association. Being an emancipation mode, constitutional patriotism will unavoidably recognize the controversial, incomplete, and ongoing constructive nature of any and all particular identification with universal principles. In sum: Habermas' proposal consists of conceiving a particular identification for a specific Constitution (which configures a political identity) as a specification for universal moral principles (legal statute) through a group of democratic deliberation and decision-making (civic participation) procedures.

## Constitutional Patriotism and European integration

It is today tacitly accepted that the current official design of the European Union is underlined by the constitutional patriotism paradigm. In the treaties that define the access conditions to the European Union, it is very difficult to find any reference to a historical and cultural community, as a way of characterizing European politics (cf. Lacroix, 2002: 946). Article 6 of the Treaty of the European Union defined at the Copenhagen European Council in 1993, simply mentions that the Union is founded on the principles of freedom, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and on the observance of the law, principles common to all the Member-States.

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In the current state of affairs, Habermas praises the European victory over nationalism as proof of maturity and prudence. He considers, however, that the possibility of conceiving international law from a new cosmopolitan perspective will only take place after the nation-States have left the scene. As that begins to take place, other alliances on a continental level as a whole may emerge and become main intervening parties on the international scene (similar to ASAN in the Asian Southeast and NAPHTHA in North America, two existing examples). It is keeping this possibility in mind that Habermas announces the necessary empirical circumstances to produce an expansion in the processes of forming an identity beyond the national borders. "These circumstances are as follow: the emerging of a European civil society; the construction of a public sphere on a European scale; and the formation of a political culture that can be shared by all European citizens" (2001: 16).

Without constraining the validity of the constitutional patriotism model as a form of answering European integration demands, there are some questions relative to its being applied to identity.

In the first place, we believe that Habermas operates with a dichotomy that is too strict insofar as the inherited notions of identity and the identity built through rational speech, which will have as an underlying factor a choice between identities inherited non-rationally (passive, non-voluntarily), and rational identities (that result willingly). The inadequacy of this opposition consists in assuming that, from an alternative model, the only source of social integration is belonging to the same ethnic group. But we understand that no matter how important sharing a cultural and ethnic universe may be, this will not be the only source of solidarity amongst individuals. In many interactive contexts, very complex and vast ties of solidarity (rights, environment, and gender) are generated, having little or nothing to do with the sharing of the same ethnicity by the individuals in question.

This first assertion is linked to a second: which is that "sharing common civic values is not enough to foster a durable national bond. Something more than adhering to abstract political principles is necessary to unite a society. That is because constitutional patriotism, appreciated by Jürgen Habermas, seems to us somewhat scarce" (Dieckhoff, 2001: 262). Reservations as to considering the ties of social unity created by constitutional patriotism sufficiently strong leads some analysts to consider the nation as the top unit in which a "limited universal form" can acquire practical meaning (Rosanvallon, 1997: 43-44). In other words, there are some who considers that "only within the national realm can ethnos become de-

mos, by being the only plan where the values of freedom, civic responsibility, and political justice obtain true meaning.” This because human beings are constituted as much by passion as by reason. This is the paradox under which modern democracies are founded: even if they belong to the rational sphere, they don’t have an option, if they intend to survive, than to use the language of ethnicity, history or mythology. The pure democracy dreamt by post-national identity champions shall continue to be too frail when deprived of the strong emotions associated to historical and cultural peculiarities (cf. Lacroix, 2002: 947). “The moments in which people get to innovate and make efforts to idealize new political forms are rare, if they do not preserve history at least in their dreams. (...) It is underestimating the difficulties and elaborating the issue of a new political form for Europe with an excessively rational view” (Wolton, 2004: 71).

It is given inadequacies such as those mentioned above that a pure model of constitutional patriotism may be unable to generate the necessary social trust needed to reach a political decision - the kind of trust that makes commitment possible given conflicting interests, or in situations of scarce resources. This type of trust is much more common amongst people that share a national identity, speak the same language, and share values. On the other hand, in multinational states, where trust is stronger within each of the groups rather than amongst them, politics tends to assume the form of a negotiation in which each decision is looked upon as a victory or a defeat by each of the groups. Paradoxically, this model can contain within itself the seeds of two dangers that threaten contemporary democracies: uncontrolled growth of individual autonomy on the one hand, and indifference for public affairs on the other, leading to attitudes of cynicism for democratic rules, reluctance given the burden of social justice, resentment in light of distant elites, and the decline in civic provisions (cf. Laborde, 2002), with individuals assuming themselves more as legal subjects and less as agents actively involved in deliberation processes.

### Europe, citizenship, and memory

If a merely civic, political, and contractual Europe, as a rational result of the conjugation of wills does not emotionally mobilize its members, we suggest, on the other hand, that the current frailness of the national identities, or even its backward move combined with the implementation of

common political projects, can mobilize an identity of a more dynamic and flexible nature, that will find new and specific references in a European space. For this purpose, it will first be necessary to ascertain the conditions for the emerging of a civil society that characterizes itself as more than the European market, that is constituted above all as a political society, with political debate and common motivations –creating the supranational space where private interests and national political passions are confronted and redefined, being mutually recognized. Once this is understood, for the most part, the basic aspect of a European identity should reflect the diversity of the political cultures within a framework of a universal democracy, i.e. satisfying, at the same time, universalistic claims and the substantial roots of specific identities.

In the current discussion on this matter, there are very different assessments as to what can unite individuals in Europe. We believe that, however incisive the leaderships and the institutions are, it will not be possible to forge a genuine European unity on a popular level unless there is intense intersubjective work carried out which, progressively moves away from the realm of the nation and the national State towards another form of inclusive identity, thus linking the formation of a self-identity to a new form of collective identity. During the last two decades, the European Community/Union has shown some work within the symbolic realm by promoting symbols (flag, hymn, and currency), as well as by invoking strong symbolic and emotional moments, with the recent celebrations of World War I and II, remembering the losses undergone by all European people. As has been widely demonstrated, identities - but also interests, sensibilities, and everything that allows effective recognition - are built in the intersection between self-images and the images built by others. Given this work, it is important to ascertain to what extent the designation "Europe" affects the identification of each one's self-image or is understood as the image of an Other - knowing that in countries such as England, Sweden or Norway, Europe is equated to the Continent, i.e. the dimension of Others, or that for the Greeks, the European identity appears as a form of wanted opposition of a "We" to the Turks (cf. Klein et al, 2003: 252).

Whatever the perspective or proposed solution, it must be considered that, in general terms, neither the problem of the identity nor of the management of the differences is resolved, but is rather subject to permanent, open adjustments. Thus, the European space is the space where all the identities that compose it interact: and, whether national, regional, linguistic, religious, majority or minority, identities are redefined through complex

games of interaction and identification within the European space, as an open space where everything has a relation. And here, there are multiple views of Europe that, throughout time and location, transpose the different speeches, accounted for by other forms of identity –gender, age, ethnicity, social class, etc.– that confer to it a very special sense, and that finally, enables the European identity to appear essentially as a concept and as discourse (cf. Strath, 2002: 388, 391). Now, what is today and what will be in the future the impact of the concept and discourse on "Europe" on these cultures and identities? And, inversely, what will be the impact of these cultures and identities on the discourse on Europe? In effect, if it is from the interactions and the confrontation amongst the several specific cultures that make up the European Union that a European political culture can be born, it is important not to forget that this process has today, more than ever, a correlation on a global scale with profound consequences both within an internal realm, as well as on a planetary level (as the past incident of the caricatures of the prophet Mohammed showed so well), in which the interaction with other transnational agents within a global sphere necessarily implies a self-evaluation and a review of "our" identity, as well as those of "others".

We consider, thus, the possibility of an intersubjective model for forming an identity as a necessary condition for the sustained formation of a European identity, in which the symbolic dimension occupies an essential role. In accordance with this model, it will be the set of relationships between the individuals that make up the European space, the interactions between the members-States and with the significant Others (foreign to the European identity) that will lead to a redefinition of the concepts of universality, particularity, nationality, and citizenship, concepts that are today intended to create a European identity. Thus, going back to the two models mentioned above (ethnic and civic), a process of European construction must simultaneously contemplate a historical and cultural inheritance in which people can believe, and a specific civic culture that, in respecting identities, recognizes sensibilities, interests, and arguments. If, on the one hand, like George Steiner stated recently, there is a generalized feeling that "Europe will die if it does not fight for its languages, local traditions, and social autonomies" (2006: 50), we believe that (not being sufficient) it is on the level of constitutional patriotism that a European conscience is clearer – it is particularly as a community of essentially political values that the European identity, in times such as those today, are most defined: democracy, human rights, freedoms, social State, and State of law. In sum:

what our proposal points to is the need to (re)build the modern condition of citizenship according to the social, historical, and particular conditions of the space in which we live.

As has been ascertained, communication assumes a crucial role in this mission. In Habermas' words, "under a normative perspective, there cannot be a federal European state worthy of the designation of European democracy without an open public European sphere, integrated and developed within the context of a common political culture" (1998b: 160). At once, due to the notion of communication as a form of participation, of sharing with other human beings, asserting and delimiting its own identity in relation to others – the entire collective and individual definition is based on the enunciation of texts and signs, of individual and collectives references that specify self interpretations, as well as those of others.

Communication thus understood - with an essential public dimension - has three dimensions of great importance for the constitution of a European identity. First of all, it allows participation in the collective choices, both with regards to specific political goals, as well as to instituting more basic proceedings. Secondly, public communication makes the production, reproduction or transformation of the social imaginary possible, providing form to cultural integration and making Europe truly real, since it could be imagined in a particular form. Lastly, sustained by communication, a public sphere is, in and of itself, as an arena for debate and intersubjective confrontation (of struggles for recognition), a form of social integration and formation of an identity. This is, basically, about recovering the classic conception of a public space as an arena of creative production of actual human and social reality. In other words: it is through public action that we become human; now, what unites us is precisely the world we create, imagine, and where we live together. Therefore, any proposal that considers constitutional patriotism depends on the vitality of the public sphere. Despite this evidence, it has been ascertained that the self-constitution of Europe through public communication is one of the relatively most neglected aspects in the process of European integration (cf. Calhoun, 2003: 244).

To finish, there is an essential characteristic of the notion of identity that should not be forgotten and should be carried out. As mentioned by Huntington (although within a different context and in a varied sense), "we know who we are when we know who we are not and against who we are" (1996: 21). If both self-image, as well as the images of the Others that we build are not static entities, but rather elements subject to a continuous

process, each encounter with an Other works simultaneously as an opportunity to reassess our own conception, as well as that of others, throughout time - in the European case, along generations. Within this measure and as an example, the migratory flows that currently go through the European space work as an important catalyst for questioning and reformulating our own identity, of what we are but also of what we were. It is considering the issue under this perspective, within a vaster historical framework, that we suggest that the definition (and above all the determination) of a European identity has, as any definition of identity, a historically circumscribed and profoundly relative value, with a quality that shall not stop being questioned in the future under the backdrop of the current historical circumstances, just as we critically assess today our eurocratic past, also marked by difficult and demanding circumstances.

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