

# **Termpaper European Identity: Analyzing the European Identity and commenting Habermas' paper on "Why Europe needs a constitution"**

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**Abstract:** The essay is an attempt to analyse the European identity as well as to comment and interpret the Habermas' paper "Why Europe needs a constitution"

**Keywords:** European identity, European Constitution, Jurgen Habermas.

## **Introduction**

The unification of Europe after World War II started in the 1950s. It arose with the foundation of the European Community of States in 1952 and continued with the European Economic Community in 1958/1959. After this event it took again more than 30 years to found the European Union, a strong association of European countries that is supposed to act as an economic and political union. The globalization, encompassing the world as a whole, has a strong influence and a great importance on Europe's countries and their societies. In times of fast development, financial crises, the threat from Islamist terrorism and the so called "refugee crisis" there is a high need for the European countries to stand together as one and manage these situations as union.

## **Analysing and comments on Habermas' paper "Why Europe needs a constitution"**

In order to understand the EU's ideas of being a union, let us have a closer look at the refugee situation in the 21st century. Hungary's prime minister says, "What we have been facing is not a refugee crisis. This is a migratory movement composed of economic migrants, refugees and also foreign fighters. This is an uncontrolled and unregulated process. [...] The right of human dignity and security are basic rights. But neither the German nor the Hungarian way of life is a basic right of all people on the Earth." [1]. In contrast to this testimony Germany's chancellor claims, "We respect the human dignity of every single person. [...] There is no tolerance towards people, who challenge others dignity" (own translation, Merkel, 2015) [2]. Those statements point out that there is no common idea of how to deal with situations like this. And this example is just one, though a very current and important one, for all the affairs which the EU is supposed to manage as a union.

The reactions according to the refugee situation make clear that there is no common thinking in the EU. The diverse political interventions of different European nation-states on the threat of terrorism is another issue that underlines the discrepancy in European politics.

At the same time there is a discussion about the European Identity. An Identity that has formed since the beginning of the unification of Europe in the 1950s. An Identity across national borders to stand together for peace and security (EPC, 1988) [3]. According to the "Document on the European Identity" the term "European Identity" was used for the first time in 1973 and became a basic idea of the EU in the 20<sup>th</sup> century which is still developing today.

The union of Europe started as a mostly economic cooperation with the building of a single market. The nine foreign ministers formulated their vision of Europe for the future. The EU should be much more than a union of economic and political issues. They wanted an enlargement of the union and a common identity for the whole community. The politicians were looking at the future EU as embedding all European countries. Some of these aims were

fulfilled as for example the EU counts 28 member states in 2016. In contrast only 53% of the Europeans feel attached to the EU (DG, 2011) [4], so the vision of a common identity has not nearly reached this point yet.

There are different opinions about the definition of the European Identity. According to the nine foreign ministers the European Identity is based on the common heritage, interest and obligations, which the EU achieved until that time. In relation to the rest of the world those countries were already acting as a union which is another important point. Moreover the development of Europe as a dynamic continent seems to be a feature that influences the people's identity (EPC, 1988) [5].

Uniting the European countries means sharing the same values and principles, having specific social, political and economic interests in common and all together take part in the construction of Europe (EPC, 1988 [6]. Moreover the European Identity includes common ideals and objectives. The main issues of European Identity, according to the nine foreign ministers in 1973, are peace, stability and progress inside and outside of Europe (EPC, 1988) [7].

As we can see the European Identity is a basic element of today's social, political and economic situation. The idea of an European Identity was created in the 1970s, but until now there is no common idea and definition. The sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas has his own idea of an European Identity and the reasons to create and strengthen it. The first part of this paper will analyze and comment on Habermas' opinion about European Identity according to his paper "Why Europe needs a constitution". Moreover the author illustrates the need of an European Identity which will be analyzed and commented in the second part.

Habermas describes an alteration in the aims of the unity of Europe. In its beginnings, after World War II, the countries wanted to build the "United States of Europe", a federal state. These days the goal is to create a new political form, a mixture between a confederation and a federation, an association of nations which unite their sovereignty only in particular cases. In contrast Habermas (2001) states that there is a strong need for the EU to create a constitution. "What forms the common core of a European identity is the character of the painful learning process it has gone through, as much as its results. It is the lasting memory of national excess and moral abyss that leads to our present commitments the quality of a peculiar achievement. This historical background should ease the transition to a post-national democracy based on the mutual recognition of the differences between strong and proud national cultures" (Habermas 2001) [8]. The common constitution as the basis of "post-national democracy" is going to encourage the European Identity, refers the author. Habermas recognizes the shared history, the conflicts and the development as the fundamental elements of a common European Identity which has developed in the past and is still developing in the present (Habermas 2001) [9].

The history of the European nation-states led to and shaped the people's identity. All European countries are influenced by the economic and cultural globalization. As a consequence of the globalization and diverse conflicts in the world, immigration and multiculturalism degrees are increasing. Facing together challenges like those is part of the European Identity, but united actions do not happen often nowadays. Referring to the refugee situation it is clear that there are still many disagreements among the EU-members. What the EU needs is a "solidarity among strangers" (Habermas 2001) [10]. European Identity means a solidarity between people without paying attention to any national border. It is a transnational movement and feeling of togetherness (Habermas 2001) [11].

This solidarity may be supported by an European civil society, the construction of a public sphere all around Europe and a common political culture of all European citizens (Habermas

2001) [12]. According to that feature all policies need to be united to create a “harmonization of major public policies” (Habermas 2001) [13]. Until now these ideas are not realized. The cultural, economic and social policies are left into national responsibility, but just the monetary sovereignty lies in European hand. Despite this political distance between the various nation-states there is an European Identity, states Habermas ((Habermas 2001) [14], which is shaped by the global expansion of modern sciences and technology, democracy and the nation-state. Furthermore like the foreign ministers in the 1970s, Habermas defines the human rights as one of the core items of an European Identity (Habermas 2001) [15].

Concerning the EU's beginning I totally agree with Habermas. As a result of World War II there was a strong need for peace and security in all European countries in the 1950s. The human hope for peace was more important than national borders at that time. This transformation of national interests and actions towards European acts and shared interests is a major step towards a common identity. Identities are always produced by society and the European Identity was mainly created through the common historical heritage. Furthermore identities are dynamic and change through time. In my opinion solidarity is an important issue, too. Due to the globalization the world, and certainly Europe as a continent, comes closer together. This is why in my opinion there is the possibility of raising the solidarity among the continent. New technologies, the opportunities to travel and work in many different countries and moreover the media of mass communication allow people to develop solidarity towards each other.

Furthermore the aspect of human rights seems to be a fundamental element of European Identity. These rights present the European's society's values, laws and the history. They express the people's ideals of peace, tolerance and mutual understanding, which are basic features of an identity. I agree with Habermas that the European Convention of Human Rights and the European Social Charter play a significant role in the European Identity because they unite Europe as a pioneer towards humanity.

Still having the ideals is not enough. Habermas [16] emphasizes the importance of one European people as a democratic union. To fulfill this aim and to get a common political system the descent, language and history are less import. It is about acting voluntarily as a civic nation. There is no need to share any ethnic feature. In contrast only the current and the historical situation in the European countries and a democratic citizenship are relevant. Talking about different languages, it is even crucial to have those different official languages in the EU institutions because all national cultures' worth and integrity are acknowledged as equal (ibid., p. 19). This equality again refers to the human rights.

Habermas points out that the European citizens should share one political culture. He sees constitution-making as a solution to solve diverse crisis [17]. In my estimation Habermas is right. Rethinking the refugee situation and the diverse opinions about it, acting as a union seems to be the only solution to manage those difficulties. If the EU could agree in dealing with the situation together, for instance how to welcome the refugees and how to give them shelter, no nation-state would build walls to “defend their country”. Walls have never been and will never be a useful method to support a growing identity among people.

According to Habermas the principles of social security and of a valid conception of citizenship are basic features for an European Identity. Due to this Habermas (2001) sees the welfare state as “the backbone of [a] society” [18]. Social, political and cultural inclusion go together with the welfare state [19].

Another major argument is the economy. Prosperity is one of the origins of the EU's foundations. Certainly the economic feature goes together with all the other aspects that have been mentioned before. The economy has a strong influence on people's lives, culture and politics. In 2001, when Habermas wrote his paper about the need of an European Constitution,

the Euro was not introduced yet. Despite the sociologist already knew that a common currency will not be enough to maintain a common identity. Habermas recognized the Euro as a unifying symbol, which is useful to stabilize the economic union, but still there is the need for a political union. In addition Habermas recognizes that the freedom of goods, persons, services and capital may support the creation of the European Identity [20].

Referring to the welfare state I agree with Habermas because having similar basic requirements for life simplifies the creation of a common identity.

According to the Eurobarometer's survey (DG, 2011) the Euro is the most important reason for EU citizens to feel attached to the EU. 36% of the participants in the survey mentioned the common currency as the reason why they feel attached to the EU [21]. I agree that the Euro may be one important element of the European Identity but in my estimation it is not the major one. It might be the most obvious reason in these days but a currency that was not even introduced 20 years ago can not be compared in its importance to a common historical background of several decades. Despite the Euro may be a next step to a closer community.

Culture is an aspect, which usually comes in mind at first when talking about identity. The outstanding adjective of European Identity, according to Habermas (2001) [22], is its combination of collectivism in society and private individualism. Cultural empowerment shall become more important than material goals in the society, adds Habermas (2001) [23]. The European Identity is based on the common values due to the common history, social norms, images of gender and class, collective bargaining, trade unions, public social services and the rights of women and children (Habermas 2001) [24].

All these issues influence on the European Identity in a strong, but sometimes invisible, dimension. As identities are constructed by society and reconstructed by their action and various elements such as culture, politics and economy, I agree that common attitudes towards social norms, images of gender and class etc. are crucial to the creation of an European Identity. Talking about culture, on the one hand I agree that European countries share particular values, but on the other hand the culture of people from Western Europe can not be put on a par with the culture of Eastern European people. Europe consists of many different cultures. Pooling them means growing a multicultural society, which is exactly what Europe may be one day: A great union of diverse people, nations, cultures and languages. All these differences exist and shall be tolerated, but the most important is to increase the feeling of togetherness, which will automatically raise the "solidarity among strangers" (Habermas, 2001) [25]. As Barth (1998) [26] states groups are not based on cultural differences neither on similarities but on their organizational form. Furthermore I agree with Barth [27] that culture should not be regarded as a primary feature but as a result.

In the second part I will discuss why this solidarity, the European Identity, is a major issue. The world is developing very quickly. Technology, politics, economy, crisis and conflicts; everything is happening and developing in a faster way since the industrialization began in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As a result the EU has to manage various different social, political and economic issues. This is still a problem in the EU because of the lack of a common political culture. Habermas (2001) [28] claims the decree of an European Constitution to be a next step to a greater European Identity. In the first part I illustrated Habermas and my understanding of an European Identity. Doing so the reader already gets aware of the importance of a common Identity in Europe. The second part shall depict why this Identity matters to individual, collective and the European Identity, according to Habermas (2001).

Habermas [29] points out that there is no new invention needed for a European Constitution. In contrast the EU only has to conserve the democracy which means to maintain the civil rights, social welfare, education and leisure. Those features are premises to the private

autonomy and democratic citizenship, which influence on the individual as well as on the collective identities.

As claimed by Habermas [30] the free exchange of people in the EU is an basic issue to individual identities. In this point I agree with Habermas [31] as individual identities are unique to every person and will never be a finished product. The dynamic of individual identities is shaped by new experiences, social changes and deeper self-reflection [32]. Through this freedom of movement persons are allowed to travel and to work in different nation-states. These new experiences influence on the individual's ways of looking at the world and as a consequence shape their identities [33].

Regarding to the collective identities Habermas [34] adds that the economic globalization demands fast structural changes. Unequal social cost and a widening gap between “winners and losers” arises. The EU should reply to this change with complementary social and infrastructural policies. Those values of justice and solidarity should be inscribed in the Union. A greater influence on the International Court is needed in order to support the social equality. The inequality is mostly concerning people with lower and middle incomes, those people who are working a lot and are highly influenced by the global changes. In my estimation this people must have a right to take part in the decision-making of the EU. In this way I agree with Habermas (2001) [35] who demands more democracy on a European level. Ergo we need more participation of citizens. This will increase legitimacy and efficacy in the European space [36]. As stated by Habermas [37] the participation is a “unique opportunity for transnational communication”. It will cause a political focus' alteration from national capitals to European centers. European citizens should be allowed to join the European parties. This is a fundamental issue to collective identities because it offers the opportunity to deal with topics that are important to the citizens such as political ideology, economies, occupational positions, social class, religion, ethnicity, gender. Functional principles should replace territorial principles [38].

According to Barth (1998) [39] collective identities are not based on cultural differences neither on similarities but on their organizational form. Furthermore I agree with Barth [40] (ibid.) that culture should not be regarded as a primary feature but as a result. Concerning the European Identity I would say that there is a common economic organizational form, which unites the group but there is no strong common political and social organization. As a result the basis for an intense common identity is not built yet. Barth claims that social boundaries, not territorial boundaries, unite or demarcate groups. In my opinion Europe is still divided among the national borders. Some borders may be less important than others but as we think of the enhancement at the Hungarian border because of the current refugee situation, I do not see the transnational solidarity. Though I must admit that the national borders became less important during the last decades. For instance the Schengen Agreement was a major step towards a union of nation-states. As a consequence this freedom of movement created kind of a border-less area. This agreement raised the feeling of togetherness. Furthermore an active relationship is fundamental to a collective identity. This is why I agree with Habermas (2001) that civil participation is a major issue. It means the activation of relationships among the European citizens, ergo a support of the European Identity. The citizen's participation will cause a great change in national identities because different national identities will be united in the elections. Power must be distributed more equally. The democratization means to me to create a balance of power in order to make the elites lose power and empower each European citizen. As a consequence there will be a political shift from nation-states to a European level, which will cause a change in collective identities. Openness and solidarity among people from different nation-states will increase. In my opinion this is how the European identity should be. It should focus on shared political values without recognizing ethnicity or languages as an

important feature.

Acting and thinking as a union is important not only to the citizens but also to the economy. An economic union such as the EU strengthens growth and welfare. Networks of trade-relations, foreign investments and financial transactions increase because of the economic union. A common political action will increase the EU's influence on the NATO and the UN decisions. This is why Habermas [41] claims a common foreign and security policy. All in all acting jointly causes a stronger EU with more power according to global decision-making processes.

Without any doubt the EU is a powerful economic association that could strengthen its political force in uniting the European countries. On the one hand I agree with Habermas (2001) that a European Constitution is an important issues to activate the citizens in order to feel more responsible and arise a common Identity. But on the other hand I do not think that the political and economic elite, which is very much the same, will give up their leading positions. In my estimation in times of neoliberalism nation-states become less important because of the state's pull-out. It is not the citizen who benefit from that but the economic leaders. Though I agree that the EU needs a common political culture. In my opinion sharing an economical system without sharing the same political values is causing many problems. For instance the crisis in Greek or the refugee situation. The European people need a European Identity which consists in shared political and economic values, emancipatory and critical thinking citizens but at the head it needs a “solidarity among strangers” (Habermas, 2001) [42].

Some people think that Europe is just too big and to diverse to build a union with a common Identity. I do not think so. In my opinion we have to stop creating differences, but recognizing and respecting existing differences. There is no “the other”, neither in Europe, nor outside of Europe, but just one people. An European Identity based on humanitarian progress and a common just political system may be the next step to a European society.

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