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EUROPEAN IDENTITY: CHALLENGES FOR THE EU

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With continuous expansion of globalization, a movement of people, along with a movement of goods (trade) and movement of money (finance), has already become the "third wave of globalization", which has a profound impact on the development process of world history and thus receives global attention. From a global perspective, the EU has the largest number of migrant residents, although the proportion of foreign population in the total population is lower than in the United States or Australia. The ongoing war and chaos in the neighboring subregions causes Europe to become number one world region in terms of the resettling population (especially refugees).

In these conditions the particular relevance of forecasting the situation with European society and so-called "European identity" is connected with the fact that in the short-term future these notions will largely determine the development of the European integration processes and the EU in particular, as well as the level of international political and social security, the direction and scale of interethnic processes.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the state of the European identity in the context of the regional integration and its issues. It allows us to determine the level of development of the European society, to establish the nature of changes both in the sphere of political, interstate and social structures, to reveal the forms of interaction of the components of the social system, to show the peculiarities of their response to the changing external and internal conditions of functioning.

European identity is rationally analyzed within the framework of the theories of neo-functionalism and "imagined regional communities", which say that identity is constructed artificially within the framework of integration processes. According to the researches in countries outside the European Union, the feeling of belonging to Europe is lower than in countries that are members of the EU. At the individual level, attitudes towards immigrants and attitudes towards European integration are positively associated with European identity. Moreover, European and national identities are positively linked at both individual and country levels. Furthermore, multiple researches confirmed the hypothesis that the economic development of the countries in the region has a positive effect on European identity [1].

The old truth "in unity is strength" is more suitable than ever to characterize European community. The European Union seeks to promote humanitarian and progressive values and ideals

among people, which serve as a reliable guarantee that humanity does not suffer, but rather benefits from the global changes taking place in the world. A simple mechanism of market relations or unilateral efforts of individual countries are not able to meet the needs of people today. Therefore, the European Union adheres to the ideas of humanism and a model of society that will be supported by EU citizens. Europeans cherish their rich heritage, which includes values such as human rights, social equality, free enterprise, fair distribution of the results of economic growth, the right to a protected environment, respect for cultural, linguistic and religious differences and the harmonious combination of tradition and progress. The European Union Charter on Human Rights was promulgated in Nice in December 2000. It is now legally binding through the Lisbon Treaty, which entered into force on December 1, 2009. The Charter sets out all the rights officially recognized today by EU member states and their citizens. Common rights and values create a sense of kinship between Europeans, encouraging European identity.

Discussions of the draft Constitutional Treaty held in most EU countries demonstrated concern of the majority of Europeans about the limits of the European Union borders expansion and even preservation of Europe's identity. There are no simple answers to these issues, since each country sees its geopolitical and economic interests differently. For example, despite the fact that Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland meet the conditions for joining the EU, they are not members of the European Union, as public opinion in these countries is currently opposed to joining the EU.

In various EU countries, public opinion on the final borders of the European Union is divided to one degree or another. If only geographical criteria were taken into account, without democratic values, then the EU, after all, could be like the Council of Europe. However, it is clear that membership of some countries will entail a serious imbalance in the European Union - both politically and geographically.

A sensible approach should be to recognize the fact that any European country is eligible to apply for EU membership if it is capable of fully adopting EU legislation and is willing to introduce euro as its currency. The unification of Europe has been a continuous process since 1950s, and any attempt to establish the borders of the EU once and for all would contradict the very essence of this process.

In order to even development of the unified countries and regions and erase intraregional differences, the EU funds are used to accelerate the development of lagging regions, restore declining industrial areas, help youth and unemployed find employment, modernize agriculture and support disadvantaged rural areas. For example, the aim of the convergence policy is to help the less developed countries and regions reach the EU average development level as soon as possible by improving the conditions for economic growth and providing employment for the population. This is achieved by investing in material and human resources, in innovation, development of the information community, environmental protection, as well as increasing adaptability to change and the effectiveness of administrative management. It is equally important to increase the competitiveness, the level of employment of the population and the attractiveness of regions, with the exception of the least developed ones. To achieve this, it is necessary to accelerate economic and social reforms and promote innovation, entrepreneurship, environmental protection, openness, adaptation and development of a labor market that covers all segments of the population. In its turn, economic and social prosperity provide less destructive factors and lead to natural formation of the sense of "unity" within society and strengthening European identity in the end.

Nevertheless, the proper feeling of cohesion and the presence of a common destiny cannot be created artificially. These feelings can only arise and mature naturally as a result of people sharing a common cultural mentality, so Europe today should focus not only on economy, but also on education, culture and social issues. The EU does not give instructions on the organization of

schools and teaching methods, does not dictate curricula (such issues are resolved exclusively at the national or local level). What the EU really does is to promote and support programs that stimulate cultural exchange in the field of education, enabling students to travel abroad to study or receive training and learn new languages, to take an active part in joint activities of colleges and other educational institutions in other countries. Within the framework of the Bologna Process, European countries are cooperating to create a common European higher education zone. In the field of culture, the EU has launched the Culture and Media programs, which aim to stimulate cooperation between TV and film producers, promoters, broadcasters, cultural organizations and institutions from different countries. The programs encourage an increase in the number of European television programs and films, thus helping to restore the balance between European and American television and film production [2].

The very idea of a "Europe for citizens" is still very young. Some symbols of common European identity already exist in reality. For example, the European passport, introduced in 1985; uniform driving licenses have been issued in all EU countries since 1996. The EU has its own motto "Unity in Diversity"; May 9 is considered to be a Day of Europe, etc.

However, people cannot feel that they belong to the European Union if they are not aware of what the EU is doing and why. The EU institutions and Member States have yet to make more efforts to inform the public about EU activities in a simple, clear and understandable language. People also need to see that the EU has a tangible impact on their daily lives. In this regard, the introduction of euro banknotes and coins into circulation since 2002 was of prime importance. More than two thirds of EU citizens now manage their personal budget and savings in euros. Pricing goods and services in euros means that consumers can directly compare prices across countries. Border check-ups have been canceled between most EU countries under the Schengen Agreement, and this alone gives people a sense of belonging to the same unified geographic area.

The sense of belonging to a single society increases, first of all, when a person feels personally involved in the decision-making process in the EU. Every adult EU citizen has the right to vote in elections to the European Parliament, and this is a strong foundation for democratic rule of law in the EU. The development of this rule of law increases as the European Parliament gains more and more powers, national parliaments gain more opportunities to speak out on pan-European issues, and European citizens increasingly participate in the activities of non-governmental organizations, political movements and in the creation of pan-European political parties. If you want to help shape the European reality and influence EU policy, there are many ways at your disposal today. For example, there are online discussion forums on European Union affairs where you can participate in debates. Where EU citizens also have the opportunity to submit their comments on blog posts of members of the Commission or the European Parliament or contact the Commission or Parliament directly, online or through one of their representative offices in their country.

The main issue for foreign and domestic policy of the EU is the urgency to strengthen European defense against pressure and coercion from the "outside". However, the key point is setting right priorities and avoiding a clash of interests among member-states. The current situation in international relations system demonstrates quite opposite opinions within the EU, which staggers the long-nurtured European identity.

However, one of the weaknesses of the EU is the geopolitical factor, since the Union has a diverse multi-level structure, united by law and values. The EU's comparative advantage lies in its ability to resolve contentious issues through dialogue based on results-oriented negotiation. This is a key point, since this potential is of high importance for solving global problems that the world community is currently facing. Nevertheless, some countries abandoned the universalist program and returned to power politics, which slightly complicated the whole process.

As long as the EU's role is constrained by the dominance of other powers in global governance, the union will continue to be subject to certain trends that it cannot influence. Indeed, the political crisis of 2015-2016 and 2022, lead to a serious erosion of solidarity within the EU and opposition to the European Commission's assertion of its powers, caused by the irregular migration, whereas the vast majority of immigrants is refugees fleeing wars or insecurities caused by the conflicts that European states have failed to contain.

The European Union was created to serve the peoples of Europe, and its future must be shaped with the active participation of representatives from all sectors of civil society. The Founding Fathers of the EU understood this well. "We are not making a coalition of states, but uniting people," said Jean Monnet in 1952 [3]. Raising public awareness of the EU's activities and tasks and involving citizens in these activities is still one of the biggest challenges facing all EU institutions today. The efficiency of the responses to these challenges directly affects understanding of the EU and strengthening European identity.

The migration crisis in 2015 has exacerbated all conflicts related to the multinational and multiconfessional nature of the European society to the limit. The model of multiculturalism, which assumed the parallel existence of different cultures in Europe, their mutual penetration, enrichment and development, was recognized as ineffective. Today European states strive to ensure the integration of immigrants based on the recognition of the dominant nature of the culture of the host country. In other words, immigrants are obliged to demonstrate that they know and respect the history and state structure of their host country, recognize its values, as well as the values of the European Union. However, in practice so far it has not been fully successful.

In recent years, two negative trends have resonated in Europe and mutually reinforce each other: the first is the strengthening of Islamic fundamentalism, the second is the growth of nationalism and right-wing radicalism. These processes pose a significant threat to the internal stability of the European Union.

Based on the studied materials and author's opinion, we can distinguish There are three main scenarios in the European debates on the future configuration of the EU. The first model is asymmetric integration, that is, stage-by-stage integration without changing the legal framework and relying on the European Council as opposed to the European Commission. The second model is a political and economic federation, the construction of which will require a radical change in the legal framework, which will have to incorporate all the integration measures taken by the EU to overcome the crisis. The third model is a project of a two-speed Europe based on an intergovernmental agreement between the leading countries of the Eurozone, which are ready and willing to move forward along the path of further integration. In other words, it is a model of coexistence in the EU of the vanguard and the rearguard [4]. Whatever scenario the European leaders choose, they will have to, first of all, solve the problem of the democratic deficit in the EU, bridge the gap between Brussels and the citizens of the EU. The latest elections to the European Parliament confirm the need for a radical revision of the previous relationship between technocratic officials and ordinary citizens. And, despite the pessimistic forecasts, the very fact of the diversity of concepts and models of post-crisis European integration testifies to the significant intellectual potential of the European project, which can and should receive a new impetus.

Nowadays, alongside with the intraregional and interregional political and economic issues, migration is considered to be one of the main challenges for the EU countries. At present, the EU citizens are more concerned about migrants, who are sometimes associated with destabilization of the society, than about economic problems. The migration crisis of 2015 and following events have exposed the strengths and weaknesses of European integration. It should be noted that, on the one hand, the EU countries have accumulated great experience in overcoming difficult situations, and the EU members are interested in preserving European stability and development. A number of measures are being developed and implemented to help resolve the consequences of irregular

migration. The EU's policy in this area is flexible and takes into account the constantly changing situation. On the other hand, it is not easy to formulate responses to the new challenges. The principle of European solidarity and its variations has been called into question, whereas the population of EU states is less and less supportive of European integration in its modern form.

Thus, the importance of studying the identities of Europeans lies in the fact that it helps to better understand what causes certain social processes in European countries, as well as to determine the prospects for the further development of European society, nation states and the EU as a whole.

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