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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### KEEPING THE EUROPEAN FAITH

#### *Collective Identity before and after the Euro-Crisis*

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**ABSTRACT:** Media discourses have conveyed the message that European identity has been severely undermined by the Euro-crisis. We test this contention with Eurobarometer data. Conceptually we distinguish two dimensions of collective identity: 'image' and 'belonging'. We surmise that economic downturns can alter the superficial layer of identity (image-like assessments), but not its underlying substance (belonging-like assessments) which depends on deeply ingrained socio-psychological mechanisms. These two dimensions are expected to be affected by the crisis in different ways: the image being a more volatile reflection of historical circumstances, and the sense of belonging being more stable over time.

We find that the Euro-crisis damaged the EU image especially in the countries most affected by the economic downturn and among the unemployed, while declarations of 'belonging' remained relatively constant. Contrary to what is frequently said, the core component of the European identity of EU citizens was largely unaffected by the Euro-crisis.

**KEYWORDS:** Eurocrisis, EU image, European identity, European citizens, European public opinion

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## 1. Introduction

On 12 October 2012, the European Union was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In the media, where the image of the EU and its future were then dominated by gloom about the recession, this acknowledgment was received with some criticism and even derision. Many columnists highlighted that Europe was closer than ever to the sunset that is part of its founding Greek myth, in which Zeus in the form of a bull abducts a Phoenician princess, named Europa, and carries her westwards across the sea. Benign commentators considered the Nobel Prize ‘a plea to support the endangered institution at a difficult hour’, as did *The New York Times* (Cowell and Kulish 2012). In fact, the media often lag behind reality. In October 2012 the spread of interest rates between EU member states’ sovereign bonds – possibly the best thermometer of the Euro-crisis – had already declined substantially from its all-time peaks. The Nobel Prize had no effect on financial recovery. Nevertheless, it reasserted a long-standing and higher-order value – peace, not bread-and-butter issues – as the core component of the EU’s mission and identity.

Within European institutions, the concern to endow the EU (or its earlier incarnations) with a values-plus-history based commonality – that is, a shared identity – has been in place for decades. Possibly, it was first brought to the fore on the occasion of the 1973 European Council, with the oil crisis in the background, and the hope that an official endorsement of the concept might lead to closer cooperation among the member states (Stråth 2002). Thereafter, ‘identity technology’ (Kaina and Karolewski 2009) entered the agenda of EU policy-making. It inspired constitution-like legal documents (especially the Charter of Fundamental Rights of 2000, later to become part of the Lisbon Treaty of 2009) student exchange programs, and social science and humanities research funding (Olsen 2012). In these documents the EU strove to gain a ‘moral order’ status more than did many European national states after World War II – even though some intellectuals would have preferred an even stronger commitment (e.g. Weiler 2003). Overall, the EU has not refrained from marketing the values that it represents and its own symbols, seeking to forge a *positive image* and to create a stronger *sense of belonging* among citizens.

The Euro-crisis affords an interesting occasion to assess the depth and persistence of European identity among Europeans. During the crisis, the dominant narratives of Europe became anchored in economic performances. The story from northern Europe depicted a continent torn between virtuous and overspending nations; the story from the south portrayed Europe as a Titanic with first and second class passenger-countries – the latter bearing the burden of technocratic and plutocratic diktats from the former.

Were the efforts of European identity-building made futile by the global recession that hit Europe from 2009 onwards? Was the collective bond of Europeans seriously threatened by the crisis?

The article starts by outlining our conceptualization and operationalization of European identity through standardized Eurobarometer (EB) questions. Then, given our distinction between 'image' and 'belonging' as separate dimensions of identity, we formulate three sets of hypotheses on changes in those dimensions in times of economic crisis. Essentially, we argue that EU belonging is less volatile than the EU image, and that this difference is more marked in countries and among social categories more severely hit by the crisis. In the following section we test these hypotheses by comparing findings from the Eurobarometers of 2004 and 2012. While our general argument on the higher stability of the 'belonging' dimension amid context-bound changes – like the Euro-crisis – holds, the concluding section discusses the relationship between these findings and the growing popularity of anti-EU political parties.

## **2. Image and Belonging: Unpacking European Identity**

Before examining European identity during the Euro-crisis, a more general question concerns the crisis of the identity concept itself. This culminated in the famous proposal by Brubaker and Cooper (2000) to go 'beyond identity' – that is, to renounce the use of such an over-stretched concept. These authors drew a distinction between too strong and too weak understandings of identity conveying too much or too little meaning. From this stems 'a crisis of overproduction and consequent devaluation of meaning' of identity (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 3). Furthermore, Brubaker and Cooper maintained that even when described in constructivist terms, the identity concept is essentialist in character. All this induced them to conclude that identity is not a useful category for social research. Whilst we sympathize with Brubaker's and Cooper's overall plea for analytical precision in the social sciences, and their contention that purely evocative use is often made of the term 'identity' (but much less so since their well-argued and much-quoted tirade), we share the view that the concept can be profitably employed if it is properly operationalized (Greenfeld 1999, 38; Kaina 2013, 185). Specifically in regard to European identity, Brubaker's argument was echoed in Favell's remark that many enlist under this rubric what are 'simply different possible ways of measuring knowledge of Europe, participation in Europe, opinions about Europe, perceptions of Europe, etc.' (Favell 2005, 1113). Accordingly, we would give away with the literature on 'European identity' that takes it as an underlying feature that can and

must be 'discovered' as a hallmark of civilization (for a classification of the European identity literature, see Recchi 2014). Consequently, we do not deny the legitimacy of studies on 'group level' identities (Kaina 2012, 186-189), but as methodological individualists we concentrate on the 'individual level'.

We maintain that sociological research on collective identity should elucidate two facets – 'identity' as *external* social representation (Moscovici 2000) and 'identity' as *internal* self-definition (Abrams and Hogg 2001). We call the two aspects, respectively, 'image' and 'belonging'. As 'image', the identity of X is the answer to the question: 'what is X?' As 'belonging', it answers the question: 'do I belong to X?' The 'image' side of identity expresses a cognitive and evaluative orientation, while the 'belonging' side implies an affective orientation (Tajfel 1982).

As we use it, the concept of 'image' refers to 'the organized representation of an object in an individual's cognitive system' (Kelman 1965, 24). The concept was explicitly employed by Hewstone (1986) in his pioneering analysis of attitudes to the European Community. In EU studies, it has been reprised in Mérand's (2006) inquiry into the social representations of policy-makers in the field of EU security. 'Belonging' alludes to a feeling of inclusion within a super-individual entity – what social psychologists term 'the collective self [that] contains affiliations, group memberships, and connections to collectives of all types' (Abrams and Hogg 2001, 432). This is what the empirical literature on European identity focuses on most frequently by adopting the instruments of public opinion research on nationalism (a most influential example is the collection by Herrmann et al. 2004).

'EU image' and 'EU belonging' are not necessarily related. As has been shown, Africans single out the European Union as having certain characteristics, but they can hardly say that they belong to it (Didelon et al. 2012). Europeans themselves may well elaborate a positive image of the EU without feeling any emotional attachment to it. Or, on the contrary, they may nurture a critical image of the EU but nonetheless have an emotional bond with Europe. In general terms, our claim is that images are more volatile and malleable attitudes, whereas belongings reflect more solid and stable views. This challenges a widespread argument concerning the pernicious effects of the Euro-crisis. In academic research, Fligstein et al. (2012) outlined that national identifications grew in importance especially in the countries struggling with the crisis, shifting the focus from the EU to national governments as a solution to the global recession (see also Poliakova and Fligstein 2013). However, because collective identities are notoriously nested (Díez Medrano and Gutiérrez 2001; Duchesne and Frogner 1995; Marks and Hooghe 2003; Citrin and Sides 2004; Risse 2004; Bruter 2005; McLaren 2006), we sus-

pect that the rise of national identification is not necessarily premised on a demise of European identification.

We rely on Eurobarometer data to track shifts in 'EU image' and 'EU belonging' before and after the Euro-crisis erupted. In doing so, we follow an established literature on Europeans' relations with the EU that mostly draws on Eurobarometer measurements. Even though these measurements have changed over time, often responding to political concerns to boost pro-EU results, it is true that they offer researchers a not so common time-series of attitudes. Given the nature of these data, we will *not* describe the 'EU image contents' – that is, how people define or frame the European Union conceptually. In this regard, in-depth interviews and focus group investigations are much more suitable. Indeed, they have produced quite substantial results – making clear the minimal salience of the EU for broad sections of the population (Duchesne et al. 2013; Gaxie et al. 2011; Meinhof 2004; White 2010) and the still robust influence of national discourses on the interpretation of the EU's role and meaning (Díez Medrano 2003). We will restrict the analysis to whether people have a 'positive', 'neutral' or a 'negative' image of the EU,<sup>1</sup> thus directly reflecting the changes in evaluative orientations that may have taken place from boom to bust.

<sup>1</sup> The other limitation of our analysis of the EU image is that it does not include views of the EU from outside the EU's borders. On this, however, there are three insightful studies. The first one, *The External Image of the European Union* project, explored the treatment of the EU in non-European media (Sperling 2009). Among other things, it found that headlines from the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* in the 1990s and early 2000s mentioned major member states more often than the EU. The image of the EU emerging from the headlines of these newspapers was that of a 'security actor'. The second project on the perception of the EU from outside, the Eurobroadmap study (<http://www.eurobroadmap.eu/>), was carried out between 2009 and 2011. Eurobroadmap put imaginative questions – via mental maps and linguistic associations – about subjective visions of Europe to undergraduate students in 18 different countries across four continents. While the mental mapping of Europe did not differ dramatically, the vocabulary utilized to describe Europe proved to be extremely country-specific (Didelon et al. 2012). Finally, data from the PEW Global Attitudes Project (<http://www.pewglobal.org/category/datasets/>) track substantial shifts in the EU's image among Americans. Quite surprisingly, the recession in Europe at first coincided with a rise of positive opinions about the EU, which reached the peak of 59 per cent in 2010. When the economic situation in Europe deteriorated further, however, the share of positive opinions about Europe fell back to the level of 2007 (around 50 per cent). While almost three in ten Americans in 2007 did not want to express or (most likely) did not have an opinion about the EU, during the 2009-11 period, only one in five Americans refrained from doing so. This is perhaps an effect of higher coverage of EU issues in the American media, as opposed to the relative scarcity of news about the EU in the 1990s and early 2000s.

### **3. Data and Hypotheses**

The two dimensions of EU identity on which we focus – EU image and EU belonging – are distinct but possibly interdependent (albeit not necessarily at the analytical level). If the former is very negative, we can hardly expect the latter to be very strong. Their relationship will be assessed in the empirical section of the article. However, our primary claim is that ‘images’ are more ephemeral perceptions, subject to events and media framings. Public opinion can rapidly change its ‘labelling’ of political institutions, for instance when office-holders change. In fact, we contend that ‘belongings’ tend to be more stable constructs. They are accrued by practices, sediment over time and have more to do with habitus (Dubar 1991, 67 ff.). Only extreme shocks can dissolve existing attachments – in our case, maybe the disruption of the EU itself or the exit of some member state.

These theoretical premises induced us to formulate the following hypotheses for our analysis:

#### **H1. GENERAL TRENDS**

- a) Both the EU image and EU belonging have weakened since before the Euro-crisis.
- b) The Euro-crisis has damaged the EU image more than EU belonging among European citizens.

#### **H2. INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL CHANGES**

- a) The EU image has worsened especially among the social categories hit hardest by the crisis (the young, the less educated, the unemployed, the lower class).
- b) Different levels of EU belonging in different social categories persist over time.

#### **H3. COUNTRY-LEVEL CHANGES**

- a) The EU image has worsened especially in the countries hit hardest by the crisis.
- b) EU belonging has declined especially in the countries hit hardest by the crisis, but to a lesser extent than the EU image.

We used trend data from the Eurobarometer interactive database<sup>2</sup> and micro-data provided by ZACAT Eurobarometer 62.0 (2004), 64.2 (2005), 67.1 (2007), 73.4 (2010), 76.4 (2011) and 77.3 (2012) to track changes in the EU image and EU belonging at the descriptive level. Inferential analysis was based on Eurobarometer 62.0 (2004) and 77.3 (2012) micro-data, which enabled us to compare the trends at the time of economic prosperity (2004) and economic crisis (2012).

To operationalize the EU image, we resorted to the following Eurobarometer question: 'In general, does the European Union conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image?'. Our analysis contrasts positive, negative and neutral (reference category) images. As for EU belonging, another Eurobarometer question was examined: 'In the near future do you see yourself as: nationality only/ nationality and European/European and nationality/ European only'.<sup>3</sup> We contrast 'strong' European identifications (including European and nationality/ European only) with all others.

The set of predictors at the individual level included gender, age groups (reference: aged 55 or more), education (reference: finished education when 20 or older), occupational status (reference: not active in the labour market), type of community (reference: large town) and countries (reference: France). On the basis of the literature, we expected to find that people possessing more resources (highly educated and upper social strata), younger cohorts and individuals with better communication means with the rest of Europe (which is the case of those living in large towns) are more likely to feel attached to the EU. Moreover, we included EU image as a predictor of EU belonging, anticipating that a positive image of the EU goes hand in hand with a stronger EU identification. Furthermore, we included country dummies as we predicted that in those member states particularly hit by the recession the EU image would be affected negatively and, *to a lesser extent*, EU belonging weakened.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/cf/index\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/cf/index_en.cfm).

<sup>3</sup> This is known as the 'Moreno question', after Luis Moreno Fernandez who first introduced it to investigate the rise of Scottish national identity and its relation with British identity. The question was then borrowed by Eurobarometer to capture the interplay of national and European identifications.

Table 1. Trends in EU positive image (2004-2012), %

	Oct 04	Jun 05	Oct 05	Apr 06	Sep 06	May 07	Oct 07	May 08	Oct 08	Jun 09	Oct 09	Jun 10	Oct 10	May 11	Oct 11	May 12
Austria	34	30	24	32	34	34	34	28	29	34	34	32	28	31	25	23
Belgium	59	55	46	54	54	60	59	58	51	51	50	49	46	47	31	35
Bulgaria	63	60	59	59	63	59	57	60	58	60	63	58	57	55	57	54
Cyprus	51	56	52	55	56	53	53	58	50	52	51	37	33	42	39	29
Czech Republic	39	43	40	50	48	45	44	43	44	39	41	35	32	29	26	22
Denmark	38	35	39	41	42	44	41	47	42	41	44	39	35	35	32	32
Estonia	38	38	37	40	48	56	51	47	46	46	45	42	38	38	29	35
Finland	36	29	27	30	34	29	28	34	28	33	35	32	27	31	22	21
France	53	48	46	48	46	50	53	49	46	44	49	42	38	41	32	39
Germany	46	42	40	43	42	52	49	44	48	46	47	36	32	38	30	33
Greece	58	54	51	54	57	51	57	48	41	45	56	38	29	31	28	26
Hungary	46	43	39	53	36	41	41	39	34	33	39	42	39	35	31	25
Ireland	75	68	69	73	73	68	69	65	59	57	58	55	48	54	37	36
Italy	64	64	56	68	56	58	55	49	46	56	58	50	53	49	42	30
Latvia	39	40	34	36	44	36	36	29	29	24	28	25	28	26	21	26
Lithuania	60	49	51	53	55	59	57	51	48	46	44	42	47	42	31	35
Luxembourg	61	58	57	54	53	56	53	53	46	56	66	52	47	48	43	41
Malta	45	48	45	45	46	55	54	57	49	51	46	48	43	36	36	36
Netherlands	44	38	41	46	40	46	43	43	52	45	49	42	40	38	31	33
Poland	46	51	50	55	58	64	64	58	54	52	53	53	56	48	42	41
Portugal	60	56	50	45	50	52	56	55	48	49	53	41	40	35	26	24
Romania	76	67	65	64	66	67	68	67	63	62	63	54	49	56	49	48
Slovakia	48	46	43	50	55	58	50	53	54	54	54	50	52	47	34	35
Slovenia	62	57	51	59	62	62	61	60	58	50	53	44	42	41	40	39
Spain	63	57	55	61	51	64	58	59	51	52	54	47	32	40	26	22
Sweden	38	34	34	39	37	41	37	42	44	40	41	40	34	33	31	31
UK	31	29	29	34	28	35	24	29	26	22	26	23	19	22	13	16
Total	50	46	44	50	46	52	49	48	45	45	48	42	38	40	31	31



**Table 2. Changes in 'strong' European belonging (including 'European only' and 'European and national', 2004-2012), %**

	<b>Oct 04</b>	<b>Oct 05</b>	<b>Feb 07</b>	<b>May 10</b>	<b>Dec 11</b>	<b>May 12</b>
Austria	8	8	8	7	12	13
Belgium	17	15	19	17	22	13
Bulgaria	6	10	14	8	12	9
Cyprus	11	11	15	14	19	12
Czech	5	13	7	4	8	7
Denmark	7	11	11	5	6	5
Estonia	5	5	5	5	10	7
Finland	3	3	5	7	6	6
France	14	12	17	12	13	8
Germany	14	14	18	13	17	10
Greece	5	7	5	6	8	4
Hungary	3	4	7	5	8	6
Ireland	5	9	7	6	6	3
Italy	13	8	9	9	13	14
Latvia	7	3	6	12	14	12
Lithuania	7	5	5	5	10	7
Luxembourg	25	22	31	28	33	24
Malta	9	5	4	5	5	5
Netherlands	12	8	15	10	14	10
Poland	4	6	6	7	8	4
Portugal	3	4	8	8	10	5
Romania	6	5	13	22	24	19
Slovakia	13	9	12	13	15	12
Slovenia	4	6	8	7	11	10
Spain	10	10	12	12	15	10
Sweden	6	6	6	6	10	4
UK	7	3	7	4	7	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>9</b>

Source: Eurobarometers 62.0, 64.2, 67.1, 73.4, 76.4, 77.3 micro-data

## 4. Testing the Hypotheses

### *H1a. Trends in EU image and EU belonging*

As expected, the image of the EU worsened in the 2004-12 period. Table 1 illustrates the downward shift in positive views of the EU across its member states. In 2004, Romania (a candidate country at the time) and Ireland ranked highest. In Bulgaria, another candidate country, the pre-accession effect was clear as well. In Italy, Spain, Slovenia, and Luxembourg the share of positive views on the EU exceeded 60 per cent. The average for the EU as a whole hovered around 50 per cent.

The situation changed quite remarkably in 2012. In all countries, the image of the EU deteriorated. The decline ranged between three per cent (Estonia) and 41 per cent (Spain). In Spain, Ireland, Portugal, Italy and Greece, the countries most affected by the economic downturn, the drop was most visible (not less than 30 per cent). The EU image was least affected (less than a ten per cent fall) in Estonia, Poland, Denmark, Sweden, Bulgaria, and Malta. In 2012 Bulgaria and Romania were again the most Euro-enthusiast countries (54 and 48 per cent of their citizens had a positive view of the Union, respectively). In Portugal and Spain, in fact, the proportion of respondents assessing the EU positively halved compared to 2004. At the end of the period examined, the Czech Republic, Finland and the UK had the lowest proportions of people with positive views on the EU. However, the EU image was faring better than it did one year earlier in many countries (France, Estonia, Latvia, Belgium, Lithuania, the UK, Germany, the Netherlands and Slovakia).

Overall, the image of the EU collapsed between the end of 2009 and mid-2012. But did this translate into a weaker attachment to Europe? Due to data availability, we analysed levels of EU belonging at six time points (Table 2).<sup>4</sup> If we only compare 2004 and 2012, the proportion of people strongly feeling themselves European (i.e. 'European only' and 'European-and-national') was about the same: approximately ten per cent. In the period examined, about half of the countries recorded a drop in numbers of people with a 'strong' EU belonging. Interestingly, however, these were not residents of the countries hit most by the economic crisis, but rather of some of the EU founding member states, i.e. France, Germany and Belgium. On the other hand, levels of EU belonging rose despite the recession in some of the new EU member states. Romania recorded a remarkable 12 per cent increase of 'strong' Europeans. There were smaller in-

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<sup>4</sup> Answer categories 'don't know', 'none (spontaneous)', 'refusal (spontaneous)' were excluded from analysis.

creases in Slovenia, Latvia, Bulgaria and Hungary. Austria, Finland, and, surprisingly, Portugal, had more respondents declaring an exclusive attachment to Europe in 2012, although they declined markedly in a shorter term perspective.

Closer inspection of trends in time shows that the amount of people declaring themselves 'European only' grew in 2007 (compared to 2005), while it tended to oscillate during the Euro-crisis years. However, in 2011 – right in the middle of the crisis – it reached an all-time high in many countries. These figures diminished in 2012, reverting to the mean of the 2000s.

In parallel, it is useful to track changes in 'exclusive' national identifications between 2004 and 2012 (table 3). In this time span, 2010 was quite exceptional, because for the first time since 1999 people declaring that they felt 'national only' outnumbered those who mentioned some European belonging (Fligstein et al. 2012). The 2010 peak, however, was not confirmed. The following years saw an increase in the Eurobarometer respondents who declared that they felt attached to *both* their nation and Europe. In 2012 more than half of the entire EU sample stated that they saw themselves as both nationals and Europeans (table 4).

What happened in Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece, Cyprus and Spain during the Euro-crisis warrants additional attention. For residents of Ireland and Cyprus, the crisis was accompanied by a rise in 'exclusively national' identifications, whilst 'national and European' belongings dropped. Yet in Portugal, Greece, Spain and Italy the opposite occurred: 'exclusively national' identifications decreased whilst 'national and European' identifications became more popular. The decline of strong national belonging was particularly marked in Italy: from 48 per cent in May 2010 to 30 per cent in December 2011. This fed into a robust rise in the proportion of individuals defining themselves as 'national and European' (from 43 to 58 per cent). Similarly, Hungary, Luxembourg, Finland, Poland and Sweden recorded an over ten per cent dip in the number of people reporting that they felt 'national only' and a growth in the 'national and European' sense of attachment. In Romania there was some polarization: weak European belonging ('national and European') dropped, while growing numbers of respondents declared a 'strong' attachment to Europe ('European and national' and 'European only') as well as a 'national only' attachment.

**Table 3. Changes in 'national only' identification in EU member states (2004-2012), %**

	<b>Oct 04</b>	<b>Oct 05</b>	<b>Feb 07</b>	<b>May 10</b>	<b>Dec 11</b>	<b>May 12</b>
Austria	43	46	45	49	45	42
Belgium	31	35	30	35	28	30
Bulgaria	42	45	47	54	45	47
Cyprus	28	31	39	40	40	40
Czech	57	38	49	59	55	50
Denmark	40	40	37	43	41	40
Estonia	44	51	48	50	46	48
Finland	56	49	49	48	47	45
France	31	33	32	43	38	36
Germany	37	36	31	39	31	33
Greece	57	47	49	51	55	45
Hungary	65	51	46	48	51	46
Ireland	41	49	59	60	60	54
Italy	36	38	54	48	30	34
Latvia	47	46	56	54	51	49
Lithuania	55	55	57	62	52	57
Luxembourg	33	26	23	24	22	20
Malta	36	29	35	38	32	36
Netherlands	33	34	29	37	33	33
Poland	46	40	45	44	42	35
Portugal	50	44	50	44	48	37
Romania	41	40	55	57	48	45
Slovakia	38	39	44	42	32	32
Slovenia	44	36	36	56	38	40
Spain	40	38	35	36	31	34
Sweden	48	44	46	49	39	38
UK	57	65	61	72	62	61
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>

Source: Eurobarometers 62.0, 64.2, 67.1, 73.4, 76.4, 77.3 micro-data

**Table 4. Changes in 'national and European' identification in EU member states (2004-2012), %**

	<b>Oct 04</b>	<b>Oct 05</b>	<b>Feb 07</b>	<b>May 10</b>	<b>Dec 11</b>	<b>May 12</b>
Austria	49	46	47	43	42	45
Belgium	51	50	51	49	49	57
Bulgaria	52	45	39	38	43	44
Cyprus	61	58	46	45	40	48
Czech	37	49	43	36	37	43
Denmark	53	50	53	52	52	55
Estonia	51	44	47	45	44	45
Finland	41	48	47	45	47	49
France	56	55	51	44	49	56
Germany	49	50	51	48	52	57
Greece	37	46	46	42	36	51
Hungary	32	45	47	47	41	48
Ireland	54	42	34	35	34	43
Italy	51	54	36	43	58	51
Latvia	46	51	38	34	35	39
Lithuania	38	40	38	32	38	36
Luxembourg	42	52	46	48	44	56
Malta	55	67	61	57	64	59
Netherlands	54	58	56	53	53	57
Poland	50	54	49	48	50	61
Portugal	47	52	42	48	42	57
Romania	52	55	32	21	28	36
Slovakia	49	52	44	46	53	56
Slovenia	52	58	55	37	51	50
Spain	50	51	53	52	54	56
Sweden	45	51	48	45	51	58
UK	36	32	31	24	31	33
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>51</b>

Source: Eurobarometers 62.0, 64.2, 67.1, 73.4, 76.4, 77.3 micro-data

### *H1b. Comparison of the above-mentioned trends*

The investigation of trends in the EU image and belonging suggests that the image component of EU identity is more sensitive to business cycles than is the belonging component. This is in line with the hypothesis. The trend was even stronger than expected, since the levels of EU belonging grew as the crisis proceeded, to shift back in 2012 to the levels of 2004-05.

### *H2a. Individual-level changes in the EU's image between 2004 and 2012*

What social categories have a more positive image of the EU? And, more importantly, does the deterioration of the EU's image concentrate in some social groups as hypothesized? Multinomial logistic regression models were run to compare the determinants of the EU image in 2004 and 2012 (table 5). The dependent variable had three categories: positive, negative and neutral (base category) image.

Models 1 and 2 focus on individual determinants of having a positive EU image in 2004 and 2012 respectively. The overall picture reflects the findings of previous research: the EU enjoys a better image among men, the highly educated, upper classes, and city-dwellers. But what is especially of interest here are changes from 2004 to 2012, which we will interpret bearing in mind the caveats highlighted by Mood (2010). These are broadly in line with our expectation. Most noticeably, the unemployed became less likely to express positive and neutral views of the EU. Their explicit inclination to have a negative image became significant in the 2012 model, as predicted. Analogously, the less educated became most negative about the EU with the crisis. Finally, contrary to what was expected, the EU image of people from their mid-20s to late 30s has not dramatically worsened, even though young people have been particularly hard hit by the reduction of occupational opportunities in many member states.<sup>5</sup>

### *H2b. Individual-level changes in EU belonging between 2004 and 2012*

Whereas we hypothesized that the EU image may be susceptible to economic shocks, we expected to find that EU belonging is comparatively more stable and resili-

<sup>5</sup> Eurostat reports that youth unemployment declined from 2004 (19 per cent) to 2008 (15 per cent), but then escalated constantly up to 23 per cent in 2012. The corresponding figures for the whole working-age population are 9 per cent in 2004, 7 per cent in 2008 and almost 11 per cent in 2012:

[http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/Unemployment\\_statistics](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics) (consulted 20 July 2013).

ent to changes in the business cycle (table 6). Models 3 and 4 concern the individual level determinants of EU belonging in 2004 and 2012. In line with the literature, we found that males, the highly educated, upper class respondents, and residents of large towns are significantly more likely to feel European. As predicted, these effects are highly persistent over time. In fact, younger cohorts' sense of belonging to the EU became significant only in 2012. The comparison between the 2004-12 changes in EU image and EU belonging among younger cohorts shows that while the younger cohorts are no longer more neutral than positive about the EU image, their sense of belonging to the EU consolidated, *ceteris paribus*. Finally, these models clarify the empirical relation between EU image and EU belonging. In both samples, a positive image resonates with a strong sense of belonging. The opposite does not hold, however. The association between a negative EU image and a feeble sense of belonging was significant in 2012, while this was not the case in 2004. It is likely that the Euro-crisis has determined an alignment of the cognitive/evaluative and affective components of European identity.

### *H3a. Country-level changes in EU image between 2004 and 2012*

As expected, residents of countries particularly hit by the crisis (Ireland, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain) turned to see the EU in less positive light in 2012 than eight years earlier. In 2004, residents of all these countries were more likely to hold neutral views about the EU than negative ones. These effects became insignificant (Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain) or reversed (Greece) in 2012.

Respondents in other countries shifted in the same direction: in Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Hungary they were more prone to hold neutral than negative image of the EU in 2004, but this was not the case (or the effect was not significant any more) in any of these countries in 2012. Compared to French residents, residents of the 'new' EU member states generally tend to be more neutral than negative even in 2012, with the notable exceptions of Hungarians, Czechs, and Cypriots (the latter more likely to have negative image of the EU).

### *H3b. Country-level changes in EU belonging between 2004 and 2012*

With models 3 and 4 we analyse the impact of country dummies on EU belonging in 2004 and 2012 respectively. As expected, EU belonging is not as negatively affected as the image of the EU during the crisis. We can distinguish two situations. The first one is prevalent in most new EU member states (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Slovenia) and Portugal, where people were significantly less likely to feel European in

2004, but no more in 2012. The second situation is typical of countries experiencing very difficult economic times (Cyprus, Italy, Spain, and Romania), as well as Belgium and Austria, where the likelihood of having a sense of EU belonging became significantly stronger.

## 5. Conclusion

The Euro-crisis tainted the image of the EU both on a global scale and Europe-wide. Within the EU, the social representation of the Union suffered especially in the countries most affected by the economic downturn: Ireland, Italy, Greece, Cyprus, Portugal and Spain. Our hypothesis, however, was that 'image' is the more volatile component of identity, grounded in cognitive/evaluative orientations. Collective identity has its deep-seated and affective root in a 'sense of belonging'. 'Images' are transient judgments of contingencies, while 'belongings' are self-understandings that connect the self with a broader social organization. Therefore, we expected that the Euro-crisis would erode the positive image of the EU but not the feeling of 'being European' among European citizens. Indeed, the proportion of the population describing themselves as primarily 'European' remained relatively stable over the years, and only small shifts were recorded in the majority of countries. Contrary to what is frequently heard and said in the public discourse, this dimension of EU identity was largely unaffected by the vagaries of the economic climate. This finding is in line with those of previous analyses attesting to a limited and declining impact of macroeconomic factors on Europeans' support for European integration (Eichenberg and Dalton 2007).

The examination of the social determinants of EU image and EU belonging was carried out to test whether the lighter side of identity (i.e. image) was particularly shaken across the weakest groups, while the more solid side (i.e., belonging) could resist even among those groups. These expectations were generally confirmed by the data. Compared to 2004, the social determinants of the EU image weakened in 2012, as if the economic situation 'democratized' discontent and made the EU image less anchored to established supporters. In fact, the predictors of a higher sense of EU belonging showed a remarkable continuity over time, as expected.

At the country level, the findings are entirely in line with the hypothesis: the image of the EU worsened in the most indebted countries, but EU belonging levels did not. This corroborates our main theoretical tenet: economic and political downturns can alter the external layer of identity (image-like assessments), but not its core substance,



which depends on more deeply ingrained socio-psychological mechanisms. People do not suddenly change their self-definitions, not even at times of deep uncertainty.

One message of this article is that, in spite of its socioeconomic and political aftermaths, the Euro-crisis was not an identitarian Armageddon. However, there is a caveat: Eurobarometer data do not provide a measure of the subjective *salience* of identifications – that is, ‘the likelihood that a given identity will be active across situations’ (Morris 2013, 24; see also Stryker and Serpe 1994). And salience is dramatically important when it comes to translating identities into behaviours. While they are not necessarily acted upon, collective identities constitute a repertoire open to mobilization by ‘political entrepreneurs’. What the Euro-crisis possibly did, in fact, was to enhance the political salience of *national* identities, capitalizing on nationalism’s power as a simplifying ideology that tends to be evoked in the face of complex hardships (Gingrich and Banks 2006). Hence, even if their number has not been expanding, Europeans with an overwhelming sense of national belonging have increasingly rallied under neo-nationalist and anti-EU party banners – as the results of the European Parliament elections of May 2014 attested especially in France, Great Britain and Denmark. The national versus European identity antagonism is the feature shared by the Front National, UK Independence Party and Dansk Folkeparti – just to mention the three most successful neo-nationalist parties in the EU. While their impact is certainly magnified by the feeble salience that mars European identity among the silent majority of European citizens (Bellucci, Sanders and Serricchio 2012; Van Ingelgom 2014), our analysis may suggest that their potential for further electoral expansion is constrained by the size of the EU population that does not see itself as part of a collective European destiny. In spite of the crisis, this remains a minority.

Table 5. Multinomial logistic regression models of EU image (positive, negative vs. neutral), 2004 and 2012

		Positive EU image (2004)	Positive EU image (2012)	Negative EU image (2004)	Negative EU image (2012)
Gender (ref: woman)	Male	.330 ***	.231 ***	.136 **	-.146 ***
Age group (ref: 55 years and more)	15-24	-.081	-.084	-.337 ***	-.259** **
	25-39	-.142 **	-.027	-.208 **	-.183 ***
	40-54	-.181 ***	-.110 *	-.010	-.051
Education	Up to age 15	-.692 ***	-.578 ***	.119	-.196 ***
	16-19	-.314 ***	-.360 ***	-.038	.13 **
Social class (ref: not active in labour market)	I	.376 ***	.237 **	-.066	-.124
	II	.305 ***	.153 *	-.130	-.185* ***
	III	.074	-.048	-.118	-.078
	IV	-.011	.132	-.024	.136
	V-VI-VII	-.139 **	-.166 **	-.068	-.025 **
	Unemployed	-.110	-.157 *	.148	.278***
Type of community (ref: large town)	Rural area	-.260 ***	-.130 **	-.007	-.016
	Small-m town	-.158 ***	-.107 **	-.088	.005
	Country (ref: France)				
	Belgium	.083	-.268 *	-.789 ***	-.210
	Netherlands	-.383 ***	-.299 **	-.305 *	.130
	Germany	-.331 ***	-.388 ***	-.309 *	-.316 **
	Italy	.447 ***	-.331 **	-.691 ***	-.130
	Luxembourg	.285 *	.004	-.575 **	-.058
	Denmark	-.832	-.797 ***	-.163	-.713 ***
	Ireland	1.020 ***	-.063 ***	-.773 ***	.042
	UK	-.514 ***	-.942 ***	.404 **	.461 ***
	Greece	.193	-.380 **	-.590 ***	.439 ***
	Spain	.340 **	-.600 ***	-.1106 ***	-.057
	Portugal	.577 ***	-.301 *	-.448 **	.222
	Finland	-.937 ***	-1.003 ***	-.170	-.009
	Sweden	-.496 ***	-.580 ***	.570 ***	.132
	Austria	-.707 ***	-.741 ***	.116	.069
	Cyprus	.118	-.243	-.070	.292 *
	Czech	-.599 ***	-.814 ***	-.149	-.007
	Estonia	-.982 ***	-.718 ***	-.882 ***	-1.288 ***
	Hungary	-.273 *	-.673 ***	-.550 ***	-.049
	Latvia	-.748 ***	-1.081 ***	-.592 ***	-1.116 ***
	Lithuania	.069	-.736 ***	-1.349 ***	-1.283 ***
	Malta	.171	-.267 *	.093	-.460 **
	Poland	-.416 ***	-.232 *	-.835 ***	-.924 ***
	Slovakia	-.420 ***	-.318 **	-.848 ***	-.347 **
	Slovenia	.265 *	-.143	-1.292 ***	-.301 *
	Bulgaria	.593 ***	.420 ***	-.299	-.498 ***
	Romania	1.139 ***	.258 *	-1.006 ***	-.659 ***
Constant		.882 ***	.441 ***	-.401 ***	-.280 **

Sources: Eurobarometer 62 (2004) and 77.3 (2012). N (2004)= 23,118; N (2011)= 23,641. Pseudo R2= .0664 (model 1), .0455 (model 2). Notes: \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001. Class I= business owners, top managers, professionals, II= middle managers, employed professionals, III= service and white-collar workers, IV= shop owners, crafts persons, self-employed manual workers, V-VI-VII= employed manual workers.

Table 6. Binomial logistic regression models of EU belonging (European only/European and national vs. national only/national and European), 2004 and 2012

		(2004)	(2012)
Gender [ref: woman]	Male	.368 ***	.271 ***
Age group [ref: 55 years and more]	15-24 years	.138	.422 ***
	25-39 years	.049	.279 ***
	40-54 years	.167	.181 *
Education [ref: finished when 20 or older]	Education up to age 15	-.419 ***	-.348 ***
	Education finished when 16-19	-.232 **	-.171 **
Social class [ref: not active in the labour market]	I	.375 *	.389 ***
	II	.071	.243 *
	III	-.161	.037
	IV	.242	.089
	V-VI-VII	.083	-.024
	Unemployed	.081	.043
Type of community [ref: large town]	Rural area or village	-.276 **	-.368 ***
	Small-middle town	-.239 **	-.142 *
EU image [ref: neutral]	Positive	.701 ***	.556 ***
	Negative	-.173	-.337 ***
Country [ref: France]	Belgium	.266	.631 ***
	Netherlands	-.016	.316
	Germany	-.017	.259
	Italy	-.248	.653 ***
	Luxembourg	.816 ***	1.391 ***
	Denmark	-.924 ***	-.544 **
	Ireland	-1.281 ***	-1.094 ***
	UK	-.217	-.234
	Greece	-1.283 ***	-.736 ***
	Spain	-.345	.413 *
	Portugal	-1.716 ***	-.266
	Finland	-1.494 ***	-.675 **
	Sweden	-1.069 ***	-.678 ***
	Austria	-.289	.581 ***
	Cyprus	-.380	.469 *
	Czech	-1.102 ***	-.067
	Estonia	-1.590 ***	-.544 **
	Hungary	-1.612 ***	-.195
	Latvia	-.944 ***	.265
	Lithuania	-1.171 ***	-.636 **
Malta	-.576	-.752 *	
Poland	-1.189 ***	-1.043 ***	
Slovakia	.000	.103	
Slovenia	-1.721 ***	.029	
Bulgaria	-1.184 ***	-.205	
Romania	-.916 ***	.790 ***	
Constant		-2.185 ***	-2.664 ***

Sources: Eurobarometer 62 (2004) and 77.3 (2012). N (2004)= 11,511; N (2012)= 22,928. Pseudo R2: .087 (2004), .074 (2012). Notes: \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001. Class I= business owners, top managers, professionals, II= middle managers, employed professionals, III= service and white-collar workers, IV= shop owners, crafts persons, self-employed manual workers, V-VI-VII= employed manual workers.

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