

## **Global, national and ethnic identities European identity empty conception or possible dream?**

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**Abstract:** The essay is an attempt to present different kinds of identity: global identity, national identity, ethnic identity, and European identity. The focus is on the explanation and interpretation of the manifestations of the identity through scientific point of view and across personal experience.

**Keywords:** global identity, national identity, ethnic identity, European identity.

### **Introduction**

In my essay I would like to consider issue connected with European identity. I want to give an answer for essential question, what does it mean to have European identity. My work is based on paper written by Anthony D. Smith about “National Identity and the idea of European union” [1]. First I want to make a statements according to theories of researcher and then explain it from different points of view. I would like to express my individual opinion as a first level, Polish national point of view as a second level and European Union perceived as form of politics and structures connections as a third level. This paper is aim at consider the problem if European identity is possible to exist, of course not now but in longer period of time, I would like to approximate to the answer and also plumb in this problem in my own advisement.

### **Global, European, national, and ethnic identities**

According to Anthony D. Smith theory [2] we have different types of identity. First one, cultural identity base on collective continuity, memories and common beliefs. Which is mean that people perceive their national identity like something what they share among the whole community. This elements, such as history, traditions, language, religion, origin, are essential components which are creating bonds between citizens and of course establish sense of national identity. It is hard to disagree with this statement. For me, when I think about my home country, I see national emblems, legends passed since ages to the new generations, polish literature and of course history. So my thinking covers specification couched by author, because I said about sharing myths, generalized culture and common bond of mass.

But if we accept this theory we cannot say that something like one, general European identity exist. At first we don't use one, common language, which is familiar for people who live in all united countries. Of course we could say about English, like a new language of Europe, but still if we go to some countries, we might have problems to communicate with local people. In my opinion creating one language for all twenty eight countries is impossible. National language has been existed since ages and they have very strong local traditions, most of the countries are proud of this part of their culture, also physically, it is inconceivable to learn people a new language against their will. But this is only my personal opinion, let have a moment to think about it in national perspective. Polish people, because this is an example, which I would like to follow with reference to nation, are traditionalist. In polish educational system still is maintained memory about the biggest authors, such as Mickiewicz [3], Słowacki [4] and many others. Children since primary school are taught, not only about grammar, syntax or flexion,

but also about past polish mentality. Through the language we are able to teach people more than words, we can teach them how to perceive the world, we can devolved a part of world point of view and of course mentality. So when you can speak in some language it also means that automatically you can understand the way of thinking of whole society. This makes us feel very attached to the language, because it creates universal, spiritual bond between speakers. That is why I cannot imagine substituting national language by general European one. Because this would be total contradiction for substantial role of language for the nation. But looking at that problem from perspective of European Union as a structures of united countries, we can see, that one language exist. We can see it acts, laws, pacts or sessions leaded in English, although with this last one I would not be so sure, because deputies still need interpreters to take part in deliberation.

Secondly we have to think about history, does it exist history of European Union? [5] I am not saying about history of Europe as a continent, but as collaborative history of all united countries. I can find the answer for this question, because this itself, does not exist. People among the Europe cannot feel any connection according to common history, because every region has own one. For me the most universal for European citizens could be the II World War, scale of this phenomenon was that wide, that almost every one experienced it. But here we have a problem almost does not mean all. I do not want to detailed it, but memory about this happenings is different for every nation. Some of nations, like Poland, were suffering much more acutely than others, so also they can made a statement that atrocity of this time affected them more than others. Without doubt I can say that war is long- haul happening, but for me it was mainly war between only couple of countries, such as Germany, Russia and Poland. With our national point of view, this is certain part of our history, till this day we worship heroes, dates and sacrifice of people from that time. None of polish people think about suffer of all Europe, in this particular case, we always think about our polish suffering. Although the II World War is very sad and harmful part of history it is inseparable associated with polish history in general. But when we think about point of view all of European Union countries, we can say that we have some common history, which is union history itself. Because we can say about first date when the unification idea was born, we can also say about another dates when this idea became true and next countries join into this new type of order. Just we have to ask a question, is this few events enough to be perceived as a common history which could be accepted and shared among society? Do people feel the connection with this stages of formatting European Union? [...] This question should be asked for many to find out about it, I can say, that honestly I do not consider this little part from past as a solid background, which could be named as a history of EU.

Thirdly let think about traditions, as we all know traditions are strongly associated with customs which have substantial meanings for society, were accepted by all people and have some origin in past. So if we think about time period for EU traditions we have to count it since 1952, when founding countries decided to create this union. Whereas that customs from particular countries have hundreds of years this is not an adequate time to shape a new habits. Another important case is acceptance of people, without doubt introducing new traditions among variety of all old one, it is a challenge. Let just assume, that the new custom for all EU would be Day of European Union [6], with singing anthem or marching with flag. I don't think that for me this day had some special meaning, at least for first couple of years, and I am sure that the same would be with polish society, who is well-known of numerous of national holidays, which celebration is a part of long time tradition. Another problem pose finding this customs among variety of different countries. What could be an universal tradition for people from way different regions, cultures, religions? How we could combine this all elements into something universal? For the whole EU this could be an logistic problem, the easiest part is of course formulated act about new holiday, but should it be also day off from work? I think dealings like this take a long

period to establish one, final version and enforce it. And we cannot forget that is only one universal traditions, which could quickly disappear among lots of other, national or global customs, so in this case creating a new system of habits, would be very expensive and long-lasting proceeding, which is in the terms of whole union inviable.

Another component which I found very important is religion, honestly I think this is individual issue for every person, but we have to say that people from one religion can go along better that from different ones. That is why in European countries mainly we have one dominant religion and couple of small. I am considering myself as an atheist, but Poland is consider to be a catholic state with great religion influence for society and not officially for administrative structures. So constituting one religion for all united countries is not only impossible but also incompatible with EU politics, which let me reminded, is politics of tolerance. That is why we have to reject this characteristic on the grounds of personal values, despite it is one of components that build identity.

The final case in this paragraph is origin, as we know Europe continent, is taken up as a residence of many people with different origin. So this mix is not allowing to us to determinate which one is clearly European? First we don't have right to evaluate it and second we do not have this knowledge. So if we assume that one of ingredients of identity is origin, we cannot say about one EU origin. Let me give an example Spanish people have Roman origin and Pole have Slavic origin in consequence we have big differentiation among countries which create the union. With origin case is combined also language, customs and other features, which we know from previous paragraphs are very hard to unite.

To sum up this theory that identity is connected with cultural meanings I have say that I am full doubts about possibility to create fully valuable European identity. I gave a lots of examples that in some cases, theoretically it is impossible to have an EU identity because of the lack of background, meaningful differences and lots of other, but despite this examples we all know that during the whole years of existence this creature, people became European in their own minds. Also I cannot say that I am not equating myself as an European, so here we have interesting phenomenon about it, which I will try to explain in further paragraphs. The solution of this case is another statement created by Anthony D. Smith [7], that people with the years shaped so many new identities connected not only with their social status or religion, but also with community, state or ethnic, that they are able to have multiple identity. So right now still we can consider national identity as the strongest and most important one, but the truth is that this is not the only one. People may identify themselves with nation, but depending on circumstances, they might also identify themselves with ethnic group, religious group, economic group and et cetera. The variety of identities coexist in coherent way, they do not exclude or interfere, this identities just occur when situation requires it. So this is why although European identity do not fulfil all characteristic for classical association, still is identity acknowledge by people.

I have to say that the phenomenon of multiple identity is very close to me, because I recognized myself as Polish women but furthermore I am belonging to local community of my region, called "województwo łódzkie" [8]. And this connected more with my ethnic identity than this national one, although if someone asked me do I feel like European citizen, I would yes. Because for me having double or triple identity is not unusual. Depending on circumstances sometimes I feel more like Polish women, especially when abroad and I have to introduce myself to other foreigner, but when I am in Poland, I certainly feel like a part of regional community. Of course this situation is similar, because when want to introduce myself to other citizen I will use my region as an identification, because we have a common background, which is knowledge about land division in Poland. But when I would speak to person who is from beyond my continent, to give him a better view I would firstly say that I am European person. But this not only connected with geography, it is also attributable to benefits which gives me

EU and kind of mentality which is, without doubt, common for all Europe citizens. What do I understand by conception of European mentality? [9] Firstly for me, this is associated with liberty, not only politics in Europe based on freedom of people, thoughts, religions, but also whole society believe that is a main law which should be maintained. For example some gestures like kissing in public places is something which in our culture became a norm, but for people from Eastern Asia, this is unacceptable behaviour. The same is with different sexual orientation, with the years, homosexual people gain in Europe new laws and common acceptance, but in Turkey they are still persecute and treated like people of worse category. And this for me another component of our mentality, Europe is orientated on tolerance, people from different cultures have better chances to acclimate here and being accepted by people than in other places. Also they rights are protected by law, which is from above EU regulated. Another case is environmental protection, which as we know, is very important issue for European people, at time to time we have new restrictions about environment. This is something what we have in common, what make us to feel like a big community and it is also a proof, that sometimes sharing the same culture, language or religion is not necessary to unite people.

So if we go that far in ascertainment of moulding the European identity [...], can we also say about one, global identity? [10]. Without doubt globalization spread all of the world is known for ages, right now we can say about sharing or adapting global culture into our own one. But can we say that one day people will recognized themselves as a citizens of world, in the same time forgetting about their national or local identity? In my opinion despite of all circumstances, which could compel me to think in this, this phenomenon cannot exist. Let me give an example to explain why for me creation of global identity is impossible.

I cannot deny that we in live in a times of adapting mass culture easily and sometimes substitute our own customs by global trends, but still we assimilate them in our own way. Because culture creates some kind of protecting bubble, which for me is almost unchangeable, so overall adaptation for new cultural patterns cannot have place. Even though sometimes older traditions might disappear, and this is natural cycle for some phenomenon, the new global tradition always appear to us, like something strange and obtained. So firstly we have convert this new ideas to our value system and own perception. Here I would like to focused on example of Valentine's Day, right now this this celebration is mainly associated with American commerce tradition, but we should not forget that it has an European origin. In middle ages in Europe, catholic people, were celebrating a name day of St. Valentin, who is a patron of people in love. But now for many people this customs is strictly associated with tradition spread in America, which based on buying present to your crush. This could be flowers but more often this are chocolates box in a shape of heart, teddy bears, cards, frames and all material things which are consider to be somehow connected with love, also we can observe the trend of decorating shops, markets on occasion of this holiday. But this is of course an invention of consumerism accelerated by the biggest world brands, like we all know, are located mainly in America. So can see how this process works, from more spiritual and religious holiday, people made a real celebrations of material commodities, just because they were raised in that kind of culture. And this is not isolated example, in general when speak about globalization and becoming more mass cultural, we have to remember that to create global identity, we had to eradicate national one. Which really strongly based on many components and because is related to smaller group than all citizens of the world, it is also stronger for individuals. If I can imagine amount of people who shares with me common beliefs, history or language, I can only imagine as the biggest one, my own nation. So crossing this feelings of bonds to smaller groups, it is almost impossible, like impossible is to share something common between everyone in the world.

To sum up all my previous thoughts I have to admit, that the problem of different types of identity is very complex and should be investigate wider than in classical way. From classical definition, identity is perceived as "the characteristics determining who or what a person or

thing is". But in my personal opinion identity is something that you think about as first, when someone ask you about it. This is feeling of belonging to some community, your self-recognition of the place you can feel yourself. It does not have to be a state, not even land or particular city, this could be also group of people, who makes you feel better about yourself. When I think about my identity, I have to say that I am proud of being polish, but the most important belonging for me, is my small village community. So as first I am identifying myself with ethnic group, which is of course smaller, but also more understandable for me. Of that small area, when everyone knows you, everyone speaks the same dialect, has the same taste as you and shares the same customs, you can truly feel as a part of it. With nation, of course, I am proud of traditions of our state, language, history, but still I can feel this small differences which makes feel less belonging to it. So I can say about myself that I have double identity, and none of it is disturbing to me or cannot be called as a source of confuse. This situation does not have to be similar to other people, because as I said, awareness of your own identity is a personal feeling and it depends on your experiences and characteristics. Which is, on the one hand problematic phenomenon, especially in content of creating European identity, but also very vital to protect our individuality against the global influences. Coexistence of different identities gives people an opportunity to fully adopt European identity as one of our own. In so far as I can imagine European identity as a real type of identity for many people, I cannot go further with thinking, and accept concept of one, global identity. Because like I said cultural bonds and common sharing our belief pose as a great protection against globalization. Of course we had in past beliefs that everyone is citizen of the world, but it was more a temporary trend than braced argument and what we can see from history it never had a real meaning for masses. So only few of people could say about themselves that the belong to the whole world and feel so, I think this situation would take place right now, even though some people find themselves like citizen of the world, this does not change the general perspective, that your identity is something more individual and reach a smaller group that all people.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion I would like to add that times are changing very fast right now, at time to time came up new ideas, new order, everything develop so fast, but this things are not connected of long standing process. Before we invented nuclear guns, electricity, cars or mass media, people were able to conceptualize themselves as a part of group, in progress of civilization this dependences has changed, but still they did not need any of modern determinants, to create their identity. That is why, to abolish perception of identity and convert it into global feeling, we need much more time, but still we have to have this establishment, that is almost impossible.

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