DUODECIM ASTRA
COLLEGE OF EUROPE STUDENT JOURNAL

More European after Brexit? The impact of the UK's Leave vote on the European identity of the remaining Member States

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Abstract: The outcome of the Brexit referendum shocked not only Britain but also the remaining EU Member States. Even before the referendum, the future of the Union was unclear in so far as the convergence of the different Member States and the existence of a European identity was doubted. The question persists whether such a feeling of belonging to Europe, if it even exists, can persist under such challenging circumstances or whether the critical situation indeed inspires European cohesion. To address the gap in the literature, this paper analyses to what extent the Brexit referendum has affected the European identity in the remaining EU Member States. The paper argues that the feeling of being European has increased in the other Member States since the referendum as the self-perception of the states is endangered by Brexit. Therefore, the ideational cohesion strengthens in such an important turning point, which also reflects in the remaining citizens' identity. Statistical methods such as a t-test, linear regression, and descriptive analysis of Standard Eurobarometer data are used to verify this hypothesis. The results of the assessment demonstrate an increase in the number of people admitting to having a European identity before and after the Brexit referendum while findings are less clear for people reporting a more national identity.

Keywords: Brexit, European identity, European integration, European Union, identity change

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Introduction

"Brexit means Brexit!" stated former British Prime Minister Theresa May in her speech to the British people in June 2017. This quote likely represents all that many people in the United Kingdom (UK) as well as elsewhere could have said about the implications of the referendum. The missing capability even of the Prime Minister to clarify the consequences of Brexit stands symbolically for the general lack of clarity on what would happen after the referendum. This might be due to the fact that not only the rest of the continent, but also broad parts of the British population seemed confident about a pro-European outcome prior to the vote on the 23rd of June 2016. Possible consequences of leaving the EU were not sufficiently examined, and therefore the surprising leave vote hit the Union even harder. The question of what Brexit really meant both for the UK and the remaining EU Member States remained unclear for a long time. While many scenarios including different economic and political consequences for the UK have been debated so far, the implications for the rest of the EU seem less apparent.

Even before the referendum, it was unclear whether the future of the Union would involve more cohesion or less. Since the foundation of the EU, the debate has been ongoing as to whether the Member States have grown together and have, as a consequence, created a common public sphere among their citizens. The same applies to the emergence of a European identity, where there is no consensus. Even if such a feeling of belonging to Europe exists, can it persist under such challenging circumstances? Does the critical situation indeed inspire cohesion across the EU? In order to address the gap in research, this paper analyses to what extent the Brexit referendum has affected the European identity in the remaining EU Member States.

This paper draws on the constructivist approach on identity and argues that the feeling of being European has increased in the other EU Member States since the referendum. This is due to the fact that the majority of the members construct their identity on a strong and united Europe. Their identity is endangered by Brexit as the event may turn the wind against European integration. As a counterreaction, the states stand closer together and their identification with Europe is strengthened. As the citizens observe and support their country's reaction, it consequently affects their feeling of belonging.

This research aims to contribute to the literature as it widens the field of results concerning the post-Brexit EU and its internal perception. The majority of studies focus on the implications of Brexit for the UK. This is why previous findings remain limited on how the remaining EU states and their citizens are influenced by the UK's withdrawal from the Union. Accordingly, this paper adds to the side of Brexit that remains rather neglected by scholars.

This article addresses the research question on how the Brexit referendum changed the European identity in the remaining Member States of the EU. The next section focuses on the definition of

collective as well as European identity. It also reviews the existing theoretical approaches which explain the transition of identity. They are then evaluated with regard to their potential for the case of Brexit, and the constructivist model is identified as most suitable. The third part is dedicated to describing social constructivism in more detail in order to deduce a hypothesis based on this theoretical framework. Insights on the methodology are given in the third section. The hypothesis is verified by a t-test of average means, linear regression, and descriptive analysis of the Standard Eurobarometer. The results demonstrate a significant increase in European identity before and after the Brexit referendum. While on average 1,961.6 people indicated feeling mostly attached to Europe before Brexit, this number increased to 2,244 after the vote. The referendum is shown to account for 56.8 per cent of the change of identity. Growth in European identity is also underpinned by descriptive indications. Less statistical and descriptive evidence is found, however, for the impact of the referendum on the development of predominantly national identity. Lastly, the results and strategy of this paper are discussed, limitations are described, and prospects for further research are presented.

1. The State of Research on European Identity

In order to understand and examine how the Brexit referendum has changed the European identity, it is necessary to comprehend the meaning of "identity" and its different dimensions identified in previous research. This section is therefore dedicated to firstly defining the term, then reviewing different theoretical approaches on the change of identity, and lastly applying these theories to the EU.

1.1. Definition of identity

Identity can refer to diverse levels of belonging. Therefore, this subsection also follows a multi-level structure, starting with the broad topic of identity and reviewing more details, firstly on the European and then the British level. A general definition of identity is given, a deeper analysis of European identity is made, and different approaches are evaluated on their potential for the case of Brexit.

Generally, identity can be perceived to derive from societal norms and moral concepts.[2] It represents a multidimensional concept, with a variety of different levels and components. Firstly, it can refer to several characteristics such as origin, language, or gender. A variety of cultural, political,

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[2] Doris Teetzmann, *Europäische Identität Im Spannungsfeld Von Theorie, Empirie Und Leitbildern* (Göttingen: Cuvillier, 2001), 16.

ethnic, imaginary, and real factors are involved in the concept of identity. Secondly, it consists of both affective and rational components meaning that the formation and persistence of one's identity relies both on emotional as well as intellectual motives.[3] It can further be distinguished between the individual and the collective level.[4] These levels must still not be seen as exclusive, but rather as coexistent and interactive. Identification with one aspect does not necessarily signify the non-identification with another. Accordingly, a person's individual identity does not hinder the simultaneous sense of belonging to a group. People can and, in fact, do possess multiple identities that often depend on each other and adapt accordingly if one aspect of the whole changes.

The sociological classification differentiates between not two but three types of identity, namely personal, social, and political. Based on this differentiation, Michael Bruter[5] elaborates further on the political facet that is closely connected to the concepts of citizenship and constitutional identification. Bruter offers a definition of political identity as a person's "sense of belonging to politically relevant human groups and political structures."[6] Moreover, he attributes the civic and cultural components to the political identity. The cultural aspect also takes into account the political group to which an individual citizen feels attached, while the civic aspect monitors if a citizen identifies with political institutions and laws.[7]

Besides the sociological conceptualisations, collective identity can also be observed from top-down and bottom-up perspectives. The top-down point of view addresses the question of who can and should be considered as European and how European identity can be developed.[8] Meanwhile, the bottom-up perspective focuses more on the aspect of who feels European and what one means by admitting their European identification.[9]

Identity in the EU is even more complex and includes more dimensions than the general term of identity, which predominantly refers to nations. As well as the features described above, the soci-

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[3] Matthew Gabel, *Interests and Integration: Market Liberalization, Public Opinion, and European Union* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009).

[4] e.g. Maurizio Bach, "Kollektive Identität in Europa. Kritische Anmerkung Zu Einem Mythos Der Gegenwart", in *Europäische Identität*, ed. Stefan Kadelbach (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG, 2008).

[5] Michael Bruter, "Winning Hearts and Minds for Europe: The Impact of News and Symbols on Civic and Cultural European Identity", *Comparative Political Studies* 36, no. 10 (2003): 1148-1179; Michael Bruter, *Citizens of Europe? The Emergence of a Mass European Identity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

[6] Bruter, *Citizens of Europe?*, *op. cit.,* p. 1.

[7] *Ibid.,* pp. 11-13.

[8] Peter Ester, Loek Halman, and Ruud de Moor, *The Individualizing Society: Value Change in Europe and North America*, (Tilburg: Tilburg University Press, 1994, 1st ed.); Cris Shore, "Inventing the 'People's Europe': Critical Approaches to European Community 'Cultural Policy'," *Man* 28, no. 4 (1993): 779-800; Paul How, "A Community of Europeans - the Requisite Underpinnings," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 33, no. 1 (1995): 27-46; Michael Wintle (ed.), *Culture and Identity in Europe: Perceptions of Divergence and Unity in Past and Present* (London: Avebury, 1996).

[9] Bruter, "Winning Hearts and Minds for Europe", *op. cit.*

ocultural, macro-historical characteristics attributed to Europe also play a role when looking at European identity.[10] Applying Bruter's concept of political identities, the cultural component of European identity describes whether European citizens feel more closely connected to other Europeans than they do to people from other continents. The civic component in the case of the EU is the extent to which Europeans see themselves as citizens of the EU's political system and how they observe the impact of the output of the EU's political process.[11]

When looking at European identity, the question arises if the feeling of Europe being a unitary community in terms of politics, culture, and society has emerged since its foundation.[12] The majority of scholars agree on the existence of a European identity in some sense, but there is no consensus on its scope. The existing research on the topic has not yet been able to give a concrete and accepted answer on the instruments shaping and changing (European) identity.[13] The next subsection dives into the approaches explaining the formation and dynamics of identity.

Limited research exists on the connection between Brexit and identity. Most scholars of this topic have focused so far on how the identity of the British has led to the "Leave" outcome of the referendum. Besides other explanations, one approach for explaining Brexit refers to Britain's Euroscepticism and the absence of a European identity in the UK. According to Carl, Dennison and Evans[14] for example, the percentages of Eurosceptic citizens and members of the European Parliament in the UK trumped any other Member State in the last 40 years. These scholars see the maintaining of national identity and sovereignty as a major driver for the 'Leave' vote. Besides that, the state of research is limited regarding Brexit and identity. No concrete findings exist on the impact of the aftermath of the Brexit referendum on the British (European) identity. Nor has there been research on the consequences of the British decision to leave the EU on the European identity of the remaining Member States. Consequently, this research gap is addressed in this article.

1.2. Theoretical perspectives on the impacts on identity

Following the definition of identity, it is also important to identify the determinants that have an impact on it. Different explanations and approaches have been developed and discussed in the literature. This subsection mainly focuses on the structural, primordialist, instrumentalist, and constructivist arguments to identity.

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[10] Teetzmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.

[11] Bruter, "Winning Hearts and Minds for Europe", *op. cit.*, p. 1155.

[12] *Ibid.*, 1153.

[13] Gemma Scalise, "The Narrative Construction of European Identity. Meanings of Europe 'from Below'", *European Societies* 17, no. 4 (2015): 598.

[14] Noah Carl, James Dennison, and Geoffrey Evans, "European but Not European Enough: An Explanation for Brexit", *European Union Politics* 20, no. 2 (2019): 282-304.

The structural model argues that factors such as institutions and symbols intensify and even construct identity. This approach concentrates on a top-down perspective focusing on the awakening of a sense of identity among the citizens by the political elite in order to secure their power. Vice versa, citizens can also feel the need for common symbols in order to construct their identity. Based on the structural point of view, Castoriadis[15] suggests that mass identity emerges from the image of individuals that form a community that tends to be very heterogeneous and diverse in modern societies. A national anthem or a flag, for example, creates a visual image of the diffuse community and can even become the representative and characteristic of an entity.[16] This task can also be fulfilled by political institutions to which political elites commonly refer as they imply certain values for a community.[17] In the case of the EU, the European anthem, flag and motto, the common passport and currency as well as the European elections among others may serve as such identity-building symbols. However, the identification with and interpretation of these symbols must be understood as dynamic and differentiated across Europe.[18] The extent to which these markers create identity among the wider population is questionable, as Bruter[19] found hints for them being perceived as rather elitist. His study showed that while most people know about the common European symbols such as the flag, the anthem, and the passport, they express doubts as to whether these are famous among the public. On the contrary, there is evidence that the euro as the common currency creates a sense of belonging to the EU among its citizens.[20]

Another approach is formulated by M. Crawford Young[21] who makes a distinction between three categories: the primordialist, the instrumentalist, and the constructivist.[22] Primordialism regards identity as a concept defined by historical parameters. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz, renowned for his work on symbolic anthropology and his critique on primordialism, explains the term as follows:

> *By a primordial attachment is meant […] immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly, but beyond them the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language, or even a dialect of a language, and following particular social practices.*

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[15] Cornelius Castoriadis, *L'institution Imaginaire De La Société* (Paris: Seuil, 1992, 5th ed.).

[16] Bruter, *Citizens of Europe?*, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

[18] Michael Bruter, "On What Citizens Mean by Feeling 'European': Perceptions of News, Symbols and Borderless-Ness", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30, no. 1 (2004): 21-39; Johan Fornäs, "European Identification: Symbolic Mediations of Unity and Diversity", *Global Media Journal: Australian Edition* 6, no. 1 (2012).

[19] Bruter, "On What Citizens Mean by Feeling 'European'", *op. cit.*

[20] Matthias Kaelberer, "The Euro and European Identity: Symbols, Power and the Politics of European Monetary Union", *Review of International Studies* 30 (2004): 161-178; Thomas Risse, "The Euro between National and European Identity," *Journal of European Public Policy* 10, no. 4 (2003): 487-505.

[21] Crawford Young, *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976); Crawford Young, "The Dialectics of Cultural Pluralism: Concept and Reality", in *The Rising Tide of Cultural Pluralism: The Nation-State at Bay?*, ed. Crawford Young (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993).

[22] Young, "The Dialectics of Cultural Pluralism", *op. cit.*, p. 21.

> *These congruities of blood, speech, custom, and so on, are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves.*[23]

This definition provides a cause for the affective, sometimes unbreakable bond that one has to a certain group of people. Primordialist identities lead to a strict definition of an in- and an out-group. Due to anthropological reasons, people cannot change their group or rather cannot become members of an in-group, if they were not born into the collective.[24] Applied to the EU, primordialism generates a distinct image of who belongs to Europe and who does not, and consequently also which countries can become Member States of the EU, and which cannot. Having in mind that the composition of the Union has been dynamic, the applicability of primordialism to the EU seems rather limited. This may be a reason why this approach has hardly been used by researchers for exploring European identity. While many studies are connected to primordialism and the nation[25], only a handful of articles can be found regarding primordial European identification[26].

According to the constructivist approach, nations or other collectives are perceived as "imagined communities".[27] Contrary to the other two categories identified by Young, there is no necessity for the real existence of a group, in order to feel a sense of belonging.[28] It is only required that the person who feels attached to a community perceives it to be real. The model detects identities as objects of constant change that adapt with respect to the situation and the circumstances.[29] Parallel to the structural model, symbols form identities according to this approach. Yet going beyond the structuralist assumptions, constructivism takes narratives, norms, and networks into account. Consequently, the group one feels attached to does not need to be one's historical home state or country of residence, but can be any group that is perceived to share the same values, aims and features.

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[23] Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States", in *Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa*, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: Free Press, 1967), 109.

[24] Thomas Risse, *A Community of Europeans?: Transnational Identities and Public Spheres* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 27.

[25] Uriel Abulof, "Nationalism as Legitimation: The Appeal of Ethnicity and the Plea for Popular Sovereignty", *Nations and Nationalism* 24, no. 3 (2018): 528-534; Alan Bairner, "National Sports and National Landscapes: In Defence of Primordialism", *National Identities* 11, no. 3 (2009): 223-239; Alexander Bligh and Gadi Hitman, "The Fate of the Assyrian Minority in Early Independent Iraq: A Test Case of Political Violence Based on Rational Primordialism", *Middle Eastern Studies* 55, no. 3 (2019): 419-432; Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt and Bernhard Giesen, "The Construction of Collective Identity", *Archives Européennes De Sociologie* 36, no. 1 (1995): 72-102; Juan J Linz, "From Primordialism to Nationalism", in *New Nationalisms of the Developed West*, ed. Edward Tiryakian and Ronald Rogowski (London: Routledge, 2020); Andreas Wimmer, "The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries: A Multilevel Process Theory", *American Journal of Sociology* 113, no. 4 (2008): 970-1022.

[26] Viera Bačová, "The Construction of National Identity - on Primordialism and Instrumentalism", *Human Affairs* 8, no. 1 (1998): 29-43; Eugeen Roosens, "National Identity, Social Order and Political System in Western Europe: Primordial Autochthony", in *Societies, Corporations, and the Nation State*, ed. Edwin Scheuch and David Sciulli (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

[27] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 2006).

[28] Young, "The Dialectics of Cultural Pluralism: Concept and Reality", *op. cit.*, p. 23.

[29] Shore, *op. cit.*, p. 783.

This is especially relevant regarding European identity as the Union has vastly expanded in terms of geography and competences over the years. The vocation to be a 'community of shared values', however, has persisted and was codified in the Lisbon Treaty. The imaginative creation of Europe becomes apparent when looking at the acceptance or rejection of membership applications. When Morocco applied to the European Economic Community in 1987, it was rejected for the reason of not being a "European country" in a geographical sense. On the contrary, Cyprus was admitted to the Union despite not being located on the European continent either. Thus, the 'Europeanness' of states plays in fact an important role, but not in the geographical sense. What matters is for countries to be identified as European, holding the same values, and chasing the same vision. The creation of European identity happens in delimitation to the outside as well as internally in reference to the similarities. Using common narratives and networks, European identity can and is evoked rhetorically. Accordingly, constructivist scholars have placed a focus on the emergence of a European public sphere[30] and explored the construction of identities by European players and the media[31].

Lastly, the instrumentalist argument recognises the origin of identity in connection to one's own benefit. A person feels connected to the unit or group where he or she expects the greatest benefit for their interest. This approach is – contrary to the structuralist and constructivist models – based on the rational component of identity. When it comes to the EU, Waechter adduces that "the instrumental approach assumes that European identification is based on conscious, rational considerations of individuals about the gains (or losses) they perceive or expect from 'being European.'"[32] The economic advantages of belonging to the Union were typically identified as the most important rational reasons by scholars. Consequently, early research testing the instrumental model for the EU, claimed that economic benefits that nations and individuals receive from the single European market, foster support for European integration.[33] More recent studies demonstrate that perceived economic gains are, in fact, more important than the real benefits for the formation of identity.[34]

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[30] e.g. Erik John Fossum and Hans-Jörg Trenz, "The EU's Fledgling Society: From Deafening Silence to Critical Voice in European Constitution-Making", *Journal of Civil Society* 2, no. 1 (2006): 57-77.

[31] Cristiano Bee, "The 'Institutionally Constructed'european Identity: Citizenship and Public Sphere Narrated by the Commission", *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 9, no. 4 (2008): 431-450; Alun Jones and Julian Clark, "Europeanisation and Discourse Building: The European Commission, European Narratives and European Neighbourhood Policy", *Geopolitics* 13, no. 3 (2008): 545-571; Scalise, *op. cit.*

[32] Natalia Waechter, "Instrumental and Cultural Considerations in Constructing European Identity among Ethnic Minority Groups in Lithuania in a Generational Perspective", *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 45, no. 4 (2017): 652.

[33] Matthew Gabel and Harvey Palmer, "Understanding Variation in Public Support for European Integration", *European Journal of Political Research* 27, no. 1 (1995): 3-19.

[34] Soetkin Verhaegen, Marc Hooghe, and Ellen Quintelier, "European Identity and Support for European Integration: A Matter of Perceived Economic Benefits?", *Kyklos* 67, no. 2 (2014): 295-314.

However, other benefits of the EU can additionally have a positive instrumentalist impact on identity. Thus, Jiménez et al[35] maintain that the freedom of movement within the EU and the common borders have a similar effect as that of economic factors.

1.3. Which is more suitable for the case of Brexit?

Does the Brexit referendum represent a threat to the EU? The answer to this question is necessary to evaluate the previously presented approaches against each other for this case. Firstly, looking at the media at the time, it seems obvious that the Leave vote was a largely unexpected outcome. This impression was proven to be true by the European Journalism Observatory study "Will It Kill Us Or Make Us Stronger? How Europe's Media Covered Brexit" which found newspaper coverage both in the UK and the remaining Member States to be mostly negative and described the decision as "disastrous" and "shocking news".[36] Not only the media but also scholars in the field have identified the Brexit referendum as a crisis for the Union. Cini and Verdun[37] argue that the EU's shock regarding the Brexit result was due to three reasons in particular: the representation of the first geographical diminishment, the expectation of the impact of the event on many political arenas and the questions that remained regarding the close outcome. Thus, they conclude that Brexit as such a critical event might very well lead to a weakening and further fragmentation of the EU, posing threats to European integration and ultimately endangering the existence of the Union. This threat is underpinned by the fact that the media covered possible referenda in other Member States after the UK's decision.[38] Additionally, Brexit is even more challenging for the EU as it does not represent the only crisis the Union faced at that time but rather one among many.[39] Consequently, the event represents a critical moment for the Union and is thus expected to have an impact on the identity of the remaining Member States.

From the three models described above, primordialism has the least capability for explaining identity in our case. Max Weber[40], among others, criticised the argument of collectives held together only by anthropological reasons, as they perceive identities not as being permanent but rather dynamic, changing, and having the tendency to be constructed. Additionally, since the in-group is

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[35] Antonia M.R. Jiménez et al., "European and National Identities in the EU's Old and New Member States: Ethnic, Civic, Instrumental and Symbolic Components", *European Integration Online Papers* 8, no. 11 (2004).

[36] European Journalism Observatory, "Will It Kill Us or Make Us Stronger? How Europe's Media Covered Brexit", (2016).

[37] Michelle Cini and Amy Verdun, "The Implications of Brexit for the Future of Europe," in *Brexit and Beyond: Rethinking the Futures of Europe*, ed. Benjamin Martill and Uta Staiger (London: UCL Press, 2018), 63.

[38] e.g. Michael Wilkinson and Laura Hughes, "EU Referendum: Brexit Contagion Spreads across Europe as Italy, France, Holland and Denmark Call for Referendums," *Telegraph*, 22 June 2016; Jon Stone, "Nearly All EU States 'Could Follow Britain's Lead and Leave the Union,' Senior French MP Warns," *The Independent*, 26 September 2016.

[39] Neill Nugent, "Brexit: Yet Another Crisis for the EU," in *Brexit and Beyond: Rethinking the Futures of Europe*, ed. Benjamin Martill and Uta Staiger, (London: UCL Press, 2018).

[40] Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

clearly defined, primordialism gives few answers as to why a country or the citizens of a country belonging to the in-group, should decide not to be a part of it anymore. The sole reason for that could be that the UK has never felt any affection towards the rest of the EU. This is possible, especially as it has been found to be the most Eurosceptic state.[41] However, because there is no change in identity according to the model, Brexit would neither have an impact on the identity of Britons nor on one of the remaining EU members. As Brexit was still an extraordinary agitation for the Union as described above, identifying no change at all is unlikely.

Both the instrumentalist and the constructivist approaches are adequate for explaining dynamic changes in identity. The instrumentalist approach would allow distinct predictions of Brexit on European identity by taking the economic consequences for the remaining Member States into account. However, besides economic consequences, Brexit cannot be seen exclusively as a purely economic decision disregarding normative or emotional factors. Different scholars have argued that (national) identity is in fact more influential on people's opinions regarding European integration than economic motives and they have found empirical support for this claim.[42] This may especially be true for the rest of the EU in this case. Losing a member for the first time causes an existential threat that is likely to be more crucial regarding the self-perception and expectations on the future of the Union rather than the economic losses generated by one state leaving the single market. As this threat goes beyond economic concerns, the constructivist approach offers a more suitable explanatory potential for the issue at hand than instrumentalism. In addition to this, it is the most fitting model as it states that identities are particularly shaped under pressing circumstances and crises.[43]

2. Constructing European Identity after the Referendum

The constructivist approach – recognised as the most apt to describe Brexit – will now be explained in more detail in order to develop predictions. The constructivist perspective on identity is based on the broader theory of social constructivism. In contrast with the mainstream theories in the field, constructivism assumes a primacy of ideational over materialistic structures. Social values, structures and meanings determine the interests, and therefore the behaviour of states.[44] The logic that

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[41] Carl, Dennison, and Evans, "European but Not European Enough: An Explanation for Brexit", *op. cit.*

[42] e.g. Hajo G Boomgaarden et al., "Mapping EU Attitudes: Conceptual and Empirical Dimensions of Euroscepticism and EU Support", *European Union Politics* 12, no. 2 (2011): 241-266; Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, "Does Identity or Economic Rationality Drive Public Opinion on European Integration?", *PS: Political Science and Politics* 37, no. 3 (2004): 415-420.

[43] Shore, *op. cit.*, p. 783.

[44] Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 2.

shapes decisions follows appropriateness rather than consequentiality.[45] Actors in the international sphere do not act consistently with rational choice considerations. Instead, communication and interaction affect the process of understanding.

The key terms of social constructivism are norms and identity which emerge endogenously. International, as well as regional or specific values, affect international actors. By acting in compliance with the prevailing norms, they are reproduced and internalised.[46] As a result, they continue to be spread globally. However, the concepts are not fixed but can change in the process of interaction. New norms can originate and are suppressed or adapted as new rules depending on the specific situation. The standards that an actor follows interact with their identity. In sum, constructivism states that changeable values influence the identity of states and other actors in international relations.

In the case of Brexit and the EU, the relevant, conflicting norms seem to be national sovereignty versus inter-European, collaboration. These two concepts cannot be seen as material aims that states can ultimately obtain. Instead, it is rather the underlying cosmovision or ideational aim of these concepts which counts. According to the constructivist argument, the remaining EU Member States stay in the Union because they believe in the value of cooperation beyond borders. Many countries are still traumatised by the Second World War and the infringement of norms that came along with it. In that time, many common values connected to humanity, respect and coexistence were damaged. During or after the war, a new norm emerged: the idea of a united and peaceful Europe. When the war was still ongoing, respective ideas developed in several European countries and were promoted among others by European federalist movements.[47] Non-totalitarian European states as well as the United States of America pushed for a new approach for Europe in the late 1940s to create peace and stability through cooperation. The EU was an outcome of this process and serves these norms.[48] Based on this standard, the EU Member States and candidates shape their identity, following the image of a prosperous and undivided continent – which has been observed by many scholars, prominently in the case of Germany.[49] Even if it may be true that Germany constitutes a special case regarding the significance the EU has for it, all Member States have grown together following the literature on the socialisation of states as part of constructivism.[50] "European socialisation implies, then, that the involvement in European venues causes a redefinition of norms and practices, and these European norms and values gradually become 'internalized' as part of the

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[45] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

[46] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[47] Dan Vataman, "History of the European Union", *Lex ET Scientia International Journal* 17, no. 2 (2010): 111-12.

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 112.

[49] Hanns W Maull, "Germany and the Use of Force: Still a 'Civilian Power'?," *Survival* 42, no. 2 (2000): 56-80; Heidemarie Uhl and Richard J Golsan, *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 30.

[50] e.g. Jeffrey T Checkel, "International Institutions and Socialization in Europe: Introduction and Framework," *International Organization* 59, no. 4 (2005): 801-826.

self."[51] Consequently, the norm of inter-European collaboration and hence the European identity of states are replicated every time a European consensus is achieved, or common rules regulate the lives of the EU citizens.

The possible erosion of the norm of European unity by Brexit represents an existential threat to the identity of the remaining Member States as it does not only endanger the current self-perception but possibly also retrenches the support for further European integration[52] (see 2.3). Situations of crisis are expected, according to social constructivism, to have a great impact on identity.[53] The Brexit referendum as such critical moment for the EU is thus assumed to affect European identity. In this clash of norms as described above, the UK is perceived by the remaining members to abandon the norms of cooperation and unity which lie at the heart of the EU. This first-time decision to leave the Union poses the threat of other countries following suit, as in fact the possibility of referenda in other European states appeared in the news.[54] Since a wave of EU referenda could ultimately cause the collapse of the Union, states building their identity upon their membership feel threatened. To escape this fate, it seems plausible that these states close their ranks. This may provoke an even more intense advocacy for the norm of European cooperation. The Member States constitute further the perception that the European continent can and must be strong in unity. This leads to the assumption that after the referendum the EU Member States exhibit an increased sense of belonging to the European idea.

The expectation for states will now be translated into a hypothesis concerning European identity on the individual level of citizens. This is necessary as the measurement of identity remains a challenge and relies on proxies for grasping it on a collective stage. State-level identity is still dependent on the perceptions of individuals which can also be explored more easily through direct questioning. Thus, the aggregate assumption is substantiated by methodological individualism and visualised by the so-called Coleman's boat.[55] The explanation frame by Coleman is used because it is well-suited for outlining the path from a societal phenomenon to the aggregate outcome of individual behaviour. A graphical presentation of the adaption to the case at hand can be seen below in Figure 1. On the macro level, the assumption stands at the beginning that the identities of the EU Member States have become more European after the referendum. The collective explanandum that is to be linked to the increased European identity of states is the aggregate feeling of a wider spread European identity among the EU citizens. The first macro-stage leads to the individual level of the actor.

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[51] Jan Beyers, "Conceptual and Methodological Challenges in the Study of European Socialization", *Journal of European Public Policy* 17, no. 6 (2010): 909.

[52] Cini and Verdun, *op. cit.*

[53] Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change", *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 906.

[54] Stone, *op. cit.*; Wilkinson and Hughes, *op. cit.*

[55] James Samuel Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

A single citizen and their values are influenced by the self-image of the home country. The affirmative perception of a nation belonging to the Union is reproduced and promoted within and outside of the country mostly by politicians, symbolic gestures, and the media. In this manner, an individual can observe the state's position following the logic of the situation of Coleman's model. In the subsequent step, the logic of selection derives the individual choice of action from the perception and values of an individual. Accordingly, an actor does not only acknowledge the standpoint of his or her state but also feels a sense of belonging and duty to support the country linked to national identity as described in the second section. Stemming from the civic responsibility that a person experiences, the citizens support the point of view of the national state and express this if asked – for example in surveys. Applied to our specific case, citizens of the remaining Member States are expected to grasp their states' strengthened European identity, choose to support the stance and mirror it. Therefore, more citizens would admit to a European identity following the logic of aggregation. This paper thus expects an increase of European identity on the aggregate level. The hypothesis consequently is:

> H1:   The number of citizens in the remaining Member States of the European Union having a European identity has increased after the Brexit referendum.
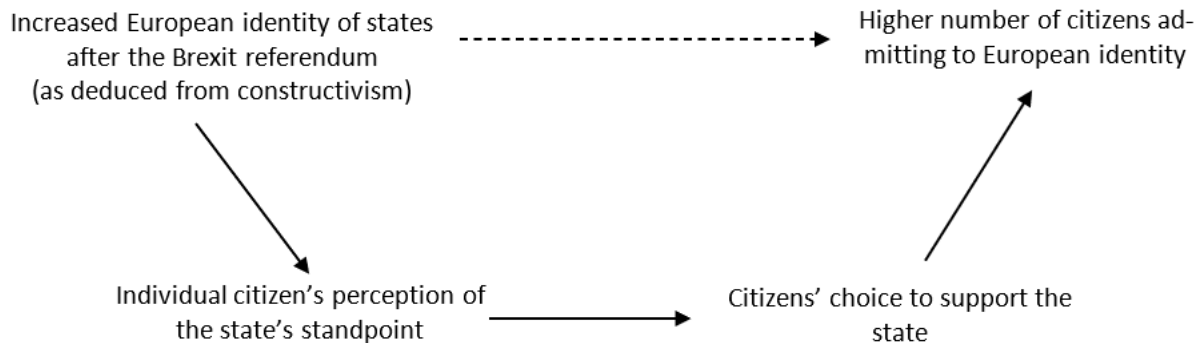

Figure 1: Implementation of Coleman's boat on European identity

3. Data and Sources

The deduction in the previous section led to the assumption of an increased feeling of being European among the other EU countries after the Brexit referendum. The research object represents, therefore, European identity. To test the hypothesis, data is required that gives insights, in the sense of belonging to Europe of the citizens of the 27 remaining Member States.

Interviews seem to be the most appropriate method for collecting information, as in this way people can best provide information about their personal feeling of identity. This interview data is retrieved from the Standard Eurobarometer, a survey format in which approximately 1,000 alternate citizens of every EU Member State are interrogated twice a year.[56] The sample period is chosen from the first survey in 2014 (Edition 81) to the second in 2018 (Edition 90). By that, the sample contains five interview editions before and five after the referendum in June 2016. The entirety of the data is analysed. Access to the Eurobarometer data is provided by the EU Open Data Portal[57] and the GESIS – Leibniz Institute for Social Science[58].

The Standard Eurobarometer contains one question (mostly number QD3) that asks about which identity the respondent feels most closely connected to. The exact phrasing is the following: "Do you see yourself as...?". The menu items are "National only", "National and European", "European and National", "European only" and "None". Adapted to the question of this paper, the items are simplified to "More national" including the first two choices and "More European" including answers number three and four. The second merged item is certainly the more important one for this study as it registers European identity. Nevertheless, the item of feeling more national also gives important information because it records if there has been a shift from national to European identity or if a possible increment comes just from the group of people previously admitting to no identity. The fifth answer is disregarded as it is not considered a necessary piece of information regarding the research question. Additionally, an identity index is created out of the four original items attributing each item a number from "1" for "Only national" to "4" for "Only European" and calculating the average mean for each year. Thus, an index score is produced ranging between "1" and "4" where a higher score indicates a greater number of people feeling more European.

The population consists of the answers of all interviewees – except the Britons – to the question described above in the chosen time period. A statistical t-test on the difference of the arithmetical means on the summarised items "More national" and "More European" before and after the referendum is conducted as well as bivariate, linear regression between the referendum and the identity index. The statistical findings are underpinned by a descriptive analysis in order to receive a more precise understanding of the process of identity change.

4. Findings on the Shift of Identity

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[56] European Commission, "Public Opinion", https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm.

[57] Data.europa.eu, "Datasets", http://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset?q=Standard+Eurobarometer&ext_boolean=all&sort=.

[58] GESIS (Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences), "The European Commission's Eurobarometer Surveys", https://www.gesis.org/eurobarometer-data-service/home.

The research question on whether the Brexit referendum had an impact on the identity of European citizens is now tested statistically through a t-test for arithmetical means and linear regression as well as descriptively.

Statistical t-test

As the first step of the analysis, it is to be discovered whether a statistically significant shift of identity has occurred around the time of the referendum. Therefore, the t-test for arithmetical means is used as the method that allows pinpointing differences in the averages of two groups.

$$t = \frac{\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2}{\sigma_{\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2}}$$

In this case, the two groups are the surveys before and after the referendum. As the Eurobarometer interviews different people every time, and respondents are not expected to influence each other's indications, a t-test for independent samples is used. The normality assumptions for this t-test are that both samples are normally distributed and have similar variations. These necessities are met as the two samples despite being independent are drawn from the same population consisting of citizens of the EU Member States except for the UK. The correspondent standard error of the means $\sigma_{\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2}$ is calculated based on the samples' sizes $n_{1/2}$ as follows:

$$\sigma_{\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2} = \sqrt{s_p^2 \times \left(\frac{1}{n_1} + \frac{1}{n_2}\right)} \; ; s_p^2 = \frac{(n_1-1) \times s_1^2 + (n_2-1) \times s_2^2}{n_1 + n_2 - 2}$$

A five per cent significance level (p< .05) for the rejection of the null hypothesis is set in this statistical analysis. The t-test shows a significant difference before (M_1=1961.60; SD=126.936; n=5) and after the Brexit vote (M_2=2244.40; SD=200.414; n=5) regarding the variable "Feeling more European than national" (t(8)= -2.666; p= .029). The change in the variable "More national than European" is, by contrast, not statistically significant on the five per cent significance level (M_1=23917.80; M_2=23690.20; SD_1=122.060; SD_2=244.190; $n_{1/2}$=5; t(8)=1.864; p= .099). Therefore, there has been a significant change in the number of people with a European identity, but no significant variation in the number of citizens who feel more national.

Linear regression

As a difference exists between the time before and after the referendum, the impact ascribed to the Brexit vote is consequently analysed. For this aim, a linear regression model testing the impact of the referendum as the independent variable on the calculated identity index as the dependent variable is deployed. The preconditions are fulfilled as the connection between the two variables as well as the coefficients are linear, and the conditional expected value is given. The required heteroscedasticity is also recorded as the Chi^2 test for homoscedasticity is not statistically significant (Chi^2

=1.18; p> .05). Nevertheless, the regression faces the risk of an omitted variable bias as it is a bivariate one, the implications of which are further discussed in the section dedicated to limitations. The statistical analysis shows that the Brexit referendum had a significant impact on the feeling of identity of the European population as operationalised by the identity index ($F(1,8)=12.836$, $p< .007$; see Table 1 below). This means that the Brexit vote is a factor that had a distinctive, positive influence on the mean identity indicated by the interviewees. The impact of the referendum is significant ($p= .007$), and the regression constant is set at 1.704 and also significant ($p< .001$). The referendum explains 56.8 per cent of the change in the identity score which is a strong effect according to Cohen[59].

$$Identity\ score = 1.704 + 0.053 \times Referendum + \varepsilon_i$$

Regression Statistics

Multiple R	0.785
R^2	0.616
Adjusted R^2	0.568
Standard error	0.023
Number of obs	10

ANOVA

	Df	SS	MS	F	Significance
Regression	1	0.007	0.007	12.836	0.007
Residual	8	0.004	0.001		
Total	9	0.011			

Coefficients

	Coefficients	SE	T	Significance
Constant	1.704	0.010	163.747	0.000
Referendum	0.053	0.015	3.583	0.007

Table 1: Regression statistics

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[59] Jacob Cohen, Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences (New York: Academic Press, 1992).

Descriptive analysis

Subsequently to the statistical analysis, the development of the variables "Feeling more European than national" and "Feeling more national than European" is submitted to a more detailed descriptive study in order to explore the direction of the development. Firstly, the variation in European identity is assessed as shown in Figure 2. The x-axis shows the editions of the Standard Eurobarometer, while the y-axis presents the number of people who gave the correspondent answer.
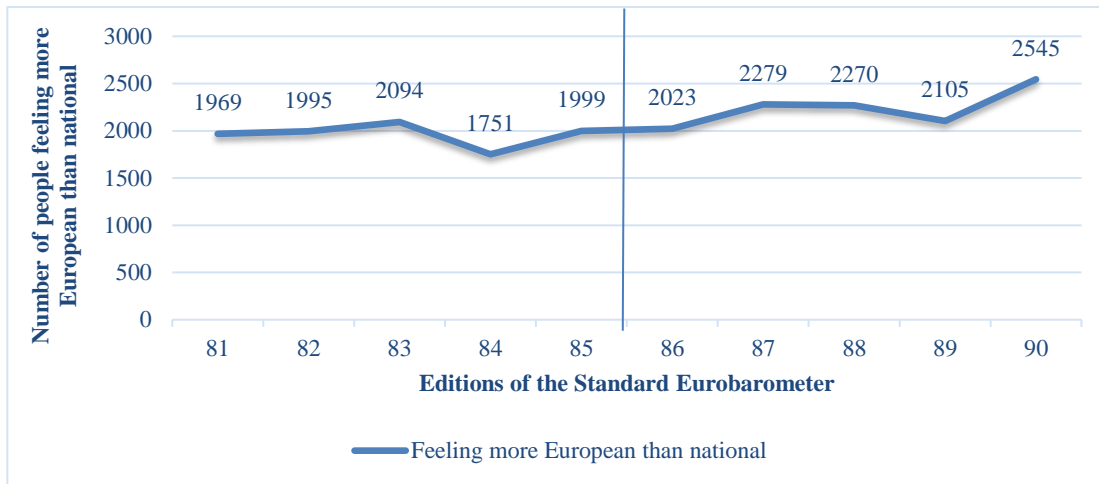

Figure 2: Development of the variable "Feeling more European than national" from Standard Eurobarometer 81 to 90

The Figure shows that the development identified by the statistical analysis exists in the postulated direction. The number of people that considered themselves more as European was around 2,000 out of 26,000 participants (equalling about 8 per cent) from Eurobarometer 81 to 86 with a downwards discrepancy in the 84th Eurobarometer. After the Brexit referendum in June 2016 (between the 85th and 86th Eurobarometer – here depicted by the blue line) the number of people who felt more European increased in the next year. Then it gradually decreased again but remained higher than in the surveys preceding the referendum. In the 90th Eurobarometer the answer "Feeling more European" reached the highest count.
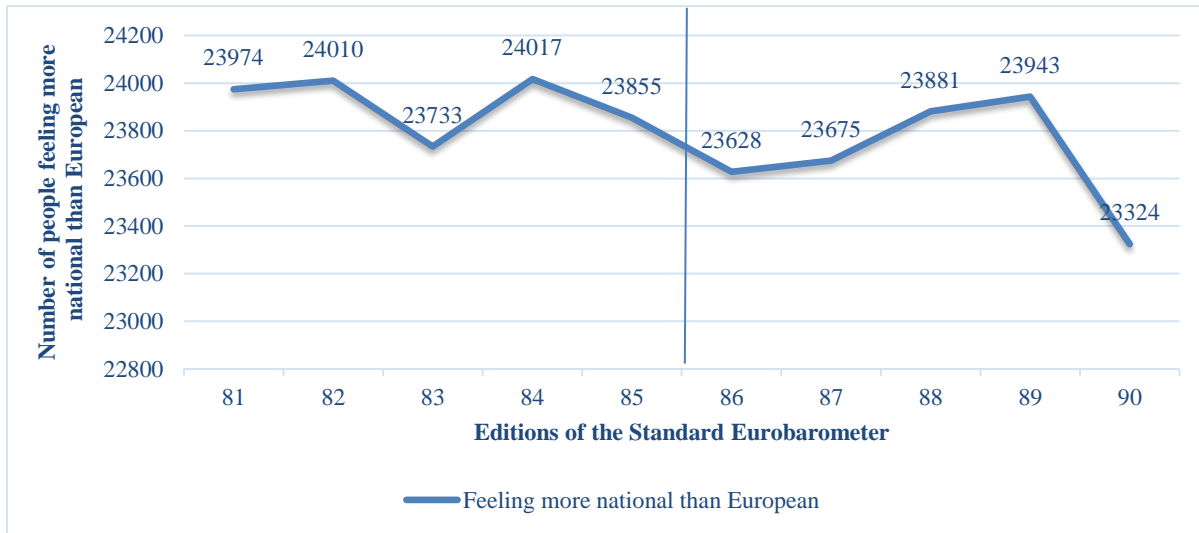
Figure 3: Development of the variable "Feeling more national than European"

The variable "Feeling more national than European" is depicted in Figure 3. Here the course shows more variation. There was a decrease in people feeling more national in the 83rd edition of the Eurobarometer (May 2015). The number of interviewees giving this answer rose again in the consecutive edition but was followed by a bigger decline starting from November 2015 that reached its local minimum in November 2016. Afterwards, more citizens felt national again until the 89th Eurobarometer. In November 2018 the least amount of people committing to this answer is reported for the analysed time period. The implications of the descriptive analysis are discussed in the following section.

5. Discussion and Limitations

The conducted empirical analysis has produced results on the research question that support the previously deduced hypothesis. The research aimed to answer the question of how the Brexit referendum has changed the European identity in the remaining EU Member States. In particular, the objective was to identify the individual impact of Brexit on European identity rather than assessing all factors that influence the level of the sense of belonging to the Union. It was expected that the referendum increased European identity in the rest of the EU. This was supported by empirical evidence as the statistical as well as descriptive assessments have demonstrated the impact of the Brexit referendum on the identity of the European citizens. A t-test for arithmetical means has found a significant difference between the number of people admitting to a more European than national feeling of belonging in the years before and after the vote, which supports the hypothesis. However,

no significant outcome was found for the people feeling more connected to their nation-state. This can be explained by focusing on the data. It can be seen that there has been a shift from people feeling only national to feeling national and European. The combined variable "More national than European" cannot display this variation as it constitutes both items. Additionally, the t-test for people feeling more national is significant on a ten per cent level indicating at least some change before and after the British vote. The linear regression revealed that this change can be ascribed to the referendum which had a significant effect on this change of identity. By reporting a corrected R^2 of 0.568, it means that 56.8 per cent of the change of identity per unit can be explained by the absence or existence of the referendum.

Furthermore, the results were supported by a descriptive look at the data and the direction of the connection was additionally explored. The chart showed an upward trend for people with a more European identity. It makes sense according to the constructivist approach that identity did not change rapidly and without small downturns. Instead, the process of interaction required time and the remarkable increase in people admitting to a European identity did not take place until the 87th edition of the Eurobarometer. For more than a year after the referendum, the negotiations continued without any breakthrough. It was speculated that there would be another referendum and hope arose that the UK – contrary to prior expectations – would not leave the Union. This could be a reason for a reduction of the perceived identity crisis at that time. Therefore, this is likely to have contributed to the decline in the 88th and 89th Eurobarometer. The considerable increase in the 90th survey from November 2018 backs the hypothesis again, especially as a withdrawal agreement was in sight when the fieldwork was conducted. For the number of people feeling more national than European, the events in connection to Brexit possess less explanatory potential coinciding with the result of the t-test. The start of a decrease in national identity could already be traced in the 85th Eurobarometer and was therefore unconnected to the referendum. The following increase cannot be explained by Brexit either. Only the latest record as the lowest in the analysed time frame could be ascribed to the imminent departure of the UK and represents the same exceptional drift as reported for more European identity. Summarising the results of the empirical analysis, the hypothesis that the referendum had an impact and influenced the identity of the people in the remaining EU Member States towards a greater Europeanness can be accepted.

Despite having produced evidence for the postulated assumption, certain issues of the analysis limit the scope of the outcome. Firstly, the inquiry of identity poses a difficulty to researchers as it remains challenging to extract it out of people, even if asking them directly about it. The phrasing of such a question in surveys is, thus, crucial and has not yet been solved satisfactorily. Secondly, the data for the analysis were retrieved from the Standard Eurobarometer which utilises a large sample and extensive fieldwork that allows representative statements about the people in the EU. Besides this asset, the survey is not directly connected to Brexit and changes in the identity of the European citizens could be evoked by different events or developments than the one assessed in this paper.

Brexit might be a factor that explains some shifts in the outcome of the Eurobarometer on the question of European identity. Several other circumstances, that are not discussed in this paper, could, however, also have influenced the feeling of being European. Brexit cannot holistically explain the progression of identity – and this research does not raise the claim for that. Instead, it aims to detect the impact of the independent variable "Brexit" on the dependent variable "European identity in the EU" rather than to identify all factors that affect the dependent variable. This also results in the regression being a bivariate one which contains the risk of an omitted variable bias. The shortcoming could, however, not be circumvented as other possible influences are challenging to study in this case and can hardly be controlled. Besides, the sample varies from survey to survey which can also cause deviations. The explanatory power of statistical significance of the tests conducted here might also be considered small due to the low number of cases of Eurobarometer editions. However, this is less problematic as each case consists of a representative sample of European citizens composed around 26,000 interviewees each.

6. Conclusion

This research paper has analysed the question of how much of an impact the Brexit referendum has had on the European identity of the remaining EU Member States. The underlying concept of identity was initially explored as a multi-dimensional, dynamic phenomenon. Different approaches on the impacts on identity were assessed including the structural, primordialist, instrumentalist and constructivist argument, and, the constructivist approach was identified as the most fitting one for Brexit. The hypothesis deduced from the constructivist model was that the sense of feeling European has increased since the referendum because the constructed identity of a united Europe strengthens in such a crucial situation of endogenous crisis as Brexit. The findings on the issue mostly support the argument. A statistical t-test has shown that there was a significant increase of EU citizens who feel mostly European after the referendum. The effect of the referendum on the change of identity was demonstrated by a linear regression and quantified to account for 56.8 per cent of the identity shift. These results are supported by the descriptive analysis which showed that the response of a predominantly European identity has increased after June 2016. For the number of people who ascribe themselves as more national, the findings could not be confirmed. The statistical as well as the descriptive analysis only delivered small hints for a decline of national identity due to the Brexit vote.

This research has contributed to the literature on European identity indicating that events such as Brexit which threaten the endurance of the European project can, in fact, strengthen the sense of belonging to the Union among its citizens. The research on Brexit was also widened by this paper

as it has explored the side of the remaining EU Member States and their citizens. The article constitutes an early step in this field of study and could act as a reference point for ensuing investigations that could also address some limitations of this article. Further research could extend the scope of the results using a wider time frame as well as data that is more directly aimed at investigating identity. Moreover, the article focuses on the impact of the referendum whereas the process of the UK leaving the EU has only been completed with the final withdrawal on 31 January 2020. The definite departure could possibly have an even broader impact on identity than the referendum. Thus, further research on the effect of this event may offer useful, additional insights into the dynamics of European identity. Beyond that, the question of the practical implications of an increased European identity remains. Will Brexit in fact create greater support for the European Union?

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