

# **Binding Europe from Below. Models of European identity from Free Movement of Persons' perspective**

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**Abstract:** This paper presents an analysis based on a qualitative study researching free movement of persons' role into European identity formation. Using the concept of social context and the concept of bonds, the paper argues what kind of European identity models emerge as a result of the binding of Europe from below. It also offers an innovative interpretation of the ever closer union among the peoples of Europe as a European identity model and it argues what could constitute this identity in civic and cultural terms so that the citizens of the EU render legitimacy to the political construction of the Union.

**Keywords:** European identity, Free Movement of Persons, Social Context, Bonds, An Ever Closer Union, Models.

## **1. Identity in social sciences**

The study of European identity requires differentiating between the different identity types so that the way European identity can be understood, is clearly conceptualized. In "The Concept of Identity" Bhikhu Parekh distinguishes between "an individual's personal, social and human identity" [1]. An individual's personal identity consists of his/her deep beliefs and personal characteristics that guide them through life and influence their decision-making. It is one's own self-hood and subjectivity that differs him or her from others and constitutes one's personal identity. The social identity of a person is not a separate identity according to Parekh. It is rather a dimension of one unified identity that a person holds. The social identities are those numerous roles and categories that people fit in. They structure our relations in society and are sources of norms how to behave and relate oneself towards others. These are not only the social roles or categories that one fits in such as gender or class but also those broad, encompassing cultural, religious, political or any other types of social memberships that make an individual belong to a certain group. Parekh also adds a third layer of identity-the human one which unites all people in the world and distinguishes them from animals. An important theoretical implication can be drawn from Parekh argumentation concerning the use of the terms *types* or *dimensions* of identity. As long as it is assumed that there is only one unified identity, distinguishing between different types of identity is conditional as they can also be regarded as different dimensions of one's identity. Therefore, it is justifiable to speak that individuals hold "plurality of social identities" [2] or "multiple identities" [3].

Another important theoretical debate that needs to be addressed is the difference between identity and identification theories. Identity refers to the recognition and acknowledgment of pre-existing, objective identity categories such as class, gender, nationality while "thinking of identity as an identification process, however, implies the necessity to consider identity formation as a purely mental phenomenon largely independent from any true category of actual shared characteristics it might relate to" [4]. Correspondingly, when studying the identification of individuals it is meant those subjective group attachment they have or are in the process of development.

Social identities are frequently studied through the paradigm of social constructivism and the concept of social context. Moreover, the formation of European identity from below or the binding force of free movement of persons needs a corresponding conceptualization.

## **Social constructivism and the concept of social context**

Social constructivism has been argued to be an approach to understanding the process of European integration in the works of Andrew Moravcsik and Jeffrey Checkel. By dwelling on previous definitions of what social constructivism is in the works of Berger and Luckmann 1966, Adler 1997 and Wendt 1999, Thomas Risse argues that social constructivism can also be applied to the social identities:

*The social environment in which we find ourselves, defines (constitutes) who we are, our identities as social beings. We are social beings, embedded in various relevant social communities. At the same time, human agency creates, reproduces, and changes culture through our daily practices. Thus, social constructivism occupies a sometimes uneasy ontological middle ground between individualism and structuralism by claiming that there are properties of structures and of agents that cannot be collapsed into each other [5].*

Thus, social constructivism is related to the term social environment which is also called social context. A definition of what social context is, is given by Burke, Galen Joseph, Rena Pasick and Judith Barker:

We define social context as the socio-cultural forces that shape people's day-to-day experiences... These forces include historical, political, legal structures and processes (e.g. colonialism and migration), organizations and institutions (e.g. schools, clinics, and community), and individual and personal trajectories (e.g. family, interpersonal relationships). Notably, these forces are co-constitutive, meaning they are formed in relation to and by each other and often influence people in ways of which they are not consciously aware "[6].

Several important implications regarding the understanding of the social identities can be drawn. First, social identities are constructed because individuals are always part of certain social groups. Second, there is an important cultural element as culture cannot be separated from human interaction and third, social identities can be redefined or restructured. The research of Thomas Risse and Meinhof is probably among the most well-known studies placing the research of European identity formation into a social context perspective. What is important for the study of European identity, however, is arguing whether political identity can be regarded as a mere sub-category of social identity or if it is a separate type of identity.

### **Political identities and European identity**

Michael Bruter argues that political identities are not just a form of a social identity but are "a form of identity in their own right". Analyzing earlier works of authors such as Rousseau 1789, Fichte 1845 and Herder 1914, as well as Renan 1870, Bruter argues that political identities are always in a relation with the legitimacy of a political community and that they are not simply a matter of legal allegiance to a given political community such as the state. They have a deep cultural side that differentiates them from the other forms of social identities. His model of a political identity suggests two mutually related components: a civic and a cultural one. In his book *Citizens of Europe? The emergence of a mass European identity*, Bruter claims that:

*A 'cultural' perspective, would analyze political identities as the sense of belonging an individual citizen feels towards a particular political group. This group can be defined by a certain culture, social similarities, values, religion, ethics or even ethnicity. The second, a 'civic' perspective, would see political identities as the identification of citizens with a political structure" [7].*

In addition to that, Bruter assumes that:

*Every time a new political community has been created, therefore the legitimacy of the contract that links it to its citizens and gives it its fundamental institutional acceptability requires the creation of a new political identity "[8].*

Therefore, the research into European identity has to be logically linked to the EU as a political order and the problem of its legitimacy. When researching European identity as a political identity, the issues reflecting the relation between the civic and the cultural component of a political identity as well as the clarification of the use of the terms Europe and EU are addressed by Thomas Risse and Michael Bruter. The discussion of their arguments complemented by their empirical research can

reveal more about the link between the civic and the cultural component as well as about the assumed link between the legitimacy of the EU as a political order and a corresponding European political identity.

Thomas Risse researches the link between political institutions and people's sense of belonging. By adopting a multi-methodological approach combining in-depth interviews, discourse analyses as well as quantitative data survey, he makes important conclusions regarding not only the role of the different social contexts but also the perception of the terms Europe and EU which are related to the cultural and civic component of a political identity in *European Institutions and Identity Change: What have we learned?*. When analyzing his research into European identity, it is necessary to discuss his main assumptions. First, Risse accepts the concept that people hold multiple social identities. Second, he uses the distinction between the civic and cultural components of European identity by grounding his research on Michael Bruter's empirical research *the OPTEM 2001 wide focus group*. Third, Risse conceptualizes European identity as an identification process within a given social context. In his research, he points out the differences in the way elites and ordinary citizens experience "Europe" or the presence of European institutions in their lives and assumes a link between the evolvement of European institutions and the formation of European identity through the causal pathways of "institutionalization, socialization, persuasion." [9].

Also, in "European institutions and identity change: What have we learned?" Risse, dwelling on Castano's arguments and Meinhof's research about the border regions, suggests that social context implies different identifications with Europe among officials in COREPER and the EC and among ordinary citizens and people living in border regions in Europe. In other words, COREPER and border regions are examples of different social contexts. When it comes to the processes of institutionalization, socialization and persuasion, they are thought of as mechanisms for building or constructing identity, institutionalization referring to the institutions' impact on people's perception of community and belonging, socialization in terms of direct experience with the EU (its policies for example), persuasion referring to deliberate efforts for creating identity through myths, symbols or framing [10]. In addition to that, the difference between an elite and mass identification with Europe, can be explained, according to Risse with the concept of *entitativity* which refers to: "reification of a community resulting from increasingly shared cultural values, a perceived common fate, increased salience and bounded-ness which then lead to collective identification" [11]. Elites at EU level deal with EU policies everyday which makes EU real in psychological terms for them. However, the fact that EU law for example, is applied by national authorities, the unclear boundaries of Europe resulting from a Schengen zone and a Euro-zone only for some members can challenge the *entitativity* of Europe.

Furthermore, Bruter's research of combining both quantitative and qualitative methods as well as the Ordinary Least Square regression summarized in his book *Citizens of Europe? The emergence of a mass European identity* shows evidence that there is a clear division between a cultural and civic/political understanding of Europe, where he justifies that the variables news and symbols have an impact respectively on the civic and the cultural side of one's identity [12] The empirical evidence from his interviews shows that EU is related to a more civic understanding of Europe, while Europe is perceived as a broader cultural space on the continent. Bruter' approach of interviewing persons on the topic of European identity focuses on the individual's perceptions and feelings, it rather asks who and feels European, being a "behavioral bottom up approach"[13]. This bottom-up approach of researching the legitimacy of the EU in relation to the issues whether and how citizens of Europe feel European and identify with the EU is different from the "top-down approach"[14], which researches the normative perspective of who should feel European and what should unite European in terms of culture.

To sum up, Bruter focuses more on the power of persuasion and the perception of symbols by citizens in Europe (Great Britain, Spain and the Netherlands) while Risse examines the role of institutions in the formation of European identity. They both ground their approaches in the social constructivist

tradition, adopt the bottom-up approach of researching individuals' perceptions and experiences, differentiate between the term Europe that is a broader cultural space not always overlapping with the EU as a political construction and accept a civic and cultural dimension of the political identities, in particular European identity.

This study researches how Europe is being bound from below, using the bottom up perspective and the concept of social context in order to argue that free movement of persons builds a space for the coming together of EU citizens. At the same time a normative model of an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe built through a legally political approach, is tested.

## **2. Legal-political approach**

The free movement of persons has often been used ambiguously covering other terms such as migration, immigration/emigration, mobility etc. Mobility is one of the most commonly used but very often undefined terms. Furthermore, terms such as migration, immigration, emigration, labor force migration, international migration, migrants from third countries, asylum seekers could all describe the migrant flows within Europe as well as throughout the world and are broadly used in different statistical documents. Although these terms are frequently used in an interchangeable way, there is an important difference in the legal definition of these categories in EU law. Clear legal limitations will be set so that ambiguity is avoided. The focus of this research are those migrant flows that fall in the category of EU citizens defined by Article 20 of the Treaty on the Functioning of European Union: “(1) Every person holding the nationality of a Member State shall be a citizen of the Union [...] They shall have (2) the right to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States” [15] where the same rights are repeated in article 21 (1) as well.

This category of free movers has to be distinguished from “third country nationals” [16] that are subject of common policy on asylum, immigration and external border control. When it comes to the terms emigration or immigration, it could be seen that Regulation 862/2007 on Community statistics on migration, for example, uses more broadly the terms *emigration* and *immigration* in order to describe the flows not only between the Member States but also between the territory of a member state and the territory of a third state.

### **Europe of bonds**

In “The Political Bond in Europe”, Jonathan White distinguishes between different bonds that link people in Europe: “a market bond, a juridical bond, a cultural bond and a political bond” [17]. Moreover, White conceptualizes a political bond in Europe by the discursive-analytical stream of thinking or in other words seeks to answer whether and how individuals talk about common political problems or concerns in Europe. Such an approach is indeed innovative and as Jonathan White justifies it, it avoids the problems of the approaches that focus on researching shared culture, values, beliefs and norms which carry “the in-built bias towards the idea that people possess developed orientations towards Europe/the EU” [18].

Additionally, in “Европейска идентичност: Теоретични дилеми и аналитични подходи” (European identity: Theoretical dilemmas and analytical approaches), Maria Stoicheva argues how the metaphor of bonds is used in the work of Jonathan White as well as that of Chantal Mouffe. When analyzing the different bonds, Stoicheva does it in the context of a political community and the need to hold it together which requires certain homogenization. She distinguishes between the political bond of Mouffe as a public engagement with the democratic way of life and the market bond based on the market benefits as well as the legal approach of setting citizenship rights [19] (my translation). It is also essential to note, that Stoicheva outlines that there is a “a rejection to the explanatory analytical value of the term cultural bond” (my translation) [20] which arises from the difficulty to conceptualize it in theoretical terms.

However, as Stoicheva suggests, the function of the different bonds is related to a homogenizing effect necessary for the upholding a political community such as the EU. Her theoretical observations shall be considered when analyzing the TEU and TFEU as sources of different bonds.

To conclude, it is conceptualized through the metaphor of bonds, that the free movement of persons right binds EU citizens in a common social context that can be called intra-EU mobility space. This space becomes possible because of the free movement of persons which gives us the ground to call it the main linking bond. What is important for this research is which these bonds are and how they bind EU movers, in a more particular sense, and EU citizens in a broader sense. In other words, what is analyzed is not merely the legal content but “the social side of this content“ [21] that Elspeth Guild adopted when researching European citizenship.

### **An Ever Closer Union**

The notion of an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe is a phrase that strikes with its grandeur and ambition as the humanist inspiration of placing the individual in the center has strongly influenced the European project. Moreover, it emphasizes something which is forgotten very often. Namely, that besides the Member States, EU citizens are also subjects of European integration. Though the idea of *an ever closer union* has been discussed from different angles, a legal-political approach using Jonathan White’s metaphor of *bonds* [22] offers an innovative conceptualization how an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe could be formed. Such an approach is built on a normative analysis of the Lisbon Treaty searching for the different legally embedded but socially binding bonds or ties that bind EU citizens in a common social context. These are also links that not only shape the social context but bind people together so that more solidarity, understood as readiness for common goals and deeper social cohesions, is created.

Preamble to Treaty on the EU:

*“RESOLVED to continue the process of creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen in accordance with the principle of sub-sidiarity”*

*“DESIRING to deepen the solidarity between their peoples while respecting their history, their culture and their traditions”*

Dwelling on the spirit of the preamble, it is implied that the first step toward *an ever closer union among the peoples* of Europe is the introduction of the core EU citizenship right: free movement of persons which has the main linking power or is the main bond, removing barriers, and creating equal legal conditions such as the principle of non-discrimination. In its turn, it is a bond that presupposes legally the coming into force of other citizenship bonds: an economic or competition bond, a social bond, a civil and political bond and a cultural bond (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

<b>Legal Basis</b>	<b>Bond content</b>	<b>Type of Bond</b>
Article 45 of TFEU  Article 49 of TFEU	Mobility of workers and self-employed persons under the same competition rules, principle of equal treatment	1. Economic/Competition bond
Article 151, 153 of the TFEU	Social rights -only for the aspects defined in the Treaties; -	2. Social bond

Charter of Fundamental rights of EU-Solidarity part, Protocol 30	minimal requirements in health and safety issues; lack of harmonization of the social systems of MS  -derogations for Poland and Great Britain	
Article 9, 10 and 11 of the TEU, Article 20 of the TFEU  Charter of Fundamental rights of the EU	Civil and political rights; -the right to petition the EP -the right to apply to the European Ombudsman -EU Citizenship initiative -the rights to vote and be elected in EP elections  basic human rights	3. Civil and Political bond
Preamble of the TEU  article 2 of TEU,  Declaration 52	“the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance” The common values  Common symbols	4. Cultural bond

### 3. Methodology of the Empirical study

A qualitative research methodology using qualitative semi-structured interviews was adopted. Generally, these types of interviews have to be distinguished from the surveys comprised of closed questions, usually providing a range of given answers. While the surveys provide for quantifiable data, the purpose of the qualitative in-depth interviews is different. They aim at finding deeper knowledge about the social world. That is why they are composed of open-ended questions and aim at revealing knowledge about the processes and relations in the social world not visible in quantitative data. In order to justify the use of qualitative interviews in this research, their benefits and weaknesses need to be discussed.

In “What is qualitative interviewing” by Rosaline Edwards and Janet Holland it is argued that qualitative interviews vary from semi-structured to unstructured interviews but they all possess

certain features in common such as the application of a thematic approach where the interviewers have certain topics to cover but the structure could be fluid or flexible [23]. The choice of a research strategy of semi-structured interviews with pre-set questions is mainly for two reasons that could be best explained by comparing these types of interviews with the unstructured ones as well as by the grounds of the topic of research. In the online *Qualitative research guideline project* by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, it is said that “Unstructured interviews are an extremely useful method for developing an understanding of an as-of-yet not fully understood or appreciated culture, experience, or setting”[24]. They are often used when we need initial information about a topic which has not been previously deeply researched and could serve as a basis for constructing a semi-structured questionnaire. In our case, however, there is already certain theoretical as well as empirical background which allows us to define pre-set questions by grounding them in previous research assuming that we have some basic knowledge about the researched problem.

In conclusion, the semi-structured interviews were the research strategy of this study whose epistemological basis could be explained through the theory guided research approach. Such an approach either tests hypotheses or uses sensitizing concepts that guide the analysis. In the case of this study, a normative model was tested on the basis of three sensitizing concepts:

- The first sensitizing concept was the free movement of persons as a social context framed by four types of bonds.

- The second sensitizing concept guiding the research was the differentiation between a civic/political component and a cultural one of a political identity.

- The third sensitizing concept was the understanding of European identity as a political identity comprised of a civic and a cultural component corresponding to the EU as a sui generis political order.

As the purpose of this study was to find a range of European identity models, one needs to address the issue of saturation and variability in qualitative research. Generally, it is accepted that interviews are taking as long as different answers are given until the point of saturation is reached and there is no point in continuing. In her paper “Focus on Qualitative methods, Sample size in Qualitative research”, Margarete Sandelowski addresses the issue of numbers by stating that “a common misconception about sampling in qualitative research is that numbers are unimportant in ensuring the adequacy of a sampling strategy” [23]. Similarly, in the paper “How many qualitative interviews is enough” prepared by Sarah Elise Baker, Middlesex University and Rosalind Edwards, National Centre for Research Methods Review papers, University of Southampton as a guide for scholars conducting qualitative research, the question of numbers is regarded as “it depends” [25].

In other words, it depends on the disciplinary field, the research question, but also the time given to a research project, finding participants and the institutional demands of the ethics committee as well as the theoretical underpinning of the study [26]. Therefore, the question of the numbers of the necessary interviews remain a critical one. If we apply the criteria set in the paper “How many qualitative interviews is enough”, we shall find it reasonable to set a minimum requirement of 20 interviews considering the methods of network sampling and the snowball referral chain where we relied fully on the willingness of the respondents to participate and refer further participants as well as the geographical and financial limitations. When taking and analyzing the interviews, the biased classification of these respondents as “other pioneers of European integration” [27] or “external migrants” [28] falling into the category of East-West labour force migration, was avoided. In order to understand if this arguing is justified, the data of the empirical study was compared with the Eurobarometer's Geographical and Labour Mobility Report 2014, Labor Mobility Report 2014 and Annual Report on Labour Mobility 2015 of the EC as well as two major Bulgarian studies: “Bulgarian Migration: Incentives and Constellation 2005”, Institute for market economy and “Trends in the transnational migration of labour force and free movement of persons: effects for Bulgaria 2010”, Open Society Institute.

The interviews were analyzed deductively using the theory guided approach and the normative model as well as inductively, searching for grounded ideas and processes.

#### 4. Models of European identity

##### Binding Europe from below

The empirical study was analyzed so as to understand how the different bonds function and shape individuals' identifications. As a result, it could be argued what is truly binding Europe from below in terms of different categories that were attached to the bonds. In empirical terms, bonds were not only those legal conditions for coming together, but larger categories of terms gathered deductively as well inductively.

##### *Deductive analysis*

##### *Cultural bond*

The most frequently encountered categories under the Cultural bond that could constitute the cultural component of European identity are *Values, Ethno-symbolism or Ethno-nationalism* and *Entitativity*. Among the values that the respondents mention, tolerance and respect for differences are some of the most frequently pointed ones. Moreover, the value of tolerance is experienced and thus accepted by the people who travel and work outside their original countries. For example, according to interview 1, the free movement right and the consequent possibilities for further education are even considered to be the ideology behind the EU:

*“Considering the ideology of the EU for free movement and education, I feel such even if I was not part of the EU... being tolerant, accepting the other... the lack of military conflict.”*

The use of the word ideology for describing what the EU is, is probably due to the fact the Bulgaria is a post-communist country and the qualification of a political community such as the EU is done with a similar terminology. Nevertheless, it is well understood that this is the value foundation of the EU. In addition to these values, it can also be thought that those who are somehow professionally and personally engaged with the EU express support for values such as the rule of law and democracy that are listed in article 2 of TEU, interview 2:

*“Rule of Law, democracy are the things that unite us...”*

There are also numerous times when the strife for happiness, personal development and peace though associated to be goals of the EU, are actually experienced and shared as values. It is also important to note that solidarity and empathy are mentioned several times as European values or the necessity for their development is regarded as a requirement for the formation of a deeper sense of belonging. One of the empirical goals which was set in the Methodology part was finding out if there is a developing solidarity in certain areas considering the general definition of solidarity as a belief in common future, its homogenizing effect and thus its significance for the fulfillment of *an ever closer union*. One of the respondents who is working for a European institution as well as one of the respondents working in a factory in the Netherlands (interview 4 and interview 18) both emphasize that the possibility for working together brings people closer, it contributes to the development of common decisions when solving problems and it is what creates solidarity:

*“If we exchange the know-how and the experience, it would be perfect. It is not continuation. It is a two-sided exchange. Because I have colleagues from Germany and Poland. When there is a situation that has to be solved, everybody... The Spanish, The Dutch, the German, says something different and in the end we discuss and make a decision which is a compilation from the culture of everybody”*

*“Serbians, Polish, Bulgarians.... yes (cultural closeness), Portuguese, Spanish but not with the Romanians because they are Gypsies.”*

Also, it is interesting to note that the respondents count as values, things that could be all grouped in the category “religious and humanist inheritance of Europe” and in particular the Christian morality such as the respect for the human being as an individual and the respect for one's life, in general. Some of the respondents do mention the differentiation between East Orthodox and Catholicism or they believe that this differentiation between East and West is deliberately sustained. However, this

differentiation is not perceived as a challenge but rather as something which is part of the cultural variety in Europe.

When discussing these values, we could well move on to the categories of *Entitativity* and *Ethno-symbolism*, the latter as an idea about the construction of European cultural identity on the basis of the common past and the “family of cultures” according to Anthony Smith. If there is a psychological experience of what Europe and being European is, this *entitativity* refers to the differentiation between Europe as a Christian civilization and “the other”, regarded as the Muslim representatives of certain countries. Here, however, this is not seen as a religious clash but rather as a value clash where Christianity is associated with its moral dimension (possessing values such as tolerance and respect for human life). In one single interview, the one with the Bulgarian woman who has lived and worked in the Flemish part of Belgium for 18 years (interview 20), a clear indignation at the religious identification, no matter Christian or Muslim, was expressed. Here the previously mentioned values along with global ecological values are clearly opposed to religious radicalism which is seen as something that belongs to the past:

*“I am not speaking about other cultural differences such as the religious ones. I do not understand what is going on today. Most of the people that I meet are not Christians or Muslims. Most of the people today, we are atheists. If I believe in sth, it is not Jehova, Jesus or Mohammed. We believe in some values that are common for all people. I cannot understand the place of religion in the contemporary world. There are so many other important things...I do not understand why people are fighting for these things. There are differences between my husband and me. He is Protestant and I am Orthodox. There is no difference. It is the same. We have cultural differences but we handled it.”*

The *Entitativity* of Europe is also felt and articulated when the respondents compare Europe with USA, Asia and South America. In this sense Europe is perceived as the old continent that has its culture, values and traditions. Later, when speaking about the Social bond we could also add the perception of Europe as a more social and less commercialized space compared to the USA, for example. Europe also has *entitativity* among the people working for the European institutions because they are well informed and at the same time they attempt at informing the others about the EU. This conclusion resembles the results from Thomas Risse's study among individuals working in COREPER as the personal engagement with the EU influences their identification with the EU in a positive way.

There is also a perception of being European which is very Bulgarian understanding of what Europe is and could be explained with self-stereotypes about the Bulgarian people. According to interview 4, a European is someone who is careful, civilized, cultivated, more educated, someone who follows the rules and in that sense it is what differentiates him or her from “the other”:

*“Well, let's say European is someone who follows the rules, will shop in the market, will clean and wait. Yesterday when I was in a shop, people from the colonies entered. I am not a racist but these people started shouting and pushing themselves ....well, we Europeans are not like that...we are more civilized and careful ....ok we Europeans...ok the Balkans, we are a different beer.”*

When it comes to the categories of symbols, there was an association with Europe in a symbolic way with the Euro in interview 18:

*“When I hear Europe, I think...nothing...euro. Everybody now is very unhappy because the Dutch were better with their currency. Here people are not happy with our membership and with the opening with the borders.”*

Though the Euro is one of the European symbols, it is rather discussed in a different sense in that interview implying the economic and financial problems within the euro-zone.

Other categories that could be deductively outlined refer to the categories of Cultural integration, Assimilation and Intercultural competences. If we use the metaphor of a coin with two sides, we could conclude that cultural integration and assimilation are these two sides. They both reflect the way an individual adapts in a foreign society. One of the most important factors for that is the language competence which is an intercultural one. Assimilation is experienced through acquiring the local

habits and rules to such an extent that the individual develops a strong attitude to the local country. Though this thesis is not in the psychological domain, we witnessed that the expressed assimilation is among individuals who hold a strong critique for the traditional society they come from - the Bulgarian one. On the other hand, cultural integration is associated with developing fondness or likeness for the local culture. If we use Favell's terminology, the affective side of an identity should overlap or be very close to the identification itself. In other words, developing likeness for a certain culture could develop an identification with it. However, no direct link with the European identity was found out. Likeness and fondness among some Bulgarians exist through the language and some cultural similarities with Russia and what some consider as *Slavic identity*. This type of an identity, however, needs further research in order to establish its relation to the issue of European identity. It is going to be more deeply analyzed in the part about the inductive categories and the models of European identity. Cultural barriers apart from language are perceived as a drawback for the integration into a society. They could vary from a feeling of being not fully accepted to conscious unwillingness to develop a deeper emotional bond with the local culture, interview 4:

*"The language barrier will always exist. Not just because of the level of the language. It is because of the symbols. For example, a foreigner who has learnt perfectly Bulgarian but when we start joking for Suncho, Hitur Petar (comic heroes in Bulgaria), playing ohluv and dama (games), he cannot understand really this. We speak perfectly the language but we have not really grown up here. We do not have these symbols that they acquire from babies until their 30s or 40s (idioms and jokes). This is a huge barrier for the communication."*

Some mention the overcoming of that problem only through a marriage with a local one, interviews 15 and 1 (said in a humorous way in interview 15). It can be considered however that this reveals more the attitude of the local citizens towards the Bulgarians.

*"At the job bureau in Belgium...this person from the administration said to me: You've got to divorce and marry a real European....hahah...This was a problem."*

*"As to the barrier I have encountered...no matter how many efforts the local people make, no matter how much you are integrated, if you are not married to a local one, it is very difficult for these barriers to disappear."*

The empirical study gives grounds to think that a cultural bond based on ethno-symbolism is a challenge for the development of a common European identity in cultural terms. Moreover, most of the respondents feel that there is enormous cultural variety in Europe - different traditions, languages, history, interviews 1 and 16:

*"Now there is tolerance, understanding... everybody knows that the other person is more intelligent, that everybody is looking for their happiness in the respective country. But for example I will never accept a huge Catholic holiday or celebrate Poland's national holiday for example."*

*"Maybe it is possible (coming together in cultural terms). I was thinking about the national traditions. Our national traditions and also religious holidays are so rich compared to theirs."*

At the same time, however, a clear awareness of some common values is expressed. Most of the respondent support the thesis of a European cultural heritage based on the idea of a "family of cultures" expressed by Anthony Smith rather than a homogeneous European culture. Also, it is interesting to note that there is probably a vague, in a sense not clearly articulated or expressed awareness of being European, interview 20:

*"Yes, I do. Absolutely. By that I mean belonging to a place that is not geographical but...this wholeness, belonging..."*

Some of the respondents express this by saying that there is no need for declaring that (interviews 20 and 17) when asked if they feel Citizens of Europe:

*"No, it sounds pretentious. I am une personne... It sounds like a declaration. There is no need for declaration."*

*"In a way...what kind of a question is this? What does it mean European? I feel the way I was before. I do not have the confidence to be something more. We are Europeans the Bulgarians. I do not know..."*

*In my own point of view I feel successful and I have my confidence. But it is not OK to exaggerate. If we have to say, it is OK. But our generation is different. We are not brought up to show off ourselves. We are just working and enjoying life.”*

Declaring it and making it public somehow provokes negativism among those respondents. What is also important to note here is that we are speaking about an awareness, rather than a deep emotional identification. We could see that the level of European identification is rather cognitive (a matter of perception) while national identity such as being Bulgarian is the deepest level of identification that is first and foremost an emotional one, interviews 10 and 14:

*“I will remain Bulgarian until my death. Then I would place the country where I would live under best conditions.”*

*“Bulgaria is on the first place. It is in my heart. This big love and passion. Bulgarian mother has given birth to me. Then Belgium that has “adopted” me and has given me all rights and Europe one big Bulgaria that I could travel and experience new cultures and nature.”*

There is a clear trend among the Bulgarian respondents to hold a critique for the EU on certain matters. In at least 3 interviews, those involving the Bulgarian professor at Liege university (interview 17:), the Bulgarian teacher at an art school in Belgium (interview 6) as well as the Bulgarian citizen with a small car mending company operating in the Flemish part (interview 7) hold a strong critique for the EU as not defending effectively *the European value system and Christian heritage* and thus undermining the building of European identity:

*“Citizen of the EU? No, this is such a cliché. In my opinion, the EU during the last events from August this year has shown extreme weakness in its structure and infantilism to evaluate its capacity and to defend a value system that we are born with and we have in our souls. I include here culture, habits, traditions and religion, history of Europe... There is a difference between us like Bulgarians and the local people. For example they did not know anything about us before falling the Berlin wall and they do not anything now. They are just not interested. ...We as Bulgarians...me as a Bulgarian the way I was brought up... there are things I do not like and accept and I am a little bit skeptical about the future of the EU. That is why I will not say I am a citizen of the EU. This is due to the last events. Before there was euphoria when Bulgaria became a member in 2007. We have certain benefits of course. We do not have to pay such huge taxes for our kids at the local universities. The travelling is easy. But now we are in and we are observing the political life. The politicians here are also influenced by different lobbies.”*

*“We have the same culture in Europe as different peoples and it is Christian. For 2000 years Europe has been a Christian one. This is the common culture. ...what cultural integration... we are one Whole. I have no feeling for difference... This difference between East and West is politically kept instead of emphasizing the common things... No identification in political sense when it come to EU. What I am seeing worries me given the fact that the emphasis is not on the person and Christianity but on some demonic powers... I have grown up in Communism... but when I came here I saw that the things we have witnessed were transformed in the EU in a very strange way... I see the same things that are ...the principle of controlled freedom... you can speak only about certain things... This bureaucracy reminds me of one Socialistic balloon that is going to be destroyed... you are working because you have to have a job and nothing more than this”*

*“I no longer associate the EU with any institution or structure. Years ago, yes. But not now. I am not disappointed...I am not affected in a bad way... but my first association is like I start laughing ...haha EU...EU 20 countries on the same continent trying to live together... I would not add the serious idea to the EU. The serious people who believe in the idea, will say the right to travel, the fact that we live together. But this is the package of the apple, they forget the inside which is already rotten. Most people forget to say what is going on inside. The bad things like conflicts... there are also good things. There is a crisis in the euro idea. That is why I am trying to answer with irony cause there is irony in real life too. The EU under the motto it was created in the 50 years is gone. This idea does not exist. This idea was launched... but there is no control and the idea was not fulfilled having*

*now killings, islamisation of cities and districts. I am sure this was not part of the European documents.*“

There is a clear differentiation between the perception of the EU and the reality which shows a lack of information and understanding about the way European institutions are functioning, how Member States are involved and in particular how decisions are made. Also, in very few interviews an institution or a personality related to the EU was mentioned correctly such as the mentioning of Donald Tusk. On the one hand, there are requirements towards the European Union for more effectiveness, critique for its inability to solve major European problems such as the refugee crisis and security issues. While, on the other hand, the EU is perceived as a body of institutions imposing decisions on the Member States. If we have to view this critique from a constructive point of view, however, one can conclude that those discourses related to the political functioning of the EU, could form what Jurgen Habermas calls European public sphere as this is an invisible domain where citizens discuss common problems. But, these opinions and more precisely their expression could not be articulated or communicated at the European level in an effective way as there are no means or communication channels to do so, or the European citizens do not find or are not aware of the mechanisms to do so. The critique that the EU cannot defend its value system is a fundamental issue as it reflects the debate for the political/civic as well as cultural component of the European identity that are intertwined. It can be concluded that if the value system reflects the European cultural identity, then the political side of it would be reflected in the effective functioning of the EU in defending this value system.

While analyzing the interviews deductively, we noticed that certain relations exist between some of the bonds which could give us more insight which ties could contribute to the formation of European identity and more precisely how. As a result, we defined that there are relations between:

#### *Cultural-Civil-Economic-Social bonds relation:*

In interview 1, the respondent defines that being European means sharing the values of tolerance and being open to the others. Tolerance, on the other hand, carries, according to the respondent this ambiguous meaning of abiding the rules and paying taxes. Following the rules in the local country such as paying the taxes is one of the most important requirement for being respected and tolerated by the other people. Though this civil bond is not understood in the way we defined it in the Constraints framework and it has no direct link to any of the European institutions, it can be considered that it is related to terms such as citizen, citizenship because it associates being European with fulfilling one's duties and obligations such as paying taxes. As a hindrance to the formation of *an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe*, one could mention the imbalanced economic development between the countries and the budget distribution in EU in interview 1:

*“Now people identify that they are Europeans by respecting other people's position and opinion, by being more open towards countries and people that are near the EU and there is no doubt about it. But I think that we need 2 or 3 generations so that we have the same economic development. A German will always say “My countries gives most money in the EU, why should I feed the Greeks that are lazy”. As I said I do not want to be integrated but I pay my taxes and I abide the laws. They will never accept me as a local but they will be tolerant to me as a person.”*

We could conclude that a cultural bond based on the values such as tolerance is not sufficient for the formation of a common European identity until problems related to the economic development and distribution of resources are not solved so that a sense of justice and solidarity could be built in social terms. Though, some of these links were extracted inductively through categories that were not initially part of the deductive code book, we could very much conclude that all these bonds that form and define the social context of the European free-movers are actually interrelated. Values are experienced to be often cultural as well as civil. There is also an important socio-economic dimension necessary for the formation of a more homogeneous European identity. Thus, it can be concluded that

such an identity needs to be strengthened not only by values but also by a socio-economic dimension in the EU.

*Cultural-Civil/Political bonds relation:*

Also, some of the respondents as in interview 2 a woman working for a European institution) clearly associates being European with the common values in article 2 of TEU such as the rule of law and democracy but also some common traditions such as the celebration of Christmas. In order to have a further union among the peoples, we need however further “centralization” and “federalization” of the EU according to the respondent. This is a clear expression related to the political structure of the EU and we could conclude that the Cultural bond probably needs to be complemented and strengthened by deepening the political integration:

*“An ever closer Union is a way to the centralization and federalization of the EU... Rule of Law, democracy are the things that unite us... also the traditions such as Christmas. This is a common tradition for each European country.”*

For most of the respondents Europe is not only about sharing values but also these possibilities for working, travelling and developing yourself and they are attributed to terms such EU/Europe, which actually shows that most of the respondents are not only aware of their EU right for travelling, working and educating oneself but support these initiatives. They are thought of as benefits, advantages, guarantees or rights. This is what could make them call themselves citizens of Europe. (Interviews 1, and 17)

*“Well, to a great extent the synchronization of the legislation in Europe and the rights which I have as a citizen of Europe, to a great extent I am protected whatever happens to me and this is a great benefit.”*

*“We have certain benefits of course. We do not have to pay such huge taxes for our kids at the local universities. The travelling is easy.”*

*Cultural-Economic bonds relation:*

It can be assumed that there is a link between the economic bond related to finding a job and the labour market competition on the one hand, and on the other hand, intercultural competences such as language.

If one of the most common dimensions of free movement is actually the economic one (free movement of workers), then we can conclude that the economic bond cannot function without fluency in more than one foreign languages apart from one’s mother tongue. Thus, the support of the EC for developing a language learning policy within the EU seems a proper measure that takes these effects into account.

*Civil/Political-Cultural bonds relation:*

As stated previously, there is a clear connection between the cultural and civic components of European identity. While neither of the European institutions is directly mentioned, we could notice the feeling or the idea that for the respondents there is a European society which is defined by its civic culture (abiding the rules) and its old traditions and history. This is what makes it different from the “other”:

*Cultural-Economic-Social bonds relation:*

In one of the interviews (where the person is living in Brussels and his wife is working for a European institution, interview 7), being European was expressed as being a middle level Italian, German or Bulgarian. It is related to the education and the skills/abilities that are developed and actually equalize the different nationalities in Europe: In this interview, one could actually feel the irritation of the respondent at some of the questions. In particular, the respondent probably regarded the idea of being European as being something more or less than the others, as an etiquette or label. We also noticed this irritation among other respondents. It can be concluded that the process of equalization is what can make you a European: A normal educated person earning the living for him and his family who could be a Bulgarian and is not different in any respect from a German or Italian, for example. That is why we concluded that the functioning of all bonds could define the state of being European. In

another interview where we have this self-employed person in the Flemish part of Belgium who is developing his own business, we have similar understanding of what is European under the term “middle class”. It is someone who does business, does not belong to the lower classes such as beggars or the upper classes such as the people working in the institutions. It is someone who is less conservative and who speaks foreign languages because he needs to have these abilities in order to do his business. Moreover, this lifestyle and way of thinking constitute the perception of being European.

*Civil and Political-Cultural bonds relation:*

The right to move in order to work as the core bond lying at the basis of EU citizenship is associated with the EU in civil/political terms but also with the possibility of knowing other cultures. It is indeed a right that creates the opportunity to come closer in Europe and is something that is viewed in a positive manner. However, we have to say that there are some respondents that do not understand what EU citizenship means and have the wrong idea about it by thinking that having a double citizenship (Belgian and Bulgarian at the same time) makes an EU citizen. This could be explained in different ways but probably one of the explanations is the lack of full information and promotion of what EU is among the nationals of the Member states.

*Civil/Political bond: categories*

One of the most frequently mentioned categories that we initially included in the deductive code book under the Civil/Political bond is *EU citizen's rights*. Though most of the respondents do not know the full scope of these rights and no one mentioned directly the group of the civil and political rights such as the right to vote and be elected in the EP, these respondents are aware that being citizens of Europe as most of them choose to call themselves bring them certain *rights, benefits, advantages and protection*. Perhaps, one of the possible explanations of the fact that they do not associate these rights directly with the EU is the fact that there is no material expression of EU citizenship in the way a national citizenship is materialized in a passport. The right of free movement, however, creates *entitativity* (awareness, psychological presence) of belonging to Europe. Also, we noticed that some of them associate EU citizenship with having a double citizenship, for example two nationalities. Furthermore, a very specific understanding of what European citizenship might be, is the way most of them attribute it to certain qualities or a way of behaving such as abiding the rules, being more civilized. There is only one example of relating to the EU from the perspective of civil culture. The respondent criticizes the fact that we, as citizens, do not actively participate and contribute with ideas to the political process. If we divide the Civil/Political bond into two elements where under civil we understand certain rights and duties in a given political community and under the political bond - the political institutions and structure, one could say that the EU is perceived in a double way. On the one hand, it is perceived as a Union of countries and some of the respondents feel citizens of it because their country is part of that Union. But, there is also a clear direct link between EU citizens and the EU as a political structure on its own. Even though it is not always approached in a positive way, the respondents holding critique for its ineffectiveness, are actually well aware of its responsibility and the fact that the EU carries out certain policies affecting their lives. The EU as a political structure is associated with its goals such as keeping peace and achieving the well-being of its peoples. Those, who are working in the European institutions, go further by connecting it directly with the process of federalization. It is also associated with the euro, the lack of borders and the possibilities it gives.

One can conclude that there is a political discourse within Europe on some of the current problems that the EU has to deal with and this is what could constitute European civil society and what could provoke the formation of the European public sphere, steps that are seen as necessary to the strengthening of the sense of European identity. Those working in the European institutions choose to call the EU “a zone of comfort” which somehow corresponds to the feeling of the other respondents for a EU that gives them protection. The main challenge for the Civil/Political bond is the possibility for the EU to discredit itself in front of the citizens of the EU (interview 8):

*“The serious people who believe in the idea, will say the right to travel, the fact that we are living together. But this is the package of the apple. They forget the inside which is already rotten... The idea was launched but there is no control and the idea was not fulfilled having now killings, islamization of cities and districts. I am sure this was not part of the European documents”*

One can conclude from this interview but also from the general spirit of the others that there is a lack of trust or skepticism towards the EU in its effectiveness and ability to handle some of the common problems (euro crisis and security issues). At the same time, however, there are expectations towards it which means that it is perceived as a legitimate political structure that could act. As a particular challenge for the Civil and Political bond one could outline the problem of the equality between EU citizens. It is a matter of debate why some of interviewed ones would rather call themselves emigrants or immigrants (depending on the point of view) and do not feel equal EU citizens. Some of the respondents, in particular those occupied with manual labour feel discriminated against when it comes to the work conditions and especially the level of salaries they receive. Considering and feeling yourself as a labour force in the context of East-West migration, on the one hand, supports Adrian Favell's assumptions for possible discrimination towards the workers from Bulgaria which traditionally belonged geographically and politically to systems different from the ones in Western Europe. Also, their unequal treatment or rather their perception for unequal treatment especially compared to the refugees and the Muslim population stirs the debate not only about equality but also questions regarding the different immigration policies within the different countries, the idea of multiculturalism and the stereotypes that exist within Europe.

The idea that the EU removes national identities and serves the big capitalist interests of transnational corporations is another example of a strong political but also social critique for the EU which should not be underestimated because it diminishes EU legitimacy (interview 13):

*“Yes, I would go to a country in a different continent and I will tell you why. Here, the emigrants from Eastern Europe-Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, we are second-hand emigrants... this is how I feel it since the refugee crisis began one year ago. All of them that have Muslim origin and those who are coming are at a higher level than us. They don't need to make so many efforts at school as I have to. They are tolerated. Not only me but also the Russians feel it. You just feel a second hand emigrant...”*  
*“For me... this (EU) is the most artificial construction because it removes the national identity and has the aim to subordinate large masses of people and it does not function adequately in most situations. And the worst... monopoly of money and capital... dictatorship of capital.”*

and in Interview 9:

*‘Now these Fluechtlinge (the refugees) are sent into the factories without speaking the language because the country does not want to pay for that. So it is going to be very difficult for us the Europeans because there will not be a job for us.’*

When it comes to the relation to the other bonds, some of the combinations including the Civil/Political bond were already discussed in the part about the Cultural bond. We will still outline the most important ones without repeating ourselves.

*Political bond-Cultural bonds relation:*

The EU is perceived as a political structure embodying a set of certain values. Moreover, according to most of the respondents, its duty is to defend the European values or as some call it the European value system. Most of the values that the respondents mention are those in article 2 of TEU. Some put particular emphasis on Christianity and consider the EU a cultural space of Christianity and oppose it to the Islamic civilization. Among the values are also peace and tolerance. The rights and the numerous possibilities related most often to the right of free movement and as a result the opportunity for further education and getting to know other cultures are viewed in such a positive manner that they become themselves values and some even choose to call them the ideology of the EU (interview 1). These rights and opportunities constitute the feeling of freedom and this creates

entitativity of the EU. The EU also represents the general idea of a society where people follow rules and this makes them Europeans compared to others that do not follow or are unwilling to follow rules.

*Civil and Political-Economic bonds relation:*

The relation between these two bonds is expressed through the idea for equality understood as the same level of remuneration and working conditions between the different nationals in the EU. In other words, being European means receiving the same salary and having the same standard of living. The different standards of living make some individuals think that they can feel European only in West Europe. The cases of discrimination regarding the level of the salaries sustains the feeling that some EU citizens are not equal to other nationals of the Member States and that is why some of them prefer to call themselves immigrants ( Interviews 9 and 13):

*“No, I would not say I am citizen of the EU. How can I feel such? ...But yes... we feel... to some extent I feel... me and my family in Bulgaria... well... our confidence here that we are people and we are living. The people in Bulgaria is nothing for our system. We got poor. We were destroyed. While here, we have confidence and we are people. Yes, we are foreigners but still we are part of the EU/Europe”*

*“No, I would not say I am a citizen of the EU because I do not have the same rights as the others do... Given the fact I have worked at an important position in Bulgarian and received 200 euros and here for this mini job I get 400 euros... Well what kind of a European confidence as a Bulgarian I could have?”*

And in Interview 11:

*“Yes. I do feel European. The understanding is that we are living in a European way. The way we watched on movies... people go shopping one time in a week, go on a vacation. This could be seen here in a systematic way. People go in the morning to their work place and in the evening to their family. The only difference in my case is that I do not go in the evening to my family... I go to the big supermarkets. I like something and I buy it. I do not deprive myself of anything. Whatever your soul wants, it get what it wants. Also my child and my wife...I do not deprive themselves of anything...In Bulgaria when we go in the morning to the work place, we do not care if we are late or not.”*

*Political and Cultural-Economic bonds:*

There is an understanding of the EU as a union based on common interests and economic benefits but the cultural and religious differences between the countries combined with expressed critique for the ineffective ruling is seen as a hindrance for the functioning of the political union as well. As to the economic side, most of the Bulgarian respondents view the membership of Bulgaria as a source of labour force, interview 10:

*“It is Union similar to another one and now they do not know how to rule it. These are too many different countries with different interests. Even though it is one religions... mostly Catholics... there is a huge difference. They are much more religious. ...It is about easier free trade... and we were invited for a labour force but we are not working under the same conditions.”*

*Economic bond*

The economic bond manifests itself through the core of economic rights of the EU citizens. Most respondents associate their right to move and work without a visa as a great benefit. This economic right is very often related to other bonds such as the social one but we are going to discuss this later. Other categories under the economic bond are discrimination and competition. Those respondents understand that they are part of the labour force market and have to possess certain qualities and skills in order to compete. Those that are highly educated and are working in highly specialized fields differ from the others with a very high self-confidence. One of the purposes of the research was to find out if there is discrimination and if cultural differences might be reasons for it. Previously we discussed that some of our interviewed ones, in particular the low-skill workers, believe that they are subject of discrimination especially when it comes to the level of salaries compared to the nationals of the local country but also compared to different Muslim communities (Turks in Germany, for example) or refugees. At the same time these people consider they are Europeans through the fact that they are working, paying their taxes and abiding all rules, interview 9:

*“What does it mean to be European? We are Europeans. We are Europeans. What do I understand... Well I pay my taxes regularly. That is very important here. Well... 25/30 percent from your salary in Germany is for taxes. It is getting harder and harder. The taxes are getting higher but the salaries not. I did not think about the money... now I am thinking about every cent.”*

Taxes is one of the most frequently mentioned category. The duty to pay your taxes and the balance between the level of the salary and the taxes is what makes you European.

The division lines between Europeans and refugees and Muslims, between East-Europeans and immigrant communities manifest themselves in the level of salaries and the treatment by the employers. These findings imply that there is a link between the Cultural bond and the Economic one which is reflected in the way the common market is functioning. Thus, we are now going to discuss the different bonds relations:

*Economic-Social bonds relations:*

The link between the Economic and the Social bond is related to the fact that the exercising of the economic rights (article 45 of the TFEU) by the EU citizens concerns the fulfillment of their social rights. It is well known that at the EU level, there is a set of minimal requirement for safety and health issues. As to the social systems, each country has its own policy and there is only a coordination between the Member States in that respect. Also, one of the requirements for staying for more than 3 months in a EU country proving that the individual will have sufficient financial resources and will not burden the social system of the local country. Among our respondents there were no cases of abuses of the social system in the local country. On the contrary, all of the respondents that were redundant started receiving redundancy payments according to the national standards and were treated in an equal manner with the nationals of the country. However, some of them in particular those working in Germany and in Belgium reported that some of their compatriots of Roma and Turkish origin did abuse the social systems of the local countries by requiring different forms of social benefits instead of trying to work, interview 9:

*“The people who first came here (in the 90s) looked at the system in a more serious way in Germany. Now everybody is waiting for social benefits and people are lazy and we the Bulgarian people are known in a very negative way. There are much bigger abuses than before.”*

*“...I do not want to offend anybody but from the “New Ours” is full... our Roma people. Our reputation is distorted.”*

These cases illustrate the inevitable link between the Economic and Social bond but its relation to the topic of European identity is reflected better when we associate it with the Cultural bond. Before analyzing the link with the Cultural bond, we have to say that one of the most frequently mentioned categories under the Economic bond and namely competition goes together with intercultural competences. Speaking the language of the local country and in general more foreign languages is a guarantee for competitiveness in the EU. Those individuals that invest efforts in learning the local language, are better socially but also culturally integrated and they rarely encounter discrimination as they are aware of their duties and rights in the host country.

*Economic-Social-Cultural bonds relation:*

One can conclude that the abuses of the social system have a negative impact on the idea of an ever closer union as they create social tension, feeling of injustice and xenophobia through creating and maintaining stereotypes about the nationals of certain countries. On the other hand, the likeness and fondness for the culture of a given country, may be the reasons for better adapting in it and choosing to live and work there as it is the case with the truck drivers in Ireland. The imbalance between giving and receiving understood in social as well as cultural terms is seen as a hindrance to the fulfillment of an ever closer union. Most respondents agree that working in another country requires respect for the local culture and national rules. Thus, the cases of abuses of the social systems and disrespect for the local culture are signs of egoism and a lack of solidarity.

*Economic-Cultural bonds relation:*

Another interesting understanding of what it is to be European is the idea that being European is a matter of standard of living and changing one's mentality which is affected by travelling and working in another country. In other words, becoming European means receiving a salary which secures you a good standard of living but also being more patient, tolerant, open and civilized (abiding the rules), interview 18:

*“Many people are telling me that my way of thinking has changed. My relatives are saying: “When you will come to Bulgaria you will see how it is... you know you have been already for 20 years abroad. You will understand that your way of thinking has changed. It is European.” Well I am a little skeptical because I have come back to Bulgaria only for a month vacation and you cannot feel the change. But personally, in particular about the prices. The prices in the Netherlands, even though people receive a middle salary 1700 Euros, some products in Bulgaria have the same prices as in the Netherlands. It is the same with the gas and petrol. But yeah my way of thinking has changed. In particular about the job....You could live with 100 and 100 000 but you have to live as the others do”.* At the same time the opportunities for working together creates the basis for mixing as one of the respondents chooses to call it and leads to equalization (interview 8) and the creation of a middle level of Europeans that is closer with the others in social, economic and cultural terms:

*“Here it is the synchronization. You have a transfer of money, stock and services... and the exchange of cultural mentality. If you are Bulgarian and I am Belgian and we do business together, we exchange something and if everything goes well, we start to become friends. I could invite you to my house, you could invite me. We could become closed and the business will go smoother. You could recommend me to someone for that.”*

#### *Economic-Civil and Political bonds relation:*

The relation between these bonds is reflected in the way the EU is psychologically present in EU citizen's minds. The Euro which is one of the most important factors in the functioning of the common market is one of the features of the EU that individuals associate themselves with.

#### *Social bond:*

One of the most frequently mentioned categories under the social bond is the one related to social rights within the EU. As a whole, the respondents regard Europe as a more socially oriented and less commercialized space compared to the USA. What is more, this is one of the reasons why they would rather not go to work in the USA. We can conclude that this is one of characteristics of European societies and it is what differentiates the European mentality from the American one, for example in interview 1:

*“No matter what, the European countries are more socially oriented and less commercialized in comparison with America.”*

As to the challenges, one could add the cases of abuses of the social systems of the Member States that influence in a negative way social cohesion in the EU and as a whole the idea of an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe in cultural and social terms.

#### *Social-Economic bonds relation:*

The functioning of the common market in Europe is very connected to the social dimensions such as the social rights of the workers, the rules for redundancy payments, for the organization of strikes or for receiving social benefits that are currently in the domain of the national legislations. On the one hand, one of the EU goals is to maintain an economic union which is less commercialized than the USA in a sense that social rights are better protected. On the other hand, the lack of harmonization together with the imbalanced economic development in Europe creates the grounds for abuses of the social systems of the richer Member States by some of the citizens of the poorer Member States.

#### *Social-Cultural bonds relation:*

Previously we already discussed cases of abuses of the social systems in some of the countries by people who initially originate from the traditional minorities in Bulgaria. This topic requires further analyses and reflection if we want to understand the deep social and political reasons for this type of

social benefits immigrants/tourists. What is important in this research is the connection with the cultural bond in Europe. These abuses create negative stereotypes about Bulgaria and as a whole are a hindrance to the formation of an ever closer union based on solidarity. This diminishes the fondness, likeness or the possibility for getting to know different cultures and it does not support social cohesion in Europe. On the contrary, it creates the grounds for loosening the integration bonds.

#### *Solidarity:*

The development of solidarity is seen as a step to the formation of European identity. Moreover, an ethno-cultural idea of Europe based on common destiny and common problems such as social, political and natural upheavals or catastrophes could develop solidarity and, in turn, European identity. As to the existence of solidarity between the peoples, individuals or societies within the EU, most of the respondents criticize that it seems that there is a general trend that egoism is growing up. Such expressions are shared in the context of a space of free movement of goods, services, capital and people. Thus, it has economic and social dimensions. At the same time, solidarity is also understood first and foremost as a moral value. One can conclude that solidarity in Europe has an economic and a social as well as a moral dimension, (“receiving instead of giving”, interview. 14).

*“Some Bulgarians want to have without giving (making efforts). This is to be European, to be open. To go outside, to plant flowers so that it feels good...”*

#### *Inductive analysis*

##### *Cultural bond*

In one single interview a perception of being European was expressed not only as being different from the “minorities” but the European as based on physical features such as whiteness that we could attribute to racial categories (interview 1):

*“The system in Belgium is constructed in a way that it protects the minorities. Considering my physical features of a European, white etc., I am not in that discriminative group.”*

As a model of a cultural bond in Europe the ideas of multi-nationalism and multiculturalism (interview 2 and interview 19) are expressed in two interviews among the respondents working respectively for a European institution and at the University of Liege.

*“Here in Luxembourg (the city) are living together around 130 different nationalities. I have colleagues that are from India and a friend from Turkey (Turkey is still not in the EU). I would not say exactly that there is European identity but... multinational identity... something connected with the globalization... people that are living and working in multinational communities and such people that are living and working in their own country.”*

*“...No I would not say it. (Do you feel European?)... (And in Canada?) ...During the last years I felt very good in Canada. Of course I feel first Bulgarian but I liked many things there. This international environment, the fact that people are very tolerant towards the differences. It is pretty different from USA when it comes to the migrants. They call it multi-culturalism. You can be yourself. They do not expect from you to be Canadian. This makes you actually a Canadian. While in other countries the feeling is that you have to adapt yourself and accept more or less.”*

For the respondent from interview 19, however, multiculturalism in Europe should be similar to the Canadian model where being a foreigner and having the right to stay such without having to change or deny who you are, actually constitutes the Canadian model. In his opinion, the fact that European societies are still predominantly mono-cultural (Italy where only Italian is spoken, for example) does not allow for such a model to be fulfilled. Language competences but also the deep meanings that each European language together with the traditions of each country are serious cultural barriers for many of the respondents:

At the same time, many respondents view communication and openness as means of overcoming those barriers and form what we chose to call *a human bond*, which can be assumed to be a developing global identity. Also, we have noticed that this communication and openness to others in Europe, the development of tolerance are matters of personal change or a process. This supports the idea that *the*

*ever closer union* in cultural terms is indeed possible when viewed as a gradual process of change where individuals exchange their cultures. This exchange is taking place within the economic domain of doing business as self-employed person, as a person working for the European institutions or as working as a manual worker in a factory in Germany. Moreover, according to the respondent who has a business in the Flemish part of Belgium (interview 8):

*“Here it is the synchronization. You have a transfer of money, stock and services and the exchange of cultural mentality”.*

It is what constitutes the European middle class. Turkey and Russia, however, are excluded in that interview from the process of synchronization. Here, unlike the development of the USA, free market goes together with the exchange of culture. This is what, for example, differentiates the EU from the USA.

A Cultural bond, on the other hand, exists according to the respondents in cultural differences that are geographically defined, interview 15 for example:

*“Closeness in a cultural sense? It depends on the peoples... Are you talking about the peoples in Europe. It will be in regions. Scandinavia with Germany and Holland. Then Belgium, France and Spain. The other region is Eastern Europe...”*

Others think that what brings individuals together in Europe are the different cultural initiatives and the individual contribution that everybody can make by promoting their culture, interview 14:

*“So, I think ...because we are in Europe... because I contribute to Europe. There is this team for traditional Bulgarian dancing where we represent Bulgaria in Europe... we have been also to France, also in Belgium... I think this is contribution... this enriches Europe”*

Also there is a differentiation between Europe as a larger cultural spaces of values and traditions and the EU as a political structure in which not all European states are part of. Inductively, except for the regional cultural differences in Europe, the so called Slavic identity appeared in numerous interviews such as in interviews 1 and 4:

*“I felt really good in the Czech republic. They are Slavic as identity. It is true, we the Slavic people spoke the same language until 13/14 century. I became part of the environment very quickly. I think it will be very difficult without common history.”*

*“I feel closer to the Russian people because of Bulgaria. I have read the whole Russian classics like Dostoevsky. From that point of view I feel closer with the Russians and the Europeans but not with the Americans. I understand them but they do not have that depth.”*

The so called Balkan mentality is also mentioned several times, interview 10:

*“I had personal problems but only with Bulgarians. We are jealous, a dirty tribe, the mentality can't change, Bai Ganio in Europe.”*

*“Ahhh.... Compared to other people I know in Bulgaria, I would say that I feel European. I am more European but not as much as the people here. You asked me before about this... people here do not know their neighbours. This cannot correspond to our understandings and the way we are. If I am European? Yes and no. ...Yes because...I am out of Bulgaria 16 years ago. You somehow have better manners and become more tolerant... no because this closed way of living... we are used to communicating only between ourselves... This Balkan heart... you see somebody and you will invite him to eat... you will share what you have on the table... two slices of bread... (Thinks that this is a trait of the Southern peoples like the Turks for example)... But people are losing this gradually and in this respect we are Europeanizing ourselves.”*

And in interview 12:

*“Yes. Me, personally I feel European. Well what can I say. It is a very broad term... I feel because of the simple reason that when I am living in a country from the EU or a Western European country, the person learns to abide the laws, to respect the other people... like the integration... because you know in BG... during a traffic jam, you know what is going on... There are Bulgarians that have a very high level of self-consciousness... but no matter how European you are, when you are in BG you*

*have to react in a different way when they disturb you during a traffic jam... (numerous examples for Bulgaria for not following the rules, for example the garbage, talking about the need for sanctions)."* These aspects of identity are rather cultural than civic/political. However, there is a major difference in their mentioning. While the perception of being Slavic is not opposed to European identity which is also connected to the attitude towards Russia, being Balkan is perceived either as being non-European or even undeveloped in some terms such as being less tolerant, cultivated or patient or as keeping some positive qualities that the Europeans miss such as being warmer and more empathetic. These identities are going to be further discussed in the part about the models of European identity.

#### *Civil-Political bond:*

The results of the interviews show that many of these respondents associate their rights, benefits or guarantees (these are the used terms by them) with the fact that their country is a member of the EU. It is true that every citizen of a Member State is a citizen of the EU and EU citizenship complements and does not replace national citizenship. Moreover, it is not a citizenship in the sense of a national one. All in all, we did not find evidence to support a clear political bond between the EU citizens and the European institutions. In addition, "citizens of Europe" means to many of the respondents adopting a certain way of behaving such as abiding the rules, being more careful, more civilized, tolerant and punctual. The discourse or in other words what is being discussed is something that creates *entitativity* of the EU and resembles the political bond conceptualized by Jonathan White. The euro, the different problems such as the security issues create expectations towards the EU and is what could strengthen the civic-political identification with the EU.

#### *Economic bond:*

Inductively we managed to outline the category of economic development under which we could place codes such as prices and standard of living that were not part of the deductive codebook. One can somehow define this under the *Horizontal economic bond* between the Member States that we discussed in the Constraints framework. By and large, the differences between more and less developed in economic terms countries influences the perception of what it is to be European.

#### *Social bond:*

Apart from terms such as social rights, social system and protection, there is another use of the terms social that we noticed and decided to draw out inductively. The social equalization between the individuals in Europe together with the economic and cultural closeness creates the so called middle level European. Socially, it is an individual that not only receives a middle level European salary but also acts and thinks in the same in the larger European society, interview 8:

*"I do not think that being European is qualified with somebody who is living on the European continent and someone who comes presumably from Western Europe so that we could call him European the way it was until today. You know the East has always tried to catch the West. In the moment, however, the West is starting to go down and it is meeting the East. Due to that we have a middle level. We are becoming one big village. Everything is the same. Even though we speak different languages, we speak basically the same things. Everything has begun to merge in the last 10 or 15 years."*

On the basis of the bonds analysis, it was argued if an ever closer union is being built from below, what possible form it could take and what other models of European identity emerge out of the bonds relations and functioning.

#### *European melting pot*

One possible model reflecting the notion of *an ever closer union* is the model of European identity manifesting itself in the development of a European way of thinking and living, a process of *synchronization and equalization*, the formation of a middle class EU citizen who shares the same cultural characteristics such as open mindedness, tolerance and fluency in foreign languages. In addition to these traits of a European, the free movement right increases the opportunities for doing

business together. It is in this process that a genuine intercultural exchange is taking place. As a result, what can be called processes of equalization and synchronization are coming into force. These are processes that do not require the abolishment of traditional and established cultural identities in Europe. They rather create the basis for coming together in what we might call European melting pot where one keeps his/her differences but there is a common culture, expressed in a common way of thinking and living. In the possible conceptualization of what a European melting pot might mean, the word synchronization is emphasized and differentiated from the concept of American melting pot that is often associated with fusion as well as assimilation. What we have in a European melting pot is a *synchronization*, a technical mechanism for coordination so that there could be unison and the system could operate in a perfect match between its different parts. It is unity in diversity where these diversities operate together and match in a perfect way so that something qualitatively new is produced. It is a model which is not static but has the idea of internal change that produces, in turn, equalization in economic and cultural terms: the relatively same standard of living and a way of thinking based on common goals and cultural closeness. What is more, according to the study, the European melting pot leads to unique merging between the East and the West in the name of common interests while doing business together. It is precisely through the opportunities of the free market to do business together that the human foundation of a European melting pot is created. Therefore, it can be argued that this is one possible way of coming together or one possible route to the establishment of an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, bringing East and West closer.

Quote:

*"I do not think that being European is qualified with somebody who is living on the European continent and someone who comes presumably from Western Europe so that we could call him European the way it was until today. You know the East has always tried to catch the West. In the moment, however, the West is starting to go down and it is meeting the East. Due to that we have a middle level. We are becoming one big village. Everything is the same. Even though we speak different languages, we speak basically the same things. Everything has begun to merge in the last 10 or 15 years. According to the elder people here the West has changed because many foreign people have come and they have acquired more than they had given. The East comes with the thirst to get more than to give... East is everything after Austria... Europe is everything from Scandinavia to Greece... without Turkey and Russia. This cross if you can imagine is the whole of Europe. The East has always tried to catch up with the developed West but now the West is coming down and for us... we are not changing in any way... it is just becoming the same for us... There is the same level... But these East European people are bringing something good...Imagine these people but not the ones working on the building constructions... but the ones that work in the companies, that travel and make business...they are not criminals and rapers. They are just normal people who have ideas that want to make something different outside their countries and they are ready to accept the rules of the foreign country. Here it is the synchronization. You have a transfer of money, stock and services...and the exchange of cultural mentality. If you are Bulgarian and I am Belgian and we make business together, we exchange something and if everything goes well, we start to become friends. I could invite you to my house, you could invite me. We could become closed and the business will go smoother. You could recommend me to someone for that"*

Besides the model of an ever closer union based on bonds, the empirical study opened premise for models of European identity reflecting its civic-political as well as cultural dimension. They pose the debate about the relation of the two dimensions such as whether civic values are sufficient for upholding the European diversity or a deeper European cultural identity is necessary so that the EU becomes legitimate for its citizens.

*Unity in Diversity = Multi-cultural Europe + Civic value-based culture (Habermas type of constitutional patriotism)*

This model of European identity guarantees the cultural and religious plurality of Europe under the allegiance to a set of common values. This type of allegiance could be also described as a Habermas

type of patriotism. According to it, the various cultural, national and religious identities in contemporary Europe should belong to the private sphere of the individual while social life should be defined by the public discourse on common values, formally embedded in a European constitution. It can be argued whether this is a more exclusive and conservative model or a model situated between conservatism and cosmopolitanism, depending on the attitude towards the “other” and the formal mechanisms for keeping the unity in diversity. This model is probably closer to what is proclaimed to be the motto of the EU: United in diversity, where cultural diversity is kept through a civic culture based on formally embedded values.

#### *Secular Europe + Tradition+Common values*

Similarly to the first model, this model aims at responding to the contemporary problems of a multi-cultural and multi-religious Europe. It recognizes the plurality of identities but at the same time it strives to preserve all those historical, cultural and civilization layers that constitute the European cultural and religious inheritance: Christianity, national identities, various intellectual and scientific movements. This inheritance could be summarized under the term *tradition*. It is a model of a post-modern Europe, keeping its secular political organization, expressing, however, its cultural and spiritual heritage and remaining tolerant to the otherness. It could be further argued that it is a hybrid model of both cultural and civic components that are closely intertwined. The common values such as human dignity, the respect for human life, freedom and solidarity are not just civic but values that have developed as cultural ones. In other words they are perceived as the cultural heritage of Europe. It is what makes one European and what legitimizes one’s participation in the European society. For example, the right of free movement should belong only to persons sharing these values. It can be concluded that this is more of an exclusive model of European identity based on the idea in the Preamble of TEU: “the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law”.

#### *A cosmopolitan European identity or a Global identity based on universal values*

It is a model of European identity based on what could be called human bond outstretching the boundaries of Europe and making this identity a global one. In other words, the differentiation between nationalities, ethnicities or religions do not matter as all should share the same universal values such as the equality of all people, the strife for happiness and the responsibility for environment. These global values list supports the hypothesis in the research “European Values at the Millennium” that “the more developed and industrialized societies are, their individuals develop a propensity for individualistic ethos within which the personal happiness and self-actualization central are the central values” [29]. A cosmopolitan identity would be more encompassing than a European identity because it is connected to allegiance to the universal or global values that surpass national identities, religions and cultures.

#### *A vertical Nation-EU civic/political identity or a parallel model of EU-Nation civic /political identity.*

This model is being formed out of what Jonathan White argues to be a political bond in Europe, or in the context of talking about common political problems. The interviews suggested the process of forming political demands towards the EU which might support the idea that EU is slowly becoming a legitimate political order for the EU citizens. However, this has not diminished the role of national identity. First, all our respondents declare a strong sense of national identity. It is through their national citizenship that they understand and accept how to be citizens of Europe. Their acceptance of the EU as a legitimate political community that can make decisions regarding their lives can happen at two levels. On the one hand, EU citizens can require from European institutions direct political actions and engagements or they can require this through their governments that are perceived to be linked to the EU. Therefore, one can speak about a parallel model of EU-Nation civic identity where national identity is still the core identity that gives legitimacy to the nation state but at the same time we have a developing EU civic/political identity in parallel.

In the second case we have a vertical Nation-EU civic identity that requires expression, first, at the national level, which is further forwarded to the EU level. Such a model slightly resembles the idea behind the subsidiarity principle or the multi-level concept of citizenship of Joe Painter who tries, at least theoretically, to argue what kind of transnational citizenship is adequate to the complex European political system where one can observe “simultaneous membership of political communities at a variety of spatial scales (local, regional, nation-state and European) and perhaps of non-territorial social groups, such as religions, sexual minorities and ethnic diasporas” [30]. Even though there is a process of coming together in the context of the free movement of persons, the unprecedented borderless project of the European free movement space poses serious challenges related to whether or not there is a set of common values shared by all EU citizens, if they are enough for holding together the EU and what further criteria for benefiting from the free movement right there should be. This raises the debate about EU citizenship and European values as well as the sensitive issues regarding security and sovereignty in Europe.

### *The EU and the “Other”*

The construction of European identity in relation to the “other” has been dealt with by Delanty as mentioned above. According to him, Europe has been an idea, constructed and used differently in geopolitical and historical terms. In other words, it has been set and used from above in a political sense and it has always been defined as opposing to the “other”. The identity concept that Delanty uses in his arguing about Europe as an idea of identity building, is the concept that identities are always relational but what matters is not the representation of the other as such but the nature of the difference. A crucial issue for Delanty is otherness, whether it is recognized as such or the negation which leads to exclusion. In addition to this concept, Delanty assumes Europe to be a macro-frame for identity building such as the religion or the national state that homogenizes and assimilates rather than recognizing the difference. According to him Europe has been an idea used differently in a different historical and geopolitical context where the reference other which served for identity construction changed from Orient as the other until the period of the Cold war.

The qualitative study of Bulgarian respondents confirmed the role that history has played in the construction of identities, particularly in the European self-perception of Bulgarians formed on the Balkan peninsula between Europe-Russia and Turkey. Its significance today is justified even more by the perspective for the Western Balkans to join the EU and the complicated EU-Russia relations. Having noted this, the discourse about the “other” should not be understood as an argumentation for exclusion but for looking into what binds us together and how negative attitudes that have been historically formed could transform into a dialogue of respect and recognition. The other discourse places the research into European identity in a context that is geographical, geo-political, social and cultural. Thus, it concerns the geographical, social and to a great extent the geopolitical borders of Europe.

Moreover, the definition of these borders has always been connected to the EU as an actor on the international scene and to its relations with other major actors. It is in the Preamble, in the context of a European defense policy and European common defense, where the term European identity is solely used. Therefore the attitudes of EU citizens can actually give more highlights on the perceived borders of Europe.

### The Balkans:

Being part of the Balkan region is considered by some of the respondents a sign for not being European or rather being less European, less modernized or less civilized:

Quote:

*“Well, we Europeans are not like that...we are more civilized and careful ...OK, we Europeans ...OK, the Balkans, we are a different beer. But from Hungary on, people are civilized.”*

Quote:

*“No. Absolutely no chance (to the question about coming closer in cultural terms). Because of this famous Balkan mentality and the fact that they treat us as people that are second hand.”*

These claims are often said to represent the self-stereotypical identification of Bulgarians that dates back to the times when the Balkan peninsula's peoples fought for independence from the Ottoman empire and viewed “Europe” as the model of social, political and cultural organization in the 18th and 19th century. According to the respondents, however, it can also be seen that it is both a self-stereotype but also sometimes the way Bulgarian people are viewed by other Europeans. What is important to note here is that the Balkans are not opposed to Europe. They are related to “Europe” but remain less or not fully European which as an idea carries the potential for having the whole Balkan region as an integrated part of Europe that is yet to be seen.

### Russia

The attitudes towards Russia among the Bulgarian EU citizens show in most cases the idea of cultural closeness. Several times Orthodox Christianity and the idea of the East versus the West were mentioned.

Quote:

*“I feel closer to the Russian people because of Bulgaria. I have read the whole Russian classics like Dostoevsky. From that point of view I feel closer with the Russians and the Europeans but not with the Americans. I understand them but they do not have that depth.”*

Quote:

*“In the term European I invest a long historical process of transition to values developed in all European societies. This transition to some general values but we have all walked that path it does not matter if we are East orthodox, Catholic or Protestant. Such a division is suggested but practically we have the same values: full respect for the other human being, the life of everybody is a value on its own compared to other continents is the feeling for the values of the life and the sense of this life for each life is something that is achieved on the European continent... This difference between East and West is politically kept instead of emphasizing the common things.”*

Quote:

*“I feel the close with Russian people. I speak their language because it was obligatory at school. I have a sentimental attitude towards Russia (a question about the cultural closeness with other European, values and practices)... My father and mother are Russophiles... This is how I am brought up...”*

Quote:

*“Yes, I would go to a country from a different continent and I will tell you why. Here, the emigrants from Eastern Europe-Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, we are second hand emigrants... this is how I feel it since the refugee crisis began one year ago.”*

It can be concluded, that, generally, Russia is not considered as “the other” but rather as “part of us” in the Bulgarian attitude towards Russia. Second, the stereotyped division East-West is mentioned, particularly in a negative context towards the other Christian denominations in Europe. However, there is the perception that citizens coming from the East are viewed as “second hand emigrants” by citizens in West European countries.

### Turkey:

As to the attitude towards Turkey, it can be summarized that it is not perceived as being part of Europe but at the same time there is a perception of some shared past with it.

Quote:

*“(Talking about the Oriental mentality that the Bulgarians have because of the Ottoman rule). Europe is up to Istanbul. Maybe also there is Europe in the Mediterranean. After that...it is like 8 or 9 centuries...no electricity, no... If they accept Turkey, I go to Canada... I will leave Europe.”*

By and large, it can be argued that the Bulgarian understanding of who is European is constructed in the unique geographical, social, cultural and geopolitical quadrangle: Balkans-Europe-Russia-

Turkey. Bulgarian identity is constructed in the heart of the Balkan peninsula, being fully oriented towards “Europe”, perceives itself, however, as being less European compared to the “West”, regarding Turkey as the unacceptable “other” and keeping a unique attitude towards Russia that is nothing close to antagonism.

Those attitudes and perceptions could be explained with the fact the Europe or West Europe as a term has been the “normative power” [31] for the Balkans and in particular for Bulgaria since the 19th century when Bulgaria was liberated from the Ottoman power. In other words, the Bulgarian modern identity constructed itself in relation to Europe and in an attempt for coming closer or integrating one's self in Europe in social and cultural terms. The attitude towards Turkey that can be described rather as antagonism is explained with the traumatic period when the Bulgarian territories were part of the Ottoman Empire. The special attitude towards Russia is most probably built on the recent shared communist past but also by the fact that Russia played a major role in the process of Bulgarian liberation from the Ottoman Empire (Russian-Turkish war 1877-1878). Bulgaria is in a sense a geopolitical space where Europe and Russia meet without being antagonized, at least in the self-perception of some of the Bulgarian people, and where Europe geographically and culturally ends at the Bulgarian-Turkish border.

Though these are historically grounded perceptions, they imply that in reality Europe is closer to what Quentin Michel claims to be a “mosaique” and Anthony Smith a “family of cultures” where we have a map of simultaneous similarities but also differences shared to some extent by some. The historical discourse about the role of the “other” could be referred to each European country separately and could probably lead to a number of different images of what Europe is for the different EU citizens. It is, however, in the common social context or at least in the possibilities of free movement of persons, that changes can take place and new opportunities for European identity formation, can be found. Moreover, Europe remains a normative and moral idea that still searches for its better defined role on the international scene. What has probably not been much on the focus when it comes to the study into European identity, is whether this identity has an important social understanding and how mixed European couples form European identifications.

#### *A social dimension of European identity*

In the interviews analysis, it was argued how the mobility structure (the occupational field), the social status of the respondents contribute to the formation of European identity. Grounding on this analysis, an elite type of European identity based on cultivation ( possessing high culture such as language competence in several foreign languages, a successful professional realization in the country of residence, social status related to a higher level of income and prestige in the society, can be outlined. This can be seen, particularly in interviews 15 and 17:

*“Oh yes. We are citizens of Europe (jiteli, inhabitants, dwellers of Europe). After all we are Europeans in general from a geographical point of view... Her daughter is studying EU law. I do not think I am different from these people here. I could even say I have the pretensions to be AT a higher level on an intellectual level...even when it comes to writing.”*

*“In a way...what kind of a question is this? What does it mean European? I feel the way I was before. I do not have the confidence to be something more. We are Europeans the Bulgarians. I do not know...In my own point of view I feel successful and I have my confidence. But it is not ok to exaggerate. If we have to say, it is ok. But our generation is different. We are not brought up to show off ourselves. We are just working and enjoying life.”*

But also in interview 16, even though the respondents is working under her qualifications in Belgium (cleaning houses in Belgium, while being a teacher in Bulgaria):

*“Of course I feel European. Hahah... even more than the local ones. Well I will start with...oh how can I say it. They are very cultivated and groomed but there is something that makes an impression on me. How can you blow your nose so loudly? And this is something that everybody does. To me this is not normal, especially in a bus or in a restaurant. Also I have observed that my colleagues that I*

*am working with cut their nails on the carpet. Yes, they do not put in an ash for example. Also I have observed that they do not care if their toilettes are clean or not. Yes, the public toilets are clean but the others...I find it very strange and interesting. We, the Bulgarians say that we judge for the culture by the toilettes in a house. If it is clean, you know the hygiene. Also, when it comes to literature. I have asked many questions about classical literature, music. For example my chef who is the chef of an health insurance company does not know who is Johannes Brahms. He does not know it. Such things.”*

This type of an elite self-perception sharply contrasts with the respondents from interviews 11 and 13 for example where the lower standard of living in terms of income, the awareness of the different economic development between Bulgaria and the country of residence, along with some negative stereotypes about the Bulgarian people, stimulates the feeling of being non-European. However the reference point here is again the normal European way of living. The following quote from interview 11:

*“Yes. I do feel European. The understanding is that we are living in a European way. The way we watched on movies...people go shopping one time in a week, go on a vacation. This could be seen here in a systematic way. People go in the morning to their work place and in the evening to their family. The only difference in my case is that I do not go in the evening to my family... I go to the big supermarkets. I like something and I buy it. I do not deprive myself of anything. Whatever your soul wants, it get what it wants. Also my child and my wife... I do not deprive themselves of anything... In Bulgaria when we go in the morning to the work place, we do not care if we are late or not.”*

Three trends are observed. First, those Bulgarians with a very high level of education have a social status that equalize them to the upper levels in the social hierarchy of the local country. Second, those who possess lower education keep a lower social status. In other words, there is not much difference from the social status they would have had in their country of origin, Bulgaria. However, there are also respondents with high qualifications who, however, are occupied with jobs under their level of education. In this case, there is the trend of downward social mobility. The perception of being European is influenced by the social status they have in the country of origin. But this is not the sole factor that defines what is to be European.

#### *Mixed couples and multi-culturalism/linguism*

This idea of being European as being bicultural or multi-cultural was expressed in interview Number 20:

*“My children are Europeans. By passport they are Swedish. They speak Bulgarian better than Swedish. They speak Flemish at best because they are born here and go to school. But after that they speak Bulgarian. Bulgarian is their mother tongue. If you meet them on the streets in Bulgaria, you will not notice that they are not Bulgarians.”*

In other words, it can be summarized that being born in a family of parents with different European nationality and living in a country (in that case Bulgarian and Swedish parents living in Belgium), different from the parent's countries of origin makes one European. One is European because it possesses the cultures, respectively the languages of his parents and the culture of the third country could be added to that. Being European is equal to being multicultural. This feeling or perception of being European slightly resembles “the umbrella model of European identity” [32] conceptualized by Adrian Favell as an identity reconciling the tension between the country of origin and the country of residence where the individual who has moved has to adapt his culture to the local culture. However, in the case of interview 20, there is no implication for such a psychological tension among the children. On the contrary, the European-ness of the children understood as being multi-cultural, bilingual or even trilingual is perceived as something natural. This model of European identity reflects the possibility for possessing several nationalities/citizenships and the real experience of embodying several cultural through the fact of birth in a mixed family. It can be argued, following Favell's

analysis, that such an individual would have better attitude towards the European integration and would probably be more tolerant towards the different cultures in Europe. These features or attitudes could possibly make up the *European person* in cultural terms but there is no strong evidence that such a European cultural identity is also going to account for the development of European civic and political identity.

In a conclusion, the study of European identity formation in the context of free movement of persons is a research perspective offering numerous dimensions and aspects of the possibility for the formation of such an identity as social context is defined by numerous factors. What this intra EU mobility space creates is a milieu for changing of traditional identities of Europe and for the formation of a new social and cultural space where new identities are developing. The study of this space eventually help in learning more about ourselves, how we relate to each other, and what binds us.

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