



Simple Reasons for Complex Issues of National vs. European Identity in the process of European Integration: Italian case

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The creation of the European Union is one of the most important events of the twentieth century, which led to a radical change of political system in Europe. Of course, such a major reform was the result of a number of circumstances and factors. Having started to take shape long with the creation of the Community and the Union it is still essential to study integration process at the present stage. As a result, the contemporary process determining European collective identities is going through major changes as well. This paper is presenting the view of the Italian nation-state. It raises the question of Italy's future, its interests as a nation as well as of its strategic and diplomatic 'relative place in the world'. The discussion is concerned with the question whether the Europeanism will continue to be a priority of the Italian foreign policy paradigms in the times of the post-economic crisis period.

Italy. European integration. EU. National identity. European identity.

Introduction

Over the last decades Europe has changed enormously. The process of integration of the European Union at the beginning of the XXI century changed the borders of the polity, but also contributed to a crisis of the national identity of the Europeans. The inclusion of many new countries to the EU raised the question of a common European framework of the way of life. Both "old" and "new" Europeans are experiencing the identity crisis and generating the question of further European integration support. The history of Italy is characterized by a considerable influence on global processes and its fundamental transformation. As a founder of the European Community and subsequently the European Union, it was considered to be a pro-active supporter of the integration process and during the earlier stages of its historical development has played a leading role in world politics.

The support for European integration is based on the full access to the participation in the European institutions. However, Italy always needed a long period of time in order to get socialized to the various stages of the European integration. Italian citizens were holding low opinions of their national elites and were instead bearing more on support for European institutions[1]. Saturated by the corruption and inefficient public administration, Italians ensured to be anchored into the European integration perceived as a way of normalization of these Italian pathologies[2]. The EU funds could provide access possibility from European Commission budget to follow an increased Italian support for Europe.

However, sometimes even Italian policy decisions have always been contentious. Since the end of the Cold War, Italian foreign policy has experienced a high degree of volatility influencing Italy's position between two poles - Europe and Atlantic Alliance. The second half of the XXth century shows us that under the influence of external and internal factors, Italian foreign policy is increasingly shaping Europe.

Both of the Italian parties, Christian Democrats and Communists, shifted to open and enthusiastic support of the European integration process[3]. However, Christian Democrats support of European integration during the Cold War period was quite moderate and was more viewed as a channel to pro-American profile[4].

Due to the political changes in Italy at the beginning of the 1990s, major political forces began to elaborate new positions towards European integration, EU and its institutions. Studying the works of the prominent Ukrainian researchers demonstrated their interest mostly in the bilateral relations of Ukraine and Italian Republic[5]. Analyzing Russian historiography, I may underline the interests of Russian researches to the Italian foreign policy doctrine transformation after the Cold-War period. However, during the last years, the interests towards researching identity aspects in Europe and in Italy draw its attention by Russian scientists[6].

Italian political scientists devote their articles to the role of Italian nation-state after the collapse of the bipolar system (Noel[7]; Neri Guardesi; Ignazi[8]), changes in the world politics and changes of the international situation (Andreatta[9]).

Italy has always been considered remaining a Euro-enthusiastic country. Both geopolitical interests and benefits from participation in the EU officially explained the support of the EU project. However, Italian identification of themselves as Europeans has to be tangible due to its strong national identification[10]. Moreover, Italy has traditionally had a low influence on European polity starting with the 90s and perceived as an influentially 'weak' member[11]. The EU Eastern enlargement, the single currency introduction as well as the austerity policy imposed in order to meet the Maastricht criteria for entering the European Monetary Union has contributed to breaking the permissive consensus around European integration for the Italian nation.

Theorizing national and European identity in the process of European integration

The discussion concerning national versus European identity is among the most central in contemporary social science. The study of national and supranational identity has sparked a considerable amount of scholarship among social scientists. Understanding how identities are formed and how political and economic integration might change, shape or create new identities has been the subject of both academic inquiry and policy-making efforts. The extent to which Europeans are attached to their national or regional identities might help determine how well the integration process would work. The classic writings of E. Gellner, A. D. Smith, E. Hobsbawm, B. Anderson and others analyze identity as a dynamic process of interactions, dialogue and negotiations in which collective identities are constructed. Such an approach encloses the question of distinguishing the level of national identity and European identity.

The concept of Italian identity was analyzed from different prospective: 1) historical paradigm (P. Bellucci, P. Isernia, A. Varsori); 2) political paradigm (P. Grilli di Cortona, M. Giuliani, F. Ramero').

Theorizing the question of national and European identity, it is essential to mark identity as a people's idea about their nation, the result of the identification with it. National identity is the nation's perception as a body or group, detached or differentiated from other nations or organizations (governmental bodies, NGOs). According to Barrett, national identity is the feeling of belonging to an own national group and it is a complex construct with its cognitive and affective elements. European identity, on the contrary, is the feeling of belonging to the European Union and it refers to the set of individuals' beliefs, opinions and attitudes towards Europe[12].

It is essential to estimate that a viable and legitimate European polity requires some degree of identification in order to keep being sustainable. However, what concerns European identity it still remains a contested idea. Scholars are stipulated on the relationship between European and national identities in zero-sum terms following the concepts of collective identities[13]. Taking into account national identity during the process of nation-building it would be hard to shift to the supranational or post-nationalist identities. Collective identities will firmly rest with the nation-state as the historically most successful connection between territory and its nation.

The existence of a European identity concept interests both politicians and scholars. The way in which Europe is framed by different actors is indeed gaining attention in research on European integration. P. Moscovici showed the importance of social frames of the individual's observation of reality. It is by cultural socialization within a society that an individual accepts (cultural, moral, normative) rules, giving a 'societal frame' to his individual decision-making[14].

In political science and history, these 'frames' are portrayed as 'national/cultural differences'. Some scientists even dash 'political identities' of member states to be so various that 'they cannot be voluntarily constructed or destroyed within a politician's amount of time'[15]. In this respect Europeanization might be placed as a complex dynamic platform through which Europe and nation-state can both interact.

Italian scholar M. Cinnirella found that the relation between national and European identity is hard to foresee and change with regard to the political, historical and cultural context in which it is examined. In this respect, he portrayed Italians displaying both a strong national identity and a positive attitude towards EU[16]. This thesis can't be proved by the Eurobarometer survey, conducted in 2004 before the EU enlargement, which showed that 9 of 10 Italian were feeling the vicinity of its own nation or its own region, only 6 of 10 proved to feel the same to our EU nations, and 4 of 10 could share the same to new member states. Moreover, the same figures is providing the survey conducted by Italian Foundation Onlus "Italian Identity: between Europe and multicultural society"[17].

Europeanization and Politization of identity

Europeanization portrays a complex dynamic through where Europe and the nation-state interact. However, this kind of interaction is supposed to be mutually beneficial. It is referred to be an interrelated process on how Europe might reshape deeply held senses of community - national, local, regional. Europe pretends to having enduring senses of loyalty and obligation integrating individuals to the community. It shifts our attention to the research of the effects Europe has on the contemporary state - its policies, institutions, and links to society.

D. Castiglione stipulates on the fact that the European political identity construction doesn't need to be anchored to the definite concept of what it means to be European. It depends on how the nation-state is interpreting the nature of the EU and its political attempt to influence what Italy will become[18]. In this respect, another Italian scholar I. Favretto points on the re-appearance of 'Mitteleuropa' concept while stipulating on the importance to of Italy's regional differences. Regarding national and European identities, Ilaria Favretto indicates Italy as a country which has lived up to its legacy principles till the EU Eastern enlargement process started. The challenges of seeing Eastern neighboring countries in the EU enhanced the discussions on regional identities. Therefore, it has led to the revitalizing of perceiving Europe in Habsburgian Central European connotations[19].

Since 2005 when this concept appeared in the mindsets of Italian, it reappears again in 2015 when Europe is challenged by a sparkling migration crisis. Vast numbers of undocumented migrants have come ashore in Italy since the start of 2015, as they attempt to flee war and poverty in North Africa and the Middle East. Moreover, the surge in the number of refugees comes as Italy struggles with the aftermath of the 2007 - 2008 global financial crises[20]. Having been seriously affected by the global crisis, Italy wasn't ready to accept this new external challenge.

Therefore, the rhetoric in Italian society is faced with contrasting tendencies. From one side, it has a strong European commitment supported by modern profile and industrial force. From the other side, surge of illegal immigration puts the democracy of this country under the test. Moreover, the vivid factors that keep Italy under pressure are the attempts to keep track with economic and social developments of the EU. These transformations are the triggers for the appearance of a number of political and economic issues which are also related to citizens' identification with the Italian nation-state and/or with the EU.

Conclusion

This analysis allowed us to put light on diverse national identity discourses which evolve and react to political changes in Italy. Italy has always been considered as a 'friendly' country towards the EU. Both geopolitical interests and benefits from participation in the EU officially explained the support of the EU project. However, Italian identification of themselves as Europeans has to be tangible due to its strong national identification.

In this article the idea of considering identity as an independent variable is supported. However, it causes certain effects on regional, national and EU identity levels. In Italy it is presented by the fact that both political parties and Italian society are playing 'trump card' for using benefits from the EU. The nation-state is interpreting quite positively the EU nature. The Italians themselves demonstrate both a

strong national identity and an assured attitude towards the EU having regional, national and European identities. However, the entrenchment of political irregularities inside Italy march upwards difficulties related to how the society interprets themselves towards other EU member-states.

Moreover, the migrant challenges shaping Europe in 2015 put at risk Italians to remain truly European. More diffuse will remain among Italians due to unforeseen impact of current Middle East conflicts and Europe's role in it. An uprising lukewarm support of the EU is becoming more widespread in the Italian regions as well. The positive outcome will be visible when there are going to be signs of European solidarity to share common vision on how to tackle with migrants burdens among EU member-states.

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