The concept of a European Identity is agreed upon as forthcoming from citizenship of a European member-state (1998, Amsterdam Treaty), but is often played out against the idea of national sovereignty as well. As the Polish sociologist and philosopher Jozef Niznik concluded in 2000 (cf. Niznik, 2012, p. 68): “The term nationalism seems to be excluded from European discourse …” and “Contemporary debates about the final political form of the EU and especially attachment to intergovernmentalism with its stress on preserving the sovereignty of nation-states within the Union can be interpreted as the continuous presence of nationalism in the policies of many Member States. Of course, part of the reason for such attitudes are the well grounded values shared by the majority in their societies. Those values have been nourished by national education, traditions and mythologies …” In this short passage Niznik touched upon several themes that presently haunt the discussions on Europe as well. These are aggravated by the recent financial problems in the Eurozone hitting upon countries like Ireland, and most of the Mediterranean countries, which urged other – most Northern European – countries to assist endangered national governments and banks, and which led to a growing Eurosceptic reaction in the latter. However, what is often forgotten in the discussions is the multi-layered identity of all European efforts at cooperation (cf. Cohn-Bendit & Verhofstadt, 2012, pp. 67-8). Identity as such is described in legal terms as consisting of a multitude of signs: Identitas vera colligitur ex multitudine signorum. At least we should acknowledge that identity as such can be derived from internal characteristics – the persona concept – and external attributes – the eyes of the beholder. The first elements in this case can be derived from the European wide accepted idea of multi-level governance (at individual, local/regional, national and European level).

The Dutch international legal scholar Alting von Geusau (2012) took an ‘ideational’ point of departure to European identity. First of all, he memorised the Greek thoughts about the ‘polis’ (city or state), the Roman structuring of society in ‘Roman law’ and the Jewish-Christian belief in the equality of men and of the value humanity as original influences from the Mediterranean part of the European geographical sub-continent. Secondly he identified the Northern (pagan in his words) traditions of chieftainship, which can also be derived from the book Vanished Kingdoms by the historian Norman Davies (2011). He described European history as an interaction between these four traditions, culminating in highlights such as: 1. the Christianizing of Roman law principles like vim vi repellere licet (it is allowed to avert power with power) in the 11th century; 2. the interaction of political (Northern ruling) principles with the church diversification (investiture, between the pope and the emperor, in the 11th century), and 3. the Westphalian Peace based on the principle of cuius regio eius religio (inhabitants
of a region were supposed to follow the religion – Roman Catholic or Protestant – of its ruler; 4. the struggle between the Northern principles of a single ruler and Greek political thought, culminating in the democratic movements, visible after the abdication of Napoleon (1815) and 5. most clearly after the end of WWII. What came out of these major changes was rock bottom to European (legal and institutional) thinking from 1946 on. These events and developments have tainted International Relations theory on the European Union up to now, resulting in the intergovernmentalist and the neofunctionalist views. The former is in practice recognisable as the view of Charles de Gaulle (French president between 1958 and 1969), the view of most British conservative governments, the view of most anti-communist nationalists in Central Europe and of most Eurosceptics. It is not only an expectation, but more often also a prescription how to act as a government by negotiating all changes in Europe at top-level meetings. The explanations for the starting points of the negotiations are political and social issues at home. The latter is based upon the expectation of a gradual development of cooperation between countries, due to the change in supra-national market rules, the development of organizational capacities and the spill-over effects of economic interdependence. Monnet’s project of a European cooperation with a federation as end-point is the most conspicuous example of this view, and most pro-Europeans share this view, pointing to the development of a pluralistic world.

In circles of International Relations theory intergovernmentalism is depicted as leading to mere ‘modern identity’ based on developments at home. This is contrary to a ‘post-modern identity’ which would be the consequence of the external relations of the European Union.

The latter would then consist of: 1. responsibilities towards the world (humanitarian aid), 2. relations with other political entities (power building), 3. respect for other cultures (diplomacy), and 4. reflection on the difference between the Internal European identity and other identities, such as the American, and African cultures and the identities of the BRIC countries (us and them). On the other hand, the former would consist of: 1. values and life-styles at the individual, 2. attitudes and ideology at the local/ regional, 3. culture and history at the national, and 4. institutional frameworks at the European level. Each level is subject of different, but often overlapping, scientific domains. Therefore, the EU legal/ institutional level and its economic basis will become the point of departure for our analysis of EU history.

Figure 1. Changes to the European society.
Internal identity is an object of public opinion research – in European context the social-psychological assessment of opinions on freedom, human rights and social justice, at the lowest level. It is also an object of political science – behavioural research on volunteering, democracy and subservience to the rule of law – at the lower-middle level. Furthermore, it is an object of the ideational sciences of history and culture (linguistics, fine arts, etc.), at the higher-middle level. Finally, it deals with political research on European institutional frameworks like the common market, the customs union and the Brussels’ politeia at the highest level. Thus, one should always be aware of the complexity of the European predicament and the manifold approaches that are applied to it, such as is shown in figure 1.

European history (changes in European society) thus shows a layered structure just as currents in the stream of a river with continuous interactions. Due to global developments after WWII an institutional structure has been formed which resulted after 50 years in the European Union as it is known today, based on economic and political principles in the first place, and on the values that have been agreed upon by 27 member countries (the ‘acquis communautaire’; Copenhagen summit, 1993). Other cultural-, value-, and opinion developments are often lagging behind the economic developments and have an uncertain impact on European Institutions, as they mainly depend on national and/or regional changes in the 27 (or in due course 28 odd) member states, where local history is preponderant.

What we may infer from all these developments and reflections on them is that the legal and institutional changes in the European Union are due on the one hand to internal politico-economic and to global changes, according to the tradition of neofunctionalism, and on the other to social-cultural changes according to the tradition of intergovernmentalism. Which tradition will be the most dominant is a question that is left for history to determine and for politicians and the peoples to choose. This scientific view is also in correspondence with the agreements of the Amsterdam Summit (1969), since when there is spoke of a two-track development of European cooperation (cf. Alting von Geusau, 2012, pp. 131-38) viz.: A. the Community track leading to a supranational method of common action (read: the method on the basis of initiatives by the European Commission), and B. an Intergovernmental Cooperation track, intended to strengthen Europe’s identity through political cooperation (read: the method based on the periodical summits of the prime ministers and/or the heads of state). However, some of the European politicians saw a necessary connection between the institutional developments and the future support by the people of Europe as well, as in the Tindemans report from 1975/1976 (E.1.11), in which he wrote: “Si nous réussissons dans notre entreprise, l’idée européenne sera définitivement préservée et, de ce fait, l’avenir de nos peuples assuré. Je demeure profondément convaincu – et avec moi l’immense majorité de nos concitoyens – que seules des politiques communes, dans la plupart des secteurs, peuvent assurer réellement notre développement” (If we succeed in our endeavour, the European idea will be consolidated definitively, and from this, the future of our people reassured. I remain profoundly convicted – and with me the immense majority of our co-citizens – that only a common policy, in the majority of sectors, could really assure our development. [my translation]).

Several of the articles in this issue will be geared to the (communicative) relationship between the administrative and political developments on the one hand and the understanding and appreciation of them by the population.
1. Europe as a Value Community

Despite all the differences between the member countries, the EU can be characterised as a unitary political institution in one important aspect: it is a value community (although Alting von Geusau prefers to speak of ‘principles’ instead of ‘values’ his reasoning is a quite old-fashioned one based on ‘natural law’ (Alting von Geusau, 2012, pp. 49-67, as developed in Roman Catholicism passing by all other earlier and later forms; we will use the more general form of ‘value’ instead). As a reaction to external and global events, the number of common values is gradually augmented and agreed upon in Council meetings and further elaborated by the Commission and added to the acquis communautaire. The start of it in the European Community of Coal and Steel (1951) was based upon two values: peace, i.e. avoidance of war (first of all between France and Germany after 3 successive wars between 1871 and 1945) – a negative value (cf. Spinelli & Rossi, the 1943 Ventotene Manifesto in Nelsen & Stubb, 2003, pp. 4-6), and solidarity, as a de facto positive value expressed in the Schuman declaration of 1950 (cf. Schuman in Nelsen & Stubb, 2003, p. 14).

In the 3rd (in 1991 2nd) article of the consolidated Maastricht treaty the value structure of the EU is summarised shortly: “The Union’s aim is first to promote peace, its values, and the well-being of its people.” So, peace is the super-value below which solidarity, cohesion, respect for cultural diversity human rights are arranged. [The formal Human Rights had already been guaranteed in 1948 by the agreements in the Council of Europe.]. The second aim (super-value) of the European Union – on Dutch initiative (by foreign minister Beyen) – was the well-being of the people which implied economic growth, the development of a social market economy, and more recently sustainable development.

Peace and solidarity, mentioned above, are the result of reflections on imposing events, and developments in the value domain have always been the result of practical “international organisation in the light of historical experience”, as Karl Deutsch et.al. remarked in their ‘Political Community and the North Atlantic Area’ (in Nelson & Stubb, 2003, pp. 121-44). The first of these values gave rise to the 2012 Nobel Peace Price award for the European Union.

A third important common value grew practically out of the enlargement of the European Union with 3 former dictatorships (Greece, 1981 and Spain and Portugal, 1986). Reflections on what the EU needed to function as a stable community led to the acknowledgement of democracy as the third basic value of the European Union, which so far had just been taken for granted. Democracy as a value later on played a significant role in the accession negotiations of the East-Central European countries which entered the Union between 2004 and 2007. As democracy is most of all felt ‘at home’ within the confinement of the nations and solidarity is eo ipso a value between the nations, both values can be put over and against each other as Niznik analysed (2012, pp. 11-42). It could be one of the reasons for the present day antithesis between Euro-sceptics and Euro-files, and at least the cause of the reproaches of a ‘democratic gap’ between the European institutions and the European population by the former.

In the model of the European Union within the waves of history (see above), it is conspicuous that the upper region – global, institutional and economic – is the major playing field for the activities of the politicians, civil servants, and IR academicians which has led to the institutionalisation of the European cooperation. Only occasionally they make use of the discourse of the general public, viz. in their Euro-speak about the choice of values ‘valid’ for our times. It is the academic world of sociology/ social-psychology and political science that tries to make a connection between the tidal waves in the upper streams and the develop-
ments in opinions, values and culture that is much broader than the institutionalised ones (cf. Niznik, 2012; Rebel & Linders, 2012). In that confrontation one meets the overall problem of the alleged democratic gap, which was supposed by the politicians and administrators to be bridged by a five-year plebiscite, the EU parliamentary elections, and followed in its identity by a mainly six month poll, the Euro-barometer. It is to these problems that the present issue of this journal is devoted.

2. The Contributors

The connection between the institutional idea of a European identity (Amsterdam Treaty, 1998) and the practice of a national identity is the target of the paper by Georgiana Udrea c.s. Focussing on Romanian students in the UK the authors tried to find out whether the sense of identity of these young Romanians were more the result of identification with their country of origin or with the European Union through which they were able to travel to freely and study in another EU-country. Although the responding students were more inclined to identify with their country of origin, identification with Europe was not absent as such and the instrumental and civic approaches to Europe were supported quite well.

The same target population as in the previous paper has been chosen by Durach Flavia and Alina Bargaoanu, with this specific difference that they dealt with students living in and studying in Romania, but still experienced in travelling and acknowledging to be able to study abroad through the Erasmus program. These youngsters appeared to be far more positive about the European Union than their average countryman. The latter’s original Euro-enthusiasm is diminishing sharply in these days; the majority of Romanians have become more sceptical and critical at present. Students, however, still show considerable trust in the EU as an institution more stable than their own country. As the authors argue, the students tend to ‘comply’ with the European standards as superior to their own national institutions, but the authors consider it more as a ‘feeling’ of EU-optimism than as a true conviction.

Although not specifically dealing with the European identity, the article by Laura Visan from York University Toronto, has much in it to heed research in the EU as well. The predicament of immigrants from mid-European countries to the north-western ones is at least comparable to the situation of Romanians living in the Greater Toronto Area (see for comparability also the article by Sievert discussed below). For the EU is probably as densely provided with internet coverage as Canada is. Visan makes us aware of the potential of cyber-connectivity for people living in diaspora. The context of origin of immigrants, as can be inferred from her study, might be a better explaining factor for the differences in use of the internet connections, and not so much the optimism or pessimism about the potential of it to form a community. That can be a hypothesis for research in the EU as well.

Professor Paul Dobrescu and his colleagues dealt with themes at the same institutional level as Józef Niznik (2012, ch.2) on the European discourse on European solidarity. As solidarity happens to be one of the operational bases for peace (see above), it seems opportune to think the developments through now that the identity of the EU is questioned all over the continent. A solution the authors suggest is to organize a cohesive Europe according to federal principles, which in its turn should be built on an organic solidarity. But, as it happened recently all over Europe there is a trend to re-nationalization of political decisions, may be as a reaction to the staunch anti-Europe attitude in Great Britain, and at least recognizable with
the net-contributors in the EU. The federal idea, one may infer, has lost its momentum by the recent reduction of the EU-budget, which at any rate moves the EU into the direction of intergovernmental attitude of everyone on its own.

Alaaddin Paksoy took an external perspective to assess the identity of the European Union by dealing with the EU-Turkey negotiations. His very insightful distinction between an essentialist definition and a functionalist one, derived from IR theories, led him to the question in what way Europe is seen as a single civilization, based on single cultural heritage and values or a set of civilizations heading for a common future. The former means a strict distinction between the Turkish Muslim identity and the European Christian identity, which would make a Turkish EU accession almost an impossibility. The latter, however, would mean a possibility to grow towards a common future based on human rights, democracy, economy and geo-strategic considerations. He tried to substantiate this surmise by analysing British newspapers and BBC News Online between 1999 and 2006 during the official Turkish bid, and substantiating it by in-depth interviews with the journalists authors. There is only one problem in my view, however, viz. that the two approaches are not watertight, for as an analysis by Oana Grigore (in Rebel & Linders, 2012, pp. 37-55) has shown, one of the principled reasons of the rejection of Turkish entry has been based on the judgement by the EU Commission and Parliament, and some NGO’s like Amnesty, that the seeming lack of (human) rights for women, was a principal hindrance for Turkey to enter and that this fact was due to the present Turkish identity. That means that functionalist criteria seem to become derived from an essentialist basis. The conclusion by Paksoy that the relations between Turkey and the EU is a product of a complex structure which includes all political, economic, geographical and cultural aspects in that respect seems to be warranted.

Holger Sievert’s contribution differed from the previous ones in this respect, that he concentrated more on methodological and epistemological problems that precede comparative research into topics like the ones that have been dealt with by the previous authors. Basing himself on insights of authors from the domain of comparative political research, he developed a context specific approach to comparisons in communication research – European public relations, public affairs, the so-called democratic deficit, etc. – throughout the European Union. His approach could well be generalised over other domains and other regions outside Europe, and is therefore part of the activities of EUPRERA and the IPR. The most important points of departure are the criteria of ‘functional equivalence of the objects of research’ and ‘formal similarity of the contexts of research’. I would suggest that in comparative research, like the type that we employ in the Academic Consultancy and Research in Europe Association (ACREA), we may use the acronym PQRST: Problems (issues), Questions (subjective definitions of problems), Respondents, Social context, and Time, as principles we will always have to reckon with. The time-frame has been dealt with sketchily above and more in depth in a previous issue of this journal (cf. Rebel, 2012), and the context frame receives an extensive treatment in the article by Holger Sievert.

Bibliography


