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Romanian Online Media and the Prospects for an Instrumental European Identity

Abstract

The emergence of a European public sphere (EPS) and of a European identity (EI) are the fundamental interconnected processes which decide the shape of the nowadays European polity. EU member states' citizens should have a European identity, be it a secondary one, to actively participate in private and public debates concerning EU affairs, policies and common future. A fresh perspective in the field considers that the nature of the compatibility between national and European identities (which do not exclude each other) is revealed by the process of identity emergence: while national identities are largely "cultural", European identities are primarily "instrumental". The paper argues that instrumental European identity, as the identity based on self-interest calculation, is a reality. EU has been experimenting new ways to contribute to the emergence of a EI, trying to promote to its citizens symbols as identity markers once used by nations with the same aim (such as a flag, an anthem, a currency). In the EU context, funding opportunities are also being used to foster EI acquisition. In this theoretical context, a content analysis was conducted on two online news portals in Romania – www.hotnews.ro and www.ziare.com – for the March-June 2012 time frame in order to answer questions such as: Which are the markers and frames of an instrumental European identity promoted through articles about EU funds, posted on the two news portals?; how visible are EU identity markers and frames reflected through news on the management of EU funds and the implementation of EU-funded programmes and projects?; which is the predominance of such news?; how do Romanian citizens comment on these news in terms of identity acquisition? Moreover, this research will be compared with a similar one¹ conducted for the March-June 2011 time frame. The Euro crisis, the low rate of EU funds' absorption and the problems regarding the Operational Programmes under the cohesion objective in Romania, which have triggered "sticks" from the EU, have changed the results of the research conducted last year. Nevertheless, the paper still shows the relevance of the EU identity markers and specific frames in building an Instrumental European identity.

Keywords: European identity, European funds, EU-funded programmes and projects, instrumental European identity.

1. Insights into the concept of identity

Identity is a vast topic with great significance in both everyday life and academic research, as for the past two decades the attention given to this concept has continued to rise (Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston & McDermott, 2006). Processes of globalization and regionalization and

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the increasing influence of mass media and of other communication tools have triggered numerous contacts between individuals around the world. These increased contacts have led to different approaches on how people construct their identity, in the process of defining and knowing themselves (Roberts, 2010).

Social identity theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, explains the implications, specific features and aspects of collective identity. According to this theory of identity, “individuals strive to achieve or to maintain a positive social identity”, which is based on favorable comparisons between one’s own group (ingroup) and any relevant distinct group (outgroup) (Grant, 2010). A *social group* is “a set of individuals who [...] view themselves as members of the same social category” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 2). Once an individual strongly identifies with a group, s/he will make everything possible to ensure that the ingroup is better than the outgroup(s). As Stets and Burke (2000, p. 11) suggest, “in group-based identities, only the actor’s perceptions and actions are directly involved” and the first factors which matter in identifying with the group. However, if one’s social identity is unsatisfactory, “individuals may leave their group to join a more positive group, make their existing group more positively distinct or redefine ingroup characteristics as being positive” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 11). Therefore, collective identity should not be taken for granted, as it might be subject to change, process known in the literature as *identity change*: “One’s identity is the product of a continued negotiation among myriad factors, including one’s choices, social circumstances, historical background and political institutions” (Davidson, 2010). Individuals construct and become aware of their identity through *identification*, a process which links individuals (who) to social groups (what) (Risse, 2010a). Relevant to mention is that each person, however, over the course of his or her life, is a member of a unique combination of social categories/groups; therefore “the set of social identities making up that person’s self-concept is unique” (Stets & Burke, p. 4). Thus, every person has a different “constellation” of identities, which may intersect with others’ identities in some points – groups – but there are not two persons holding the same “constellation” of identities.

The process of identification involves “an interaction, between how we identify ourselves and how others categorize us, between self-image and public image” (Jenkins, 2010). The self is reflexive, “it can take itself as an object and can categorize, classify, or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications” (Stets & Burke, p. 2). Identification is basically “a process of classification, drawing on criteria of similarity and difference” (Stets & Burke, p. 2), between the characteristics of the ingroups and outgroups, known in the literature as the ‘I-Other dialectic’. Stuart Hall argues that entire communities construct their identities in relation to “the Other” (Balaji, 2010).

The communication theory of identity (CTI) highlights the explicitly acknowledged interdependency between communication and identity, as “identity is formed, maintained, and modified in a communicative process, and communication is a performance of identity” (Hecht & Hopfer, 2010). Communication is internalized as identity “when people place themselves in socially recognizable categories and thereby validate, through social interaction, whether these categories are relevant to them” (Hecht & Hopfer, 2010). Identity is manifested in social interaction through expectations and motivations, which influence the person’s communication. Thus, “identity is externalized to social interaction through expectations attached to identities” (Hecht & Hopfer, 2010).

The two theories of identity are relevant for this study, as European identity is a genuine collective identity which is intimately linked with concepts such as the European public

sphere. Communication, through the emergence of a communicative space for the citizens of the EU, is an essential condition for the emergence of a European identity, a European demos and a European polity, as many scholars argue (Risse, 2003; Díez Medrano, 2009; Eder, 2009).

2. European identity as the fundamental solution for the EU political project

The issue of a common identity which would bind together the citizens of the member states has been one of the major challenges of the EU. While at the EU institutional level there has been strong support for both deepening and enlargement, these processes are not as appreciated by its citizens as by EU officials (Inthorn, 2006). Recognition of this problem is not new. EU officials started to look into the concept of European identity starting with the 1970s (Stråth in Schlesinger & Foret, 2007). Until then, while a “European consciousness might sometimes have been evoked, identity as such was not a card to play” (Schlesinger & Foret, 2007, p. 127). The economic crisis of the 1970s urged the member states to reinforce their global position by deepening the European construction, thus coming across the European identity issue. European identity became a permanent concern of the EU institutions. Therefore, in 1972 a “Declaration on a European Identity” defined European identity based on three pillars: (1) common heritage, interests and special obligations within the community; (2) the “dynamic nature” of European unification; and (3) the extent to which the nine member states are collaborating in relation to the rest of the world (Burgess, 2002, p. 479). This embryo of the concept of European identity is based on internal unity and heritage with regard to the rest of the world.

As already announced, the literature reveals European identity as referring to the concept of collective identity. Moreover, it is a *political identity*, which means “the sense of belonging to politically relevant human groups and political structures” (Bruter, 2005, p. 1). The same author claims that the emergence of a corresponding political identity can be considered as “the primary source of legitimization of a political community” (Bruter, 2005, p. 1).

“Collective identities are social constructions which use psychological needs and motives to provide an answer to the questions «who do I belong to?» or «who do we belong to?»” (Eder, 2009, p. 431). As long as these questions may receive many answers, one person is able to have multiple identities, which do not exclude each other. Moreover, one should bear in mind that not all the multiple collective identities of a person are salient at the same time. Social identity theorists originally used the term *salience* to indicate the activation of an identity in a specific situation. A *salient social identity* was “one which is functioning psychologically to increase the influence of one’s membership in that group on perception and behavior” (Oakes in Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 19). These theorists agree that an identity has no effect without activation. To examine the likelihood that an identity will be activated across many situations, researchers must consider factors such as the fit of the identity to the situation (the stimuli present in the situation that fit the characteristics of the identity), as well as the individual’s structural commitment (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 26). Simply put, which collective identity becomes salient while others remain dormant depends on the specific situation the person faces (Simon & Klandermans, 2001) and the strengths of his/her commitment to a specific group, of which identity will be activated. This is an essential aspect, taking into account that when debating on the issue of European identity, it is often related to the na-

tional identity and presented in zero-sum terms: citizens of member states may feel either German, British, Greek or European (belonging to the EU). These identities are not considered to be complementary. This has been a contested assumption (Burgess, 2002; Risse, 2003; Bruter, 2004), as the Eurobarometer surveys show that “country first, but Europe, too” is the dominant outlook in most EU countries and people do not perceive this as contradictory (Risse, 2003). Moreover, we support the idea that rather than a mere shift in identity from being German, British or Greek to being European, a fundamental change in the underlying dynamics of identity formation is underway (Holmes, 2009). Most of the cases belong to the following scheme when referring to the collective identities related to territorial aspects: a person relates first to their community identity, then to their regional identity, their national identity, their European/ Asian identity, all to be integrated in a global identity². Another way of conceptualizing the relationship between European and national identities is the “marble cake” model, which is not explicitly dealt with in the literature (Risse, 2004). This model suggests that the various identities which an individual holds cannot be completely separated on different levels (Risse, 2004). This classification might only be suitable for academic purposes. Risse (2004, p. 6) claims that “identity components influence each other, mesh and blend into each other”, thus we cannot truly separate German or Dutch identity from European identity. Moreover, the author has an interesting position suggesting that “European identity might mean different things to different people” (Risse, 2004, p. 6).

We argue that, although the argument of multiple identities is valid, the preeminence of the national identity over the European identity of most of the people living across the EU is a serious matter when it comes to the EU democratic deficit, a European public sphere and the lack of an EU demos (Bârgăoanu, Negrea & Dascălu, 2010). This is a relevant aspect when considering the fact that if the national identity is strong, one may see another European citizen, from another member state, as “the other” thus impeding the identification with the EU to consolidate or even to crystallize. These facts are clearly revealed in crises situations, when different groups, communities or nations feel that their identity and interests are threatened by EU integration, as the Greek crisis in 2010 and the Euro crisis show. National identity is reinforced when any of its components is threatened or if some nations are thought to benefit more from the EU (more resources, for example) than others (Hix, 1998). This happens because people who highly identify with a group are “willing to work for the group and promote action when things get badly” (Scheepers, Spears, Doosje & Manstead, 2003, p. 569). Therefore, in times of crisis for the EU, European citizens promote action in favor of their countries and relate to their national identity, not to their European one. Creating a strong European identity is compulsory, as many scholars emphasize: „a collective identity above the level of primary groups and a collective we-feeling are needed in order for the EU citizens to acknowledge the sacrifices imposed in the name of the European collective goods” (Eriksen, 2007, p. 24). As Eriksen and Fossum (2004, p. 437) put it, “the success of the EU depends upon developing a shared identity and a value basis for integrating different conceptions of the good life, and a diverse range of societal interests”. Although “common norms and values are required to motivate collective action” (Eriksen & Fossum, 2004, p. 440), achieving one’s goals and interests due to membership of a particular group (e.g. the EU) might be enough to determine the person (the European citizen) to promote action in favor of the group (European citizens). This could happen, if the EU made efforts to at least develop this instrumental sense of belonging to the EU. And, as we show in this paper, this is already the case.

Moreover, EU needs a strong leadership which defines itself as European, for the European citizens. Jacques Delors, one of the most respected leaders of the European Community, clearly highlights this need that EU faces: “we don’t just need firefighters; we need architects too. And there are no architects left – and no visionaries either.”; “By «visionaries» I mean people who will evoke, stimulate or awaken in us that which is best in the human race” (Delors, 2011). As Díez Medrano (2009, p. 93) highlights, “we take for granted that European leaders are driven by long-term political identity projects for Europe”, as most public debate about the EU still concerns “mundane” policy-related issues and bargaining between states (Medrano, 2009) and not strategic long term objectives for the EU.

EU’s enlargement policy affects the perception of EU among European citizens. Checkel and Katzenstein (2009, p. 3) claim that with Europe once again united, after the enlargements in 2004 and 2007, “the store of collective memories has broadened enormously and this makes the emergence of a collective European identity even more problematic than it had been before enlargement”. In what regards the cultural assets of a European identity, this might well be the case, as these enlargement waves have introduced in the EU very different self-understandings of Europe, of its history and of its mission.

EU’s “others” are frequently constructed as territorially defined entities such as America, Russia, Asia and even Turkey (Risse, Engelmann-Martin, Knopf & Roscher, 1999). Turkey is currently a candidate to the EU, fact that triggers confusion in identifying this specific EU’s “other”. In our view, this controversy would be resolved once the decision on granting the membership or postponing the enlargement process was made. European leaders have also tried to present the continent’s own past of wars and nationalist rivalries as the “other” to the public (Risse et al., 1999). A relevant example is the Franco-German reconciliation and the strong relation, starting with the founding treaties, between the two once rival countries.

Although a truly consolidated European identity will not emerge in only a few decades, but rather in centuries (Lewis, 2008), if European leaders fail to support this process, first for themselves, then for the European citizens, EU’s future might be in danger (Bângăoanu et al., 2010).

3. Instrumental European identity, an empirical stance

We consider one of the most relevant perspectives on European identity in the literature to consist in the theories of the emergence of a European identity (Jimenez, Gorniak, Koscic, Kiss & Kandulla, 2004):

- a. a “cultural” theory, which understands identities as being based on ethno-cultural factors generated through a long-term process;
- b. a “civic” theory, which understands identities as being based on agreement over rules for peaceful political co-existence;
- c. an “instrumental” theory, which conceives of identities as being based on self-interest calculation (whether economic or political).

In what concerns the “cultural” theory, scholars argue that if a European identity were to emerge, it would not, and should not, be based on the same identity markers which the nation state promotes, such as language, myths or a common cultural heritage (Jimenez et al., 2004). The authors claim that „while it may be possible for a cultural European identity to emerge, this would certainly take a long time and would ultimately lead to the substitution of national identities” (Jimenez et al., 2004, p. 2).

From the “civic” perspective on European identity, “the substance of EU membership lies in a commitment to the shared values of the Union as expressed in its constituent documents, a commitment to the duties and rights of a civic society covering specific areas of public life, a commitment to membership of a polity which promotes the direct opposite of classic ethno-nationalism” (Jimenez et al., 2004, p. 4). This perspective connects European identity to concepts such as the Habermasian communicative rationality and the European public sphere, which are seen to be crucial for the emergence of a European identity, but mostly with his “constitutional patriotism” as the basis for political identity at a European level. This is a kind of patriotism which should be based on a “civic” (and cosmopolitan) understanding of the principles underlying the European polity (Castiglione, 2009). This means a supranational patriotism open to the inclusion of the “other”, but which remains rooted in a self-understanding of the European perspective. As other Habermasian concepts, it is seen as an attractive, but normative perspective. A less normative approach may be that of Castiglione (2009), who understands the civic European culture as a growing perception of citizens that the EU contributes to a fundamental (though multilayered) institutional and legal order within which they can exercise their liberty. Therefore, the basic assets of a European civic culture should simply be the freedom to work, study and travel in any EU member state.

Other scholars argue that instrumental factors may play an essential role in defining and strengthening individuals’ sense of identification with the UE. Some premises accepted in the literature are that: the perception of the potential gains or losses that might result from EU membership of the EU may influence peoples’ identification with it and “the better the citizen’s evaluation of the results of European policies (compared to the results of policies pursued by national government), the more likely s/he is to feel European” (Castiglione, 2009, p. 3). Schoen (2008, p. 5) claims that “drawing on Eurobarometer data, the analysis shows that instrumental self-interest and territorial identities contribute considerably to explaining support for common foreign affairs and defense policies”. Risse et al. (1999, p. 157) believe that any type of collective identity has an instrumental component as well: “Collective identities define and shape in the first place how actors view their perceived instrumental and material interests and which preferences are regarded as legitimate and appropriate for enacting given identities. At the same time, a change in perceived material and instrumental interests might well lead over time to changes in collective identities”. Once the European Community created the single market and then the unique market, some European citizens had major benefits. Thus, identity change in response to market developments reflects shifting economic self-interests (Checkel & Katzenstein, 2009). Fligstein (2009) conducted a research into finding out who the Europeans – the people who positively identify with EU – were. His premise relies on this connection between the identification with the EU and the material benefits some Europeans have as a result of their country’s membership in the EU. He claims that those who have a sense of belonging to the EU “tend to be the most privileged strata of society: managers, professionals, white-collar workers, educated people, and young people” who “speak second languages, report having traveled to another member state in the past twelve months, and have joined European-wide organizations” (Fligstein, 2009, p. 134). Although his corpus and the results of his research cannot reach such a conclusion, he suggests that “interest and identity are wrapped up together” (Fligstein, 2009, p. 146). As Sanchez-Cuenca (2000, p. 168) more plastically suggests, “identities, so to speak, do not fall from heaven: they are a consequence of complex economic and political calculations”.

In this context, the authors (Jimenez et al., 2004) promote an interesting perspective on the multiple identities theory, as they consider the nature of the compatibility between the national and European identity to be the different approaches of identity emergence: while national identities are largely “cultural”, European identities are primarily “instrumental”. We firmly support this theory and claim that the only theory of European identity which has empirical evidence is the instrumental one. People across the EU tend to identify with the supranational structure when they perceive the benefits that EU brings in their lives, when EU becomes real to them. The most relevant and perceivable instruments in developing such an identity across the EU are the financial opportunities which EU bring to its citizens (Sanchez Salgado, 2008) through the funds it offers under the Regional and Cohesion Policy, the Common Agriculture and Fisheries Policies and the thematic policies. This could be a valid solution for the emergence of a European identity, which could be promoted by a strong leadership of the EU, along with a well communicated vision and mission for the supranational structure.

In triggering and consolidating national identity, nation states make use of various symbols and instruments –“identity markers” –, which have the purpose to remind citizens they belong to a national community. Such symbols and instruments are the flag, the anthem, the currency, passports and particular national holidays when relevant moments in the nation’s history are commemorated (Risse, 2010b). As Kaelble (2009) notes, during the late 1940s and the early 1950s, when a strong European movement was active in the initial period of European integration, many European symbols were proposed: various designs of a European flag; postage stamps; historical places commemorating Europe, such as Strasbourg; human rights charters; historical figures such as Charlemagne, reinforced by the Charlemagne prize of Aix-la-Chapelle; institutions for advanced education – the College of Europe in Bruges; and rituals such as the lifting of border barriers by young Europeans or the signing of international treaties by elder statesmen. The EU has followed the national strategy in promoting its own identity markers, such as the EU’s flag and anthem, the Euro, the EU’s flag on European citizens’ passports and even holidays, such as the 9th of May, when every European should celebrate the birth of the European Community. But only the European flag, the Erasmus program, and the EU currency (the Euro) have succeeded (Kaelble, 2009), in a relative manner, while most other European symbols have remained weak or ambiguous: the European anthem and Europe Day remain largely unobserved and unknown and references to outstanding European historical figures are not frequent (Kaelble, 2009).

Taking into account that these identity markers don’t have the same power as the national ones, the EU has had to be innovative and use other strategies to enforce a sense of belonging to the EU. We believe that the most innovative strategy is the use of EU funds, so that EU citizens may relate directly to the EU. In this way, it is perceived that EU has direct effects on their day to day life. Moreover, the mandatory rules regarding the visual identity of the EU that every institution which manages European funds and every beneficiary of these funds must respect and apply are a strong instrument for identity acquisition towards the EU. To this end, the EU finances large communication campaigns, which use different media to reach the objective of informing both potential beneficiaries *and the large public* on the financial opportunities which EU offers its citizens to develop their business, the region’s infrastructure, their organizations’ human resources and so on. Therefore, every citizen of the member states has to know, even if s/he is not directly involved, that the EU has a major contribution in making his/her life better. Taking into consideration that the message of the large communication campaigns and the purpose of the mandatory rules regarding the visual iden-

tity of the EU connect more with the instrumental component of one's collective identity than with the cultural or affective ones, we consider that both at the EU level (as in strategic objectives) and at the empirical level, the emergence of an instrumental European identity is considered the main card to be played in developing citizens' sense of belonging to the EU. This paper focuses on finding the empirical evidence of using identity markers and specific frames in order to develop such an instrumental identity among Romanians. The corpus consists in articles about EU funds of two online news portals in Romania – www.hotnews.ro and www.ziare.com – for the March-June 2012 time frame.

4. Research

4.1. Methodology

Bearing these arguments in mind, we have carried out a content analysis in order to identify to what extent Romanian online media promote markers and frames of an instrumental European identity. The two selected portals, www.hotnews.ro and www.ziare.com are the most visited news portals in Romania which cover the subject of EU funds, their management and the implementation of EU-funded projects and programmes. The websites address a general public, with a high level of education (higher education), mainly from urban areas.

The research questions are the following:

- a. Which are the most promoted markers and frames of an instrumental European identity, through articles about EU funds posted on the two news portals?
- b. What visibility do EU identity markers and frames reflected through news about the management of EU funds have?
- c. Which is the predominance of such news?
- d. How do Romanian citizens comment on these news, in terms of identity acquisition?

In order to find the answers to these questions, we collected the data by downloading all relevant articles in the March – June 2012 time frame on EU funds, EU-funded projects and programmes from the news portals www.hotnews.ro and www.ziare.com. The chosen categories of articles on the portals were “Economy” for www.hotnews.ro and “Business” for the latter. These chapters cover the subject of European funds in the portals' structure – “euRO-fonduri” for www.hotnews.ro and “Funds” for www.ziare.com.

The search resulted in 47 relevant articles on www.hotnews.ro and 38 such articles on www.ziare.com. Both the unit of analysis and the unit of observation consist in the individual article for the first content analysis application (to find answers to questions a-c) and the comment for the second one, expected to offer an answer for the last research question.

Moreover, these results are compared with those of a similar research conducted last year on the same portals, also for the March-June time frame. We consider that the Euro crisis and the problems regarding the Operational Programmes, which triggered warnings of suspension of payments from the European Commission, result in a new context, which may have changed the results revealed by the first research.

4.2. Results and discussion

The predominance of articles about the implementation and management of EU-funded projects and programmes in Romania appears to be quite low, as there are only 0,16% articles on these topics in the “Economy” section of www.hotnews.ro, in the March-June 2011 time frame and 0,12% on the “Business” category of www.ziare.com, in the same time frame (see Table 1 and Table 2 below). These topics have similar visibility on the two portals.

Table 1. Articles in the “Economy” section, www.hotnews.ro, March-June 2012.

	Articles on EU funds	Articles in the “Economy” chapter
March-June 2012	47	2856
% articles on EU funds	0,16 %	

Table 2. Articles in the “Business” section, www.ziare.com, March-June 2012.

	Articles on EU funds	Articles in the “Business” chapter
March-June 2012	38	3152
% articles on EU funds	0,12%	

Results of the similar research conducted last year revealed that only 0,046% of articles in the “Economy” of www.hotnews.ro and 0,045% on the “Business” of www.ziare.com were posted. Therefore, in the 4 months of 2012 the topic of EU funds was more visible through these portals, than in the same period of 2011. Although the difference is not big, this might be an effect of the problems Romania has faced regarding the Operational Programmes under the cohesion objective, which triggered warnings of suspension of payments on behalf of the European Commission, especially for the Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development (SOP HRD). Moreover, journalists insist on presenting to their readers that Romania can not spend EU money properly and that this situation gets worse as time passes.

Despite the fact that the predominance of news about EU funds is quite low, we consider it relevant, as there is a significant number of diverse topics debated in the articles on the two of the portals. Therefore, the fact that 32 articles were dedicated in March 2012 on both portals (as an example) to EU funds, among topics such as companies, gadgets, business and others, shows that journalists are interested in the topic and consider it relevant to their readers.

As mentioned, we aim to identify the EU identity markers and frames reflected through news about the management of EU funds and the implementation of EU-funded programmes and projects and to reflect on their visibility in the articles. To this end, we applied the following category scheme, separately for the two portals and then a centralization of data for both portals:

Table 3. Category scheme 1, www.ziare.com.

Category*	Subcategory	Frequency of the unit of analysis (individual article)
A. EU identity markers	1. picture of EU flag	1
	2. picture of the Euro symbol	2
	3. picture of European money (Euros)	9
	4. logo of Operational Programmes	2
	5. Europe's map	1
	6. None	24
B.	1. EU offers great amounts of money	11
	2. Not mentioned	27
C.	1. EU offers free money	3
	2. Not mentioned	35
D. EU funds absorption rate in Romania	1. Negative	22
	2. Positive	1
	3. Not mentioned	15
E.	1. EU funds have many beneficiaries	13
	2. Not mentioned	25
F.	1. Gains of absorbing EU money	12
	2. Not mentioned	26
G.	1. Disadvantages of absorbing EU money	1
	2. Not mentioned	37
H.	1. Romania mismanages EU funds	27
	2. Not mentioned	11
I. Presence of EU institutions	1. Active role	12
	2. Passive role	5
	3. No presence	21

* From category B to category H we refer to frames.

Table 4. Category scheme 1, www.hotnews.ro.

Category*	Subcategory	Frequency of the unit of analysis (individual article)
A. EU identity markers	1. picture of EU flag	0
	2. picture of the Euro symbol	0
	3. picture of European money (Euros)	0
	4. logo of Operational Programmes	0
	5. Europe's map	0
	5. None	47
B.	1. EU offers great amounts of money	19
	2. Not mentioned	28
C.	1. EU offers free money	4
	2. Not mentioned	43
D. EU funds absorption rate in Romania	1. Negative	24
	2. Positive	0
	3. Not mentioned	23
E.	1. EU funds have many beneficiaries	25
	2. Not mentioned	22
F.	1. Gains of absorbing EU money	20
	2. Not mentioned	27
G.	1. Disadvantages of absorbing EU money	2
	2. Not mentioned	45
H.	1. Romania mismanages EU funds	26
	2. Not mentioned	21
I Presence of EU institutions	1. Active role	19
	2. Passive role	3
	3. No presence	25

* From category B to category H we refer to frames.

Table 5. Category scheme 1, both portals.

Category*	Subcategory	Frequency of the unit of analysis (individual article)
A. EU identity markers	1. picture of EU flag	1
	2. picture of the Euro symbol	2
	3. picture of European money (Euros)	9
	4. logo of Operational Programmes	2
	5. Europe's map	1
	5. None	71
B.	1. EU offers great amounts of money	30
	2. Not mentioned	55
C.	1. EU offers free money	7
	2. Not mentioned	78
D. EU funds absorption rate in Romania	1. Negative	46
	2. Positive	1
	3. Not mentioned	38
E.	1. EU funds have many beneficiaries	38
	2. Not mentioned	47
F.	1. Gains of absorbing EU money	32
	2. Not mentioned	53
G.	1. Disadvantages of absorbing EU money	3
	2. Not mentioned	82
H.	1. Romania mismanages EU funds	53
	2. Not mentioned	32
I. Presence of EU institutions	1. Active role	31
	2. Passive role	8
	3. No presence	46

* From category B to category H we refer to frames.

We have mentioned that the EU has followed the national strategy in promoting its own identity markers, such as the EU's flag, anthem and the Euro. We searched for such identity markers in the articles about the implementation of EU funds and the management of EU-funded projects and programmes in Romania. We have found that just 1 article from the 85 relevant articles posted on both news portals used a photo of the EU flag, 2 articles used photos with the Euro symbol and 9 articles used photos of Euros. Moreover, this research has also revealed the use of logos of Operational Programmes in 2 articles and 1 picture with Europe's map. These last two identity markers were not found in the articles posted last year on the two portals. Actually, the use of the logos is a sign of respecting the visual identity rules for the Structural Instruments that we have mentioned play a key role in the instrumental European identity acquisition of European citizens. The research from last year showed no use of such visual identity markers by journalists, as they are not mandatory for their profession, but only for the beneficiaries of EU-funded projects in press releases or press ads (not to mention informative or promotional materials for the projects). Therefore, this finding is quite interesting: although in just 2 cases, journalists have started to use visual identity markers, even if they are not mandatory for the articles they post. Moreover, we should mention that the two articles are from www.ziare.com, as www.hotnews.ro did not present articles with pictures of such identity markers. Results from last year showed a much lower use of these identity markers – just 4 articles of 33 used photos of the EU flag (1), the Euro symbol (2) and European money (1).

One may reach the conclusion that, although we have found a low visibility of these EU identity markers, their appearance suggests that journalists relate to an EU identity and unconsciously promote it to their readers – the Romanian citizens. Moreover, taking into account the fact that pictures of the Euro symbol and EU money appear 11 times and there is just one picture of the EU flag and 1 of Europe's map, one might suggest there is an instance of an instrumental European identity, more than a cultural or civic one (although at a rudimentary level). Results also show that identity markers are not that memorable and relevant to the EU as they are for the national state – even the journalists did not insist on these markers (consciously), especially those from www.hotnews.com, who didn't use them at all. More relevant for the EU identity acquisition are the frames used in the articles, thus transmitted to the public.

The appearance and frequency of the frames used to support the idea that one of the major strategies which EU enforces in order to create a sense of belonging to the EU in every European citizen, through promoting the gains they have as a result of their country getting EU funds, is quite high. Thirty articles out of 85 (11 from www.ziare.com and 19 from www.hotnews.ro) promote as a positive fact that EU offers Romania large amounts of money to be spent. Moreover, 7 articles highlight that these are “free money”. Although unconsciously used, this frame helps to increase the significant role that instrumental factors play in defining and strengthening individuals' sense of identification with the EU.

By comparing these results with those of the research conducted last year, it seems that in 2012 these frames – EU gives Romania great amounts of money and EU offers Romania free money – are less used than in 2011, when almost a half of the articles – 14 out of 33 – used the first frame and 6 out of 33 the other one, in comparison with 7 out of 85. If one has read articles on EU funds in Romania, s/he finds that these are overused frames starting with the 1st of January 2007, when Romania became a member of the EU and a beneficiary of post-accession EU funds. Therefore, it is a very interesting finding that these frames are not as promoted as they used to be in the first years of benefiting from EU funds. This might be a

reaction of the disappointment triggered by the difficult process of absorbing EU money, which revealed several problems during its implementation in Romania.

The topic of the absorption rate of EU funds in Romania is frequently used and it is presented both in positive, but mostly in negative terms: only 1 article presents the situation as positive, while 46 articles promote the idea that Romania does not perform at all at spending EU money. This is true for more than half of the articles which we analyzed, as it resulted last year. This is consistent with the actual situation regarding EU funds' absorption: as the situation is getting worse (time passes by and no significant progress is made), journalists frame it accordingly.

As it resulted last year as well, despite the fact that one might consider this frame to negatively affect Romanians' identification to the EU, it actually enforces it, as the second analysis shows. The idea unanimously promoted on the two portals is that EU gives Romania great amounts of money and if they are not spent, it is Romania's and not EU's fault. The EU institutions make everything possible to help Romanian authorities to best manage EU funds and their implementation, but Romanian institutions are not able to work accordingly, they are even accused to be obstacles in the beneficiaries' ways of absorbing the funds.

Beneficiaries of EU funds are mentioned at least once in 38 articles of the 85 analyzed. Their mentioning is rarely connected to the gains they might have due to EU funds, but more often to the problems they face when trying to spend them. Moreover, only 32 out of the 85 articles on both portals present gains of absorbing EU money. We have expected more articles promoting this frame. This is clearly an effect of the low absorption rate in the last year, as the results of the research conducted in 2011 are in the opposite direction. More specifically, this frame – EU funds have many beneficiaries – is one of the most used in 2011 to highlight the gains of being a European citizen, which directly connects to our definition of instrumental European identity. Actually, 11 articles (out of 33) show examples of specific advantages Romanian citizens have once absorbing EU money. Most of them present the end results of different EU-funded projects, while just 1 article (which does not present advantages/gains) mentions some disadvantages beneficiaries of EU-funded projects face in their implementation. Therefore, EU funds were presented as significant for Romania's development last year, sometimes as the only chance for the modernization of different sectors of society. It is considered that EU funds mostly bring benefits and only few disadvantages. When problems appear, it is the Romanian authorities that are responsible, not the EU. Although Romania is still to blame for the low rate of EU funds absorption, all the problems Romanians as beneficiaries of these funds have faced in the past months – because of the poor performance of Romanian institutions responsible with the management of EU funds – make this great opportunity a disappointment.

The fact that only 3 articles out of 85 present some disadvantages of absorbing EU funds connects with the idea that these funds are still considered a great opportunity for Romanian society. Moreover, the EU is seen as a good actor, who intends to help Romania through these funds, and Romanian institutions are to blame for the low absorption rate. Actually, this is illustrated by the use of the frame "Romania mismanages EU funds", as 53 articles from both portals (out of 85) promote this perspective. In this regard, www.ziare.com insists more than www.hotnews.ro, with 27 out of 38 articles using this frame on the first portal, and 26 out of 47 on the latter. As the research conducted last year also shows, this frame helps promote an image of the "good guy" vs. "bad guy" cleavage, which also appears after conducting the second content analysis, on the comments readers posted on the portals, as a reaction to the

individual articles. The situation is presented in favor of the EU, which gives free money to European citizens (although less than last year) – in this case Romanians – and Romania is not able to spend it properly, due to cases of corruption, discrimination, incompetence, lack of money for co-funding the projects, among others.

Another relevant frame used to make EU visible to its citizens is the presence of EU institutions, mostly the European Commission. Thirty one articles present EU institutions in active roles, while 8 mention the European Commission and other EU actors as having a passive approach to a specific debated issue. Through the European Commission, the EU acts as an objective judge of the way its rules are respected and which offers “carrots and sticks” when necessary. Results from last year show a lower appearance of the EU institutions both in active and passive roles (7 and 1 articles, respectively). This finding may be explained by the fact that once the European Commission started to send audit missions to Romania, it discovered many problems and started to “punish” Romanian institutions because of their incompetence.

In order to find an answer to the forth research question, we conducted a second content analysis (see Table 7 below).

Table 6. Number of comments and articles, both portals.

	Articles	Comments
www.ziare.com	38	86
www.hotnews.ro	47	232
Total	85	318

As Table 6 above shows, the 36 articles from www.ziare.com triggered 86 comments, while the 47 articles from www.hotnews.ro – 232 comments. There is a significant difference between the number of comments on the two portals, as www.hotnews.ro has triggered more comments for the March-June 2012 time frame.

Table 7. Category scheme 2.

Category	Subcategory	Frequency of the unit of analysis (comment) www.ziare.com	Frequency of the unit of analysis (comment) www.hotnews.ro
A.	1. EU offers Romania free money (“good guy”)	5	23
	2. EU discriminates Romania (“bad guy”)	2	8
	3. Not mentioned	79	201
B.	1. Romania mismanages EU money (“bad guy”)	50	117
	2. Romania does everything it can (“good guy”)	0	6
	3.. Not mentioned	36	109

The second content analysis shows that Romanians see the EU rather as conducting actions which have positive effects on their lives, as being the “good guy” (28 comments) more often than the “bad guy” (10 comments). Although these frames do not appear in the majority of the comments – 280, these results are relevant when discussing about how Romanian citizens see the EU. Moreover, the 280 comments which did not present these frames don’t relate in any other way to the EU. Therefore, there are more Romanians who see the EU as the “good guy”, rather than the “bad guy” regarding its role in the low absorption rate of EU funds in Romania. This is consistent with the result of the first content analysis regarding the fact that it is not EU’s fault that Romania can not spend the EU funds. These results are similar with those revealed by the research conducted last year. Moreover, 52,52% of the comments suggest Romania is the “bad guy”, as its institutions mismanage EU money, while only 6 (1,89%) comments claim that Romanian authorities do everything they can in spending and managing EU funds. Last year results show a similar picture: 43,97 % of the comments suggest Romania is the “bad guy”, while only 3 (2,59%) comments claim that Romanian authorities do everything they can to perform. There are not significant differences in the appearance of these frames in the comments of the two portals.

These findings suggest that well educated Romanians who read online articles identify with the EU in instrumental terms; EU is real to them to the extent that they clearly perceive the benefits that EU brings in their lives.. Therefore, EU appears to be “the good guy” when related to the implementation and spending of EU funds, whereas Romanian institutions are the ones that make mistake after mistake in helping its citizens benefit from EU’s grants. This is an empirical finding of the hypotheses promoted in the literature that the better the citizen’s evaluation of the results of the European policies, compared to the results of policies pursued by national governments, the more likely s/he is to identify with the EU.

When it comes to the implementation and management of EU funds, Romanian citizens tend to sanction Romanian institutions and to relate to the EU in a positive manner. This seems to be the case more than last year, as the context has changed: the European Commission sent audit missions in Romania which, especially regarding SOP HRD, found problems in the programmes’ implementation and decided to suspend payments to Romanian managing institutions. There seems to be a general conclusion on behalf of Romanians that Romanian institutions and the political class are not truly interested in the absorption of EU funds, although they are being promoted as the single chance for Romania’s modernization. This conclusion brings a lot of disappointment with the current situation regarding the spending of EU funds. Although Romanians strongly criticize Romanian institutions, this seems not to happen in the case of EU. Results did not show an increase of skepticism regarding EU’s motives for offering free money to Romania, taking into account that EU is still seen as the “good guy” and Romania the “bad guy”.

We consider that in this context an interesting hypothesis to test in further studies is that, when facing a poor absorption rate and poor management of EU funds, citizens of a member state identify (in instrumental terms) more with EU than with the member state they belong to.

5. Conclusion

This paper suggests that a specific type of European identity is already a reality -the instrumental European identity – and presents the results of two content analyses conducted on

85 articles on EU funds and their comments (318) from two Romanian news portals. Moreover, it compares the results of these two content analyses with a similar research conducted for the same time-frame (March-June) in 2011.

EU cannot make use of the same identity markers which countries promote to reassure their citizens' identification with the respective countries. Similar EU identity markers do not have the same power as the national ones. This study shows that some articles had pictures of the EU flag or currency, which means that journalists are aware of this fact. Although for www.ziare.com these photos were more used than in 2011, this does not change the fact that such identity markers are considered not to work as much as intended. Therefore, the EU has had to be innovative and use other strategies to enforce a sense of belonging to the EU among member states' citizens. European citizens tend to identify with EU when they perceive the benefits which it brings in their lives, when EU becomes real to them. The most relevant and perceivable instruments in developing such an identity are the financial opportunities which EU brings to its citizens through the funds it offers under the Regional and Cohesion Policy, the Common Agriculture and Fisheries Policies and the thematic policies.

Results of the conducted research have confirmed the presence of instrumental identity markers in articles posted on just one of the two news portals taken into account – www.ziare.com, such as pictures of the European flag, Europe's map, the Euro symbol and European money, although quite low. Nevertheless, there are more articles which use these identity frames in 2012 than in 2011.

Moreover, when it comes to frames used to foster an instrumental European identity, this research has different results than the one conducted last year: while in 2011 promoting the benefits Romanians have as a result of their country getting EU funds is frequently used, in 2012 less than 50% of the articles on both portals present gains of absorbing EU money. This is clearly an effect of the low EU funds absorption rate in the past year, as the results of the research conducted in 2011 are in the opposite direction. While the benefits of absorbing EU funds were presented as significant for Romania's development last year, sometimes as the only chance for the modernization of different sectors of society, in 2012 journalists do not insist on this. However, both in 2011 and 2012 journalists promote the view that EU funds bring mostly benefits and only few disadvantages and that when problems appear, it is the Romanian authorities which are responsible, not the EU. Actually, the frame "Romania mis-manages EU funds" is the most used in 2012. As the research conducted last year also shows, this frame helps promoting an image of the "good guy" vs. "bad guy" cleavage, which also appears after conducting the second content analysis, on the comments readers posted on the portals. Journalists present EU in a positive manner. EU gives free money to Romanian citizens (although less than last year) and Romania is not able to spend it properly, due to cases of corruption, discrimination, incompetence, lack of money for co-funding the projects, among others.

Readers comment on the issue of the implementation and management of EU funds the same way journalists frame it in the articles. They tend to sanction Romanian institutions because of their incompetence in managing the funds, but relate to the EU in a positive manner. Romanians believe EU delivers important economic benefits to their communities and their country. We consider this to be both a necessary condition for the emergence of an instrumental European identity and an instance of this concept in real life circumstances. Although it currently is at a rudimentary level, an instrumental European identity exists due to efforts promoted by EU institutions, one of the major strategies to achieve this being the fi-

nancial opportunities EU offers to its member states, with its benefits, and the news this issue generates.

Rezumat: Emergența unei sfere publice europene (SPE) și consolidarea unei identități europene (IE) reprezintă două procese interdependente cu rol fundamental în construcția uniunii politice, atât de dorită de unii teoreticieni ai Uniunii Europene. Cetățenii statelor membre UE ar trebui să aibă o identitate europeană, chiar și secundară, pentru a participa la dezbateri publice sau private cu privire la politicile și viitorul Uniunii. O perspectivă recentă în literatura despre identitatea europeană demonstrează că identitatea națională și cea europeană sunt compatibile. Motivul acestei compatibilități este că procesul de emergență al celor două identități are la bază fundamente diferite: în timp ce identitățile naționale sunt în primul rând formate din dimensiunea culturală, identitatea europeană este instrumentală. Lucrarea susține că identitatea europeană instrumentală, care presupune calcule cost-beneficiu, este o realitate. UE a experimentat metode noi care să contribuie la emergența identității europene, prin promovarea unor simboluri (precum steagul, imnul, moneda unică) utilizate și de statele naționale cu scopul de a dezvolta identificarea cu națiunea, în rândul cetățenilor. UE utilizează, însă, și oportunitățile de finanțare pe care le oferă cetățenilor pentru a dezvolta identificarea cu organizația supranațională. În acest cadru teoretic, lucrarea prezintă rezultatele unei analize de conținut, aplicată pe un corpus format din articole din cadrul portalurilor de știri www.hotnews.ro și www.ziare.com pentru perioada martie-iunie 2012. Întrebările de cercetare la care lucrarea caută un răspuns sunt următoarele: Care sunt simbolurile și cadrele utilizate pentru a dezvolta o identitate europeană instrumentală, promovate prin intermediul articolelor despre fondurile europene apărute pe cele două portaluri?; Cât de vizibile sunt aceste simboluri și cadre în știrile despre implementarea programelor și proiectelor finanțate prin intermediul fondurilor europene?; Care este predominanța acestor știri? Cum comentează cetățenii români aceste știri în ceea ce privește identificarea cu UE? Rezultatele acestei lucrări vor fi comparate cu cele ale unei cercetări similare realizate pentru perioada martie-iunie 2011. Criza euro, rata scăzută de absorbție a fondurilor europene și problemele apărute în implementarea Programelor Operaționale românești aflate sub obiectivul de convergență al Politicii Regionale și de Coeziune (ce au atras sancțiuni din partea Comisiei Europene) au determinat obținerea unor alte rezultate. Lucrarea susține că simbolurile și cadrele utilizate pentru a dezvolta o identitate europeană instrumentală au un impact semnificativ, având în vedere că sunt preluate de cititori.

Cuvinte-cheie: fonduri europene, proiecte și programe finanțate de UE, identitate europeană, identitate europeană instrumentală.

Notes

¹ The research conducted last year is described in the paper *Visibility of the EU through EU-funded Programmes and Projects. What about an Instrumental European Identity?*, presented at the international conference *Identity and Intercultural Communication*, organized by the Centre of Research in Communication, the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania on 26-27 September 2011; forthcoming in the conference volume published by Cambridge University Press.

² At this point, one has to bear in mind the difference between European and EU identity (in this paper European identity equals EU identity), as people might identify with Europe, but not with the EU and vice versa.

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