

WHAT IS A EUROPEAN IDENTITY?

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Abstract: Europe as a concept plays an important role in the times of rising migration. More and more countries join the European Union and enable their citizens to travel and work freely in member states. Faced with the current state of affairs, the common identity shared by people seems more important than ever before. However, is the concept of European identity, which is based on the notion of common memory of these countries, really internalized by people or is it just a concept used by the EU politicians? This paper presents the attitudes present in the German, British and Polish press towards Greece during the time before and after the Greek bailout referendum, which was the climax of the Eurozone crisis. By the means of such a content analysis, the author was able to grasp the aspects forming the European identity and therefore to observe and comment on its picture in three big EU member states: Germany, Great Britain and Poland.

Keywords: European identity, European Union, Greek bailout referendum, Eurozone crisis

I. INTRODUCTION

European identity (sometimes referred to as European identities) is a concept created to explain the feeling of identification with Europe where

individuals orient themselves to European history and values, which are often seen as common for the citizens of all European countries (as opposed to other continents). Human identity is often seen as a mosaic (Arroyabe, 1999), which highlights the fact that it can be multiple and is rather situation-specific making it salient in specific contexts.¹ As Arroyabe (1999 : 28-29) puts it, Europe and the European Union as a modern European form of community is a concept that is based on the cold calculations of the necessary actions for both political and economic stability and global recognition. As he puts it: "this integration process is not due to some lofty European spirit, and not even to humdrum common sense; it has been forced upon Europeans by circumstances." (Arroyabe 1999 : 29) At the same time a European identity stays fragmented and plural with no dominant state, or at least no clear hegemon, although the voices about the significant influence of Germany as a main contributor to the common budget have been raised since the Eurozone and the Migrant crisis.

It is a fact that an important role in shaping a European identity play the mass media themselves, by promoting the symbols and general positive attitude towards the idea of the European integration as such.

Reference to a collective European identity is also present in preambles of the Rome, Maastricht and Amsterdam treaties.²

Taking into the consideration the specifics of European identity/identities enlisted above, an assumption can be made that with the situation of economic or political (understood as international safety) threat, the reactions of the citizens of particular European countries are going to differ and the media image could be less favourable than in the times of peace.

II. METHODOLOGY AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The article is based on three research questions and their hypotheses:

RQ1: What is a European identity?

H1: There is no one unique European identity and it's a collection of national identities.

RQ2: How is a European identity presented in media in the times of crisis?

H2: In the times of crisis the individual particular interests of the countries take over the idea of a united European community.

RQ3: How much space is devoted in the printed media to the topic of a European identity?

H3: The topic of a European identity is continuously present in media of the EU member states, however, it is not the main topic of these media.

The answer for the research questions was provided by the means of a content analysis of the press titles from Germany, Great Britain and Poland in

the period from 25.06.2015 till 12.07.2015. The aforementioned period was chosen as it was the climax of the Eurozone crisis. In May 2010 Greece was promised the bailout payment from the European Commission together with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) amounting 110 billion euro (called the First Bailout Package, which consisted of 80bn from the Eurozone member states and 30bn from the IMF). The help to the EU countries was also aided by the technical support of the European Central Bank (ECB) and therefore the three institutions were nicknamed the Troika. Soon it was clear that the three-year 110bn loan would not be enough to rescue the Greek economy and the promised austerity measures would not be implemented as swiftly as the Troika would expect them to be. As a result in October 2011 the Second Bailout Programme was offered, this time amounting to 130bn euro. It was already then that the first idea of a referendum on the bailout programme conditions was suggested by the then Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou, who opposed to the planned 50% haircut of Greek debt owed to private creditors. The initial response to the announcement of the referendum was negative in Greece as well as in the European Union member states. In domestic context, referendum was seen as a manoeuvre of the compromised government to avoid the early elections. Also the constitutional issues connected with the matter of the referendum were arisen. According to Article 44 of the constitution of Greece referenda on fiscal bills are not allowed (as opposed to referenda on critical national matters and social bills).³ The referendum was cancelled and the newly appointed Prime Minister Lucas Papademos was responsible for implementing the austerity measures. Unfortunately,

their side-effect was a worsening of the Greek recession (which began in 2008) that resulted in the Troika agreeing on the second bailout package for this country of 130bn euro. In January 2015 new elections took place in immersed in the crisis Greece. As a result Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left) took over the power and formed an anti-austerity government. Alexis Tsipras has become the Prime Minister of Greece. The new government refused to respect the terms of its current bailout agreement and began their own new negotiations with the Troika. On 27 June 2015 Tsipras announced the Greek bailout referendum which was accepted by the parliament the day later. The referendum was announced without prior consultations with the Troika and given to the public opinion among all via Tsipras Twitter account.



Fig. 1 Alexis Tsipras announces Greek bailout referendum on 28.06.2015.

The biggest number of sceptical press materials in the chosen period appeared in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. The right spectrum press tended to be generally more sceptical towards the situation in Greece and the meaningfulness of the Troika help than the other three newspapers, except of the UK where the situation was opposite as shown in Fig. 1.

TABLE I. NUMBER OF DIFFERENT PRESS MATERIALS DEVOTED TO THE TOPIC OF GREECE AND GREEK CRISIS FROM 25.06-12.07.2015

Overtone	Country		
	Germany	UK	Poland
Positive	51	42	18
Neutral	62	74	53
Negative	162	71	45
Altogether	275	187	116

The analysis covers the press issues from 25.06 until 12.07 (a week after referendum on 5.06.2015). The analysed press materials were collected from daily newspapers in Germany: Süddeutsche Zeitung (representing the left side of the spectrum) and Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung(right). In the United Kingdom the Guardian (left) and the Times (right) were chosen. In Poland, respectively, Gazeta Wyborcza and Rzeczpospolita.

III. RESULTS

Germany is the Eurozone country which had the biggest financial burden in bailout packages offered to Greece by the Troika. Also in the European arena German Chancellor, Angela Merkel has become a key figure in the analysed articles in newspapers in Germany, the UK and Poland.

The number of articles devoted to the topic of Greece in the analysed period of time varied depending on a country. As seen in the Table 1, the interest in the topic of Eurozone crisis in Greece and Greek referendum was noticeably more popular in the German press, then in British and the least common in Polish daily newspapers.

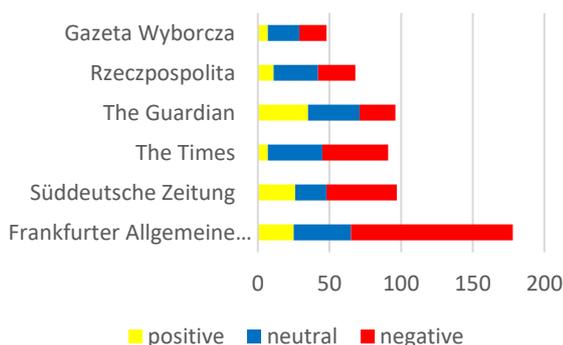


Fig. 2 Number of press materials and their overtone.

The press materials that were analysed were divided into separate popular types: the news, interview, column, review, commentary, report, silhouette and other (such as, e.g. letter to the editor, comic, photo, reprinted articles from foreign newspapers). Fig. 3 shows the space devoted to the Greek Eurozone crisis in each newspaper.

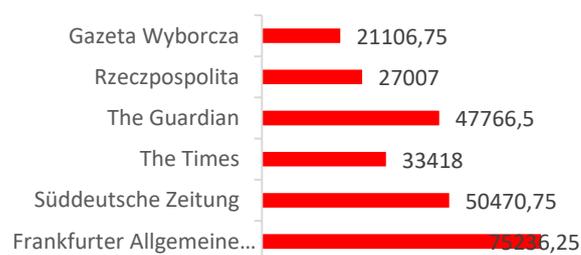


Fig. 3 Space devoted to Greece in each newspaper in cm².

As seen from the Fig. 3 the place devoted to the topic of Greece in the time between announcing the referendum and a week after, was generally more significant in the press titles representing the right side of the political arena. The same situation was in the case of British the Times, which is the smallest format of all six analysed dailies.

Newspaper	Type of a press material							
	News	Interview	Column	Review	Commentary	Report	Silhouette	Other
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung	21556,5	1160	6599,5	143	12321,5	29084,25	1707	2664,5
Süddeutsche Zeitung	19438,75	0	2337	0	6023,75	18061,25	626	3984
The Times	13521,5	0	3317,25	0	3669,5	10034,25	209	2666,5
The Guardian	18108,75	0	911,5	0	15136,5	5077,75	536,5	7995,5
Rzeczpospolita	7643	1353,5	1038,25	0	5148,25	10872	952	0
Gazeta Wyborcza	5030	3761,25	2067,5	0	1712,25	5929,75	1820	786

Fig. 4 Space devoted to Greece in different press materials in cm².

As seen from the Fig. 4 there are certain types of press materials that were popular in the press in a given country, while almost not present in other countries. This is the case with interviews, which were relatively popular in Polish and non-existent in e.g. German press, or a review of a play that appeared in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung and because of its Greek origins, the suggestion towards the current Greek situation was drawn.

It is also visible that the materials about Greece in Poland did not have so often a status of the news and belonged to the more publicist types such as columns, commentaries or reports. Polish press also devoted more space to present the silhouettes of important figures of the crisis, such as Alexis Tsipras, Christine Lagarde (IMF), Yanis Varoufakis (Minister of Finance in Greece between January and September 2015), etc.

On the other hand, the British press, and especially the Times had regularly comic materials on the topic of Eurozone crisis and Greece. Because of the character of this form, the comics are explicit and hardly belong to the “neutral” category. One of the example can be a caricature of Angela Merkel in a uniform showing the way to the exit marked as “Grexit”, where behind the open door one can see a wall.

The difference in the presentation of Greece and its actions connected to bailout referendum as well as financial crisis in general is the most visible in the British press. The number of negative press materials in the Times was almost double to the number of such materials in the Guardian. Also the Guardian tended to present more neutral (38%) and positive (36%) articles.

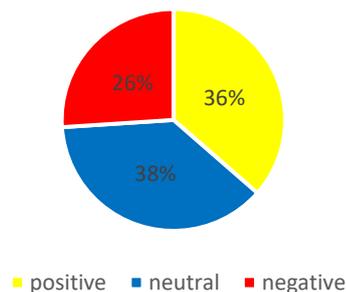


Fig. 5 Percentage and overtone of the press materials in the Guardian.

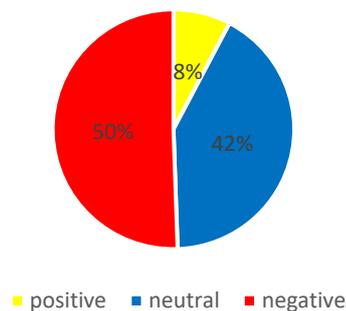
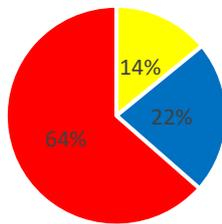


Fig. 6 Percentage and overtone of the press materials in the Times.

In Germany the number of neutral press materials was similar in both Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung and Süddeutsche Zeitung. The differences are visible in the number of positive and negative articles. The right-wing Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung tends to publish more negative materials, while the left-wing Süddeutsche Zeitung – significantly less, although the number of sceptical articles is still high in both

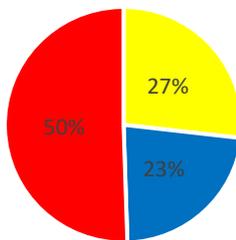
newspapers and is the main overtone of the press materials.

In Poland, on the other hand, the overtone of the press materials was similarly distributed in both analysed daily newspapers. The differences were almost none.



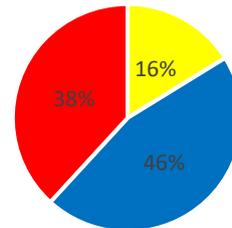
■ positive ■ neutral ■ negative

Fig. 7 Percentage and overtone of the press materials in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung.



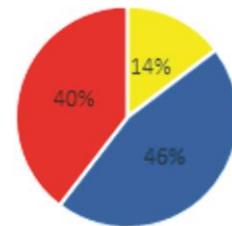
■ positive ■ neutral ■ negative

Fig. 8 Percentage and overtone of the press materials in the Süddeutsche Zeitung.



■ positive ■ neutral ■ negative

Fig. 9 Percentage and overtone of the press materials in Rzeczpospolita.



■ positive ■ neutral ■ negative

Fig. 10 Percentage and overtone of the press materials in Gazeta Wyborcza.

The number of press materials connected to the financial crisis in Greece grew substantially since the bailout referendum was announced 27 June 2015. On Monday 29 June the topic was already present in the daily newspapers in all countries.

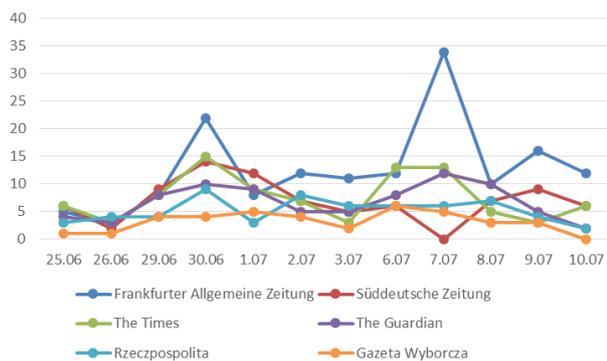


Fig. 11 The number of press materials on the Eurozone crisis in Greece in the period of time from 25.06-10.07.2015.

The increase in interest in the topic of Greek crisis is visible especially on the example of Polish press, as the number of articles before the bailout referendum was announced was minimal (the lowest compared to other newspapers from the remaining two countries).

In the press in all three countries the analysis of the Greek situation, possible outcomes of the referendum and possible further steps of the Troika are analysed. The two questions planned for the referendum and the consequences of the answer are presented in the press in Germany, the UK and Poland. Interestingly, the materials mostly present the opinion of “reasonable” Greeks who will agree for the austerity measures proposed by the Troika and vote for the bailout plan presented to the Greek government. The British press highlights also the possible outcomes of Greece leaving the Eurozone, quoting the economists and specialists in this area. The overtone of such articles is similar to the overtone of Polish ones (in both countries Grexit is judged mostly positively or

neutrally, as not affecting the EU and Eurozone strongly). On the opposite side is, however, the overtone of the German articles, where Grexit is seen as the worst possible solution and a lot of stress is put on keeping the current status quo both in the EU and in the Eurozone.

After the referendum on 5 July 2015 the spike in the number of press materials can be observed. The analysis of the results and the reasons for the negative answer are present in the press in all three countries. However, the assessment of such a decision and therefore the overtone of the materials differs. Newspapers representing more social views (here understood as left wing) tend to sympathize with the Greek people showing their readers the reasons for a negative response to the austerity plan voted on in the referendum. On the other hand, right wing newspapers blame the Greek government for irresponsibility shown by encouraging the citizens to vote against the Troika bailout plan.

IV. DISCUSSION

The analysis of the six newspapers from Germany, the UK and Poland has enabled the author to answer the research questions stated in the beginning of the article. The hypotheses have been verified and two hypotheses (H1 and H2) were confirmed. Research also revealed that the third hypothesis H3 was inappropriate.

RQ1: What is a European identity?

H1: Confirmed - There is no one unique European identity and it's a collection of national identities.

RQ2: How is a European identity presented in media in the times of crisis?

H2: Confirmed - In the times of crisis the individual particular interests of the countries take over the idea of a united European community.

RQ3: How much space is devoted in the printed media to the topic of a European identity?

H3: Wrong. The topic of a European identity is accidental and gets more interest in the times of a hardship in the EU member states.

As seen from the current state-of-art the European identity is fragmented and plural. In the times of a Eurozone crisis a new dominant state has emerged in the press. This role is played by Germany, which is strongly identified with the German Chancellor Angela Merkel. She is also portrayed as one of the most decisive actors in the Troika and the person that makes the final decision about the future of Greece and the Eurozone.

The press materials that have positive overtone towards the Greece and its role in the crisis or Tsipras's decision to announce the referendum pay attention to the following factors that led to the crisis:

- EU clientelism,
- Germany and its lack of understanding for harsh austerity measures imposed on Greece,
- Merkel-Diktum leading to the referendum,
- Greece is a victim of a crisis, not a country that caused it,
- the IMF breaching its own rules by taking part in a bailout that held out little prospect of achieving the debt sustainability that its rescues prescribe,
- Greeks are under attack from busted economics being imposed from above,
- Greece left mire in debt for decades,

- 93% of funds from the bailout program would have gone to cover the cost of maturing debt for the rest of the extension,
- Merkel and Schauble want to see Tsipras go (personal conflict) and to make the conflict worsen,
- normally Greek national bank would help in financial crisis like that, but in the Eurozone the decision depends on Frankfurt,
- according to the IMF analysis Greek economy needs breathing space,
- Greek people want to stay in the European Union – it's the government that should not have called the referendum,
- Politicians representing Brussel and Berlin are called the deficit fetishists that should cut Greece some slack and work to promote growth,
- EU is not used to countries saying no and the Greeks said no in the referendum to the way EU politics is done,
- it's the Troika's actions that caused closing of the banks in Greece,
- Germany was given the Economic Resistance Act in 1949 and it should also reduce Greek debt,
- Greece needs European help and in the name of solidarity such help should be granted,
- the referendum is a fresh chance for dialogue in the EU,
- the assault on Greece is the latest episode in a long history of neoliberalism crushing people's choices, which makes Troika politically bankrupt,
- Greece is an austerity laboratory for the EU,
- creditors want to break the party politically-reduce the Greek government's authority,

- Greek islands won't be able to survive with 23% VAT opposed to now 16%,
 - Merkel did not back a full bailout in 2010 and is now to blame for the Greek crisis,
 - Greek referendum is in their national interest,
 - Greeks have seen themselves as clients not citizens.
The press materials with negative or sceptical overtone highlighted to the following factors:
 - The Troika is not guilty of the fact that Greek Syriza has no experience in ruling and no confidence of European Union citizens,
 - Greek government will sign everything just to get money and not even plan to pay it off,
 - Referendum was announced without prior consultations with the Troika,
 - populists from Athens push Greece to ruins and force the citizens to suffer,
 - Troika's offer was generous and flexible,
 - Greek but lived on cost of their debtors for years and EU needs to be tough to prove they treat their rules seriously,
 - Greek crisis is the result of irresponsible governing and lack of reforms for many years,
 - Greek government is not fair with referendum - unclear question, not two weeks since they announced it, and its budgetary topic,
 - Greece, Ukraine and Russia have similar problems - oligarchs in industry and no tax payment, international transfer of capital
 - Greek referendum is a result of Greek absurd,
 - Greek politicians were supposed to present the new plan after referendum but only had an oral presentation written on a hotel paper (it was last chance meeting),
 - Greek plagues: cheating, beaurocracy, corruption; 40% of Greeks don't pay taxes (European commission from 2013),
 - the EU is not a conspiracy against democracy,
 - Greek society is infused with patronage and cronyism,
 - Greece has inefficient tax collecting regime,
 - Argentinian peso should be a lesson for Greek ideas to reintroduce drachma,
- As visible from the exemplary topics of different press materials in the analysed period, the positive overtone was characteristic of materials stating the strong, undivided and ruthless leadership of one big European country over the others (as against the specifics of a European identity), while the sceptical overtone highlighted the selfishness of one country that harmed the whole idea of the solidarity and the core of the formed union (in this way also opposing the idea of a European identity).

V. CONCLUSION

European identity is a special concept based, on one hand, on the common notions such as common memory, similar culture and history and, on the other hand, on the multiplicity of complicated national identities that do not only not exclude the feeling of a common European identity, but also strengthen it and make it unique on a global scale.

The analysed German, British and Polish press titles show the attitudes towards the idea of a European identity and European solidarity as such, in the time before and after the Greek bailout referendum. By the means of a content analysis, the author was able to grasp the aspects forming the

European identity and therefore to observe and comment on its picture in three big EU member states: Germany, Great Britain and Poland.

It has been confirmed that in the times of crisis the individual particular interests of the countries take over the idea of a united European community. The idea of solidarity flit between the press materials in the newspapers in all three countries, but it was not the theme on which the main stress would have been put.

What is more, the topic of a European identity turned out to be accidental and got more interest in the times of a hardship in the EU member states, here, in the times of a Greek financial crisis and bailout referendum announcement.

ENDNOTES

- [1] Such understanding of the character of European identity/identities is presented e.g. in the European Commission research projects and the policy review on the European identity development from 2013.
- [2] Preamble to the European Union Treaty 1992.
- [3] The Constitution of Greece, Article 44. Acts of legislative content. Referendum. Messages to the people, states that: “* 2. The President of the Republic shall by decree proclaim a referendum on crucial national matters following a resolution voted by an

- absolute majority of the total number of Members of Parliament, taken upon proposal of the Cabinet.
- A referendum on Bills passed by Parliament regulating important social matters, with the exception of the fiscal ones shall be proclaimed by decree by the President of the Republic, if this is decided by three-fifths of the total number of its members, following a proposal of two-fifths of the total number of its members, and as the Standing Orders and the law for the application of the present paragraph provide. No more than two proposals to hold a referendum on a Bill can be introduced in the same parliamentary term.
- Should a Bill be voted, the time-limit stated in article 42 paragraph 1 begins the day the referendum is held.”

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