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## When Country Matters More than Europe: What Implications for the Future of the EU?

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Giovanni Perucca

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# When Country Matters More than Europe: What Implications for the Future of the EU?

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## **ABSTRACT:**

This paper studies the determinants of the imbalance between country and European identity. While the two sentiments are positively correlated, recent empirical evidence showed the emergence, in the last years, of an increasing imbalance in favour of the identification with individuals' country of residence. In the political arena, this phenomenon is accompanied by the increasing support to nationalisms and Eurosceptic parties almost everywhere in the EU. It is therefore interesting to understand what are the individual and contextual factors associated to this identity imbalance. The assumption tested in this paper is that the unequal distribution (among individuals and regions) of the benefits from EU integration is the main determinant of the emerging antagonism between European and national identity. Empirical results support this hypothesis. Individuals with lower education and income, and those living in the lagging-behind regions of the EU are more likely than the others to identify more with their own country than with Europe.

**KEYWORDS:** European identity; national identity; European regions.

**JEL CLASSIFICATION:** R10; E61; O10.

## Quando el país importa más que Europa: ¿qué implicaciones para el futuro de la UE?

### **RESUMEN:**

Este artículo estudia los determinantes del desequilibrio entre la identidad de país y la europea. Si bien los dos sentimientos están positivamente correlacionados, la evidencia empírica reciente mostró la aparición, en los últimos años, un desequilibrio creciente a favor de la identificación con el país de residencia de las personas. En el ámbito político, este fenómeno se acompaña del creciente apoyo a los nacionalismos y los partidos euroescépticos en casi toda la UE. Por lo tanto, es interesante entender cuáles son los factores individuales y contextuales asociados a este desequilibrio de identidad. El supuesto que se contrasta en este documento es que la distribución desigual (entre individuos y regiones) de los beneficios de la integración de la UE es el principal determinante del antagonismo emergente entre la identidad europea y nacional. Los resultados empíricos respaldan esta hipótesis. Las personas con educación e ingresos más bajos, y aquellos que viven en las regiones rezagadas de la UE tienen más probabilidades que los demás de identificarse más con su propio país que con Europa.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** identidad europea; identidad nacional; Regiones europeas.

**CLASIFICACIÓN JEL:** R10; E61; O10.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The attention towards the determinants of European identity largely increased in the last years. The electoral success of Eurosceptic parties in many countries, culminated with the (mostly unpredicted) outcome of the Brexit referendum, revealed that little is known on the mechanisms leading to the citizens' identification with Europe. Moreover, in the political arena Eurosceptic positions are usually matched with nationalist ideologies, reinforcing the antagonism between national and European identity (Halikiopoulou et al., 2012).

Previous studies, in fact, claimed that individuals typically do not identify with one single community but, rather, multiple social identities coexist (Risse, 2004). This implies, for instance, that the same individual can identify (or not) with her country of origin and, at the same time, with Europe. While there is empirical evidence of a positive correlation between national and European identity (Bruter, 2003), the study of the determinants of imbalances in favour of the individuals' country of origin is much more scarce, even if it is important for the understanding of the increasing support to Eurosceptic parties (Kneuer, 2019).

The literature mostly focused on the factors promoting European identity, which is however a conceptually different issue from the analysis of the divergence between identification with Europe and one's own country. The former line of research does not provide any information on the way in which the elements reinforcing European identity may impact on the citizens' identification with their country. Studying the factors favouring a divergence between national and European identity, instead, sheds light on the conditions under which the simultaneous reinforcement of the two forms of identification is not achieved, creating a fertile soil for the success of nationalist and Eurosceptic movements. Stemming from these considerations, the present paper studies the extent to which a stronger identification with one's own country rather than Europe is associated with some individual characteristics and attributes of the region of residence. In general, the definition of these characteristics is based on the assumption that the unequal distribution (among individuals and regions) of the benefits from EU integration is the main determinant of the emerging antagonism between European and national identity.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section provides the conceptual framework and a review of the relevant literature, highlighting the innovative aspects of the study. The third section discusses the data and the methods employed in the empirical analysis. The fourth section presents the findings of the paper, while conclusions and policy implications follow in the last section.

## 2. MULTIPLE IDENTITIES AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

Identity is defined in the economic literature as the one's own sense of self, derived from perceived membership in social groups (Chen and Li, 2009). Many works proved the crucial role of identity in affecting individuals' behaviour (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000; Shayo, 2009). More precisely, these studies showed how group identity is likely to promote both cooperation with other group members and unselfish conduct (Tsouri, 2017), which are not traditionally explained by mainstream economic theory. Identity, as a consequence, is beneficial whenever it fosters efficient behaviours instead of opportunism and free riding (Goette et al., 2006).

Social groups are typically determined on the basis of similarities of different kind, from shared cultural behaviours to relational linkages to cognitive factors, as for instance economic specialization.<sup>1</sup> Whenever these similarities generate an identification with the community, then cooperative behaviour is

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<sup>1</sup> These similarities can be defined also by individuals' perceptions of imagined communities (Anderson, 1991).

fostered, so that private and public interests coincide. Put differently, under these conditions individuals' actions, aimed at maximizing one's own welfare, do not just increase personal utility but, simultaneously, they generate a benefit for the whole community (Capello, 2019).

Applying the same reasoning to Europe makes clear that the building of a European identity is an important step towards the achievement of economic and social integration. By identifying with Europe, citizens perceive supranational interests and goals as consistent with their own objectives and, as a consequence, they are more likely to support cooperation and collaboration among countries. It is not by chance that the evolution of the European Union has been accompanied by the creation of symbols, like the EU flag and anthem, able to reinforce the citizens' sense of belonging and identification with Europe.

There is, however, a further element of complexity in the study of identity. Individuals, in fact, hold multiple identities, which means that they generally identify with different communities (Herrmann and Brewer, 2004). For instance, they can identify with their country of origin but, at the same time, with Europe.<sup>2</sup>

Several works focused on the relationship between national and European identity. These studies can be classified in two categories. The first stream of literature claimed that the two identities are in contrast with each other, being based on very different mechanisms of formation (Smith, 1992). In particular, they suggest that national identity depends on deeply rooted country-specific values, history and culture, elements that are not cohesive (and even potentially divisive) at the supranational level. The second perspective on this issue, instead, assumed that the identification with Europe, even if based on different elements of cohesiveness compared with national identity, and mostly related to the civic and social sphere, can fully coexist with the latter (Habermas, 2004).

It is important to note that for both perspectives, the study of the relationship between European and national identity is conceptually very different from the analysis of the identification with Europe. This because the factors promoting European identity may have a contrasting effect, either positive or negative, on the identification with one's own country, and the occurrence of identity imbalances is extremely relevant for the development of socioeconomic, institutional and political supranational constructs, such as the EU.

Empirical evidence, mostly based on survey data, tends to confirm the "coexistence" approach, since it generally did not document any trade-off between national and European identity (Risse, 2005).<sup>3</sup> Rather, broad evidence showed that national and European identities are positively correlated (Bruter, 2003). The evolution over time of citizens' identification, however, suggests that this relationship weakened in the last years, and in particular after the economic recession. Polyakova and Fligstein (2016) documented the raise, from 2005 on, of the share of EU citizens holding exclusive national identity, together with a decrease of those holding both national and European identity.

While the identification with Europe followed a highly diversified (and generally decreasing) trend across countries from the Nineties on (Anderson and Hecht, 2018), what is new in the current scenario is the emergence of a strong antagonism between European and national identities. It seems that, after a period of coexistence of European and national identity, some divisive elements emerged, reinforcing nationalism in almost all EU countries. An interesting interpretation of this phenomenon is provided by Cinpoes (2008) who claims that, while national identity is not a barrier for the development of European identity, nationalism is. In other words, the symbols of national identity can either promote supranational identification, when prominence is given to elements of cohesion with other countries, or impede it, when

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<sup>2</sup> Citizens may also identify with other territorial or administrative constructs, like the region or the city of residence. Without denying the occurrence of these other forms of identification, the present paper focuses just on the national and European identity.

<sup>3</sup> For a taxonomy of the possible relationships between multiple identities see Risse (2002).

the divisive aspects are emphasized. Such mechanism is mirrored by the political propaganda of Eurosceptic parties, where symbols of national identity (Arzheimer, 2015) and history (Petrović, 2019) are broadly used in opposition to European values.<sup>4</sup> This antagonism was amplified by the increasing support to Eurosceptic movements, with evident implications for the future of EU integration: in the same period studied by Polyakova and Fligstein (2016), the share of seats in the EU Parliament occupied by Eurosceptic and nationalist parties raised from 2.8 per cent in 2007 to 23.3 per cent in 2019.<sup>5</sup>

Since the values and symbols generating a common identity, both at the national and supranational level, change only in the long period, through processes of creation of a collective imaginary, why do we observe situations where divisive elements arise, overcoming the cohesive ones? What are those conditions under which national identity evolves into nationalism, leading to an imbalance between the identification with country and Europe?

Very few studies focused on these research questions. The goal of the present paper is to shed light on this issue, identifying the determinants of the imbalance between individuals' identification with their country and Europe. More precisely, the gap between national and European identity will be studied as a function of several characteristics, associated to both the individuals and the context conditions of their regions of residence. The next section presents with more details the empirical approach.

### **3. THE IMBALANCE BETWEEN EUROPEAN AND NATIONAL IDENTITY: ASSUMPTIONS AND EMPIRICAL MEASUREMENTS**

#### **3.1. THE DETERMINANTS OF THE IDENTITY IMBALANCE**

The empirical analysis presented in this paper will associate episodes of divergence between individuals' national and European identity with some elements that are expected to play a role in promoting this imbalance. In general, previous literature suggests that the emergence of nationalisms occurred with higher intensity in those places and within those social groups that benefited less from EU integration. The goal of the present analysis is therefore to test this hypothesis, recognizing that disparities and lack of opportunities may manifest themselves in different forms. As a consequence, the potential determinants of the identity imbalance are classified in four categories.

The first set of elements refers to some individual characteristics. People of different kind, in terms of age, education, occupation, are differently exposed to European symbols and to the advantages from EU integration. For instance, EU students' exchange programmes exposed the younger generation to cultural experiences abroad, emphasising similarity between different parts of Europe, rather than difference (Cinpoes, 2008). Education and income are other examples of individual characteristics assumed to be strongly associated to the identity imbalance, since less educated and poorer individuals tend to be more sensitive to the rhetoric of nationalist movements (Becker et al., 2017).

The second group of factors concern the level of economic development achieved by the local community compared with the EU average. Many works claimed that the resurgence of nationalism is mainly due to the asymmetries in the level of economic development within the EU. Individuals living in regions characterized by the lowest levels of GDP, highest unemployment rates and, in general, lack of opportunities, perceive EU integration as a process that did not produce any benefit for their own community. From this perspective, embracing nationalist ideologies is a form of "revenge of places that

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<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the rejection of symbols of European identity is part of the rhetoric of Eurosceptic movements. The choice of some British members of the EU Parliament to turn backs on Europe anthem at the 2019 opening session is an example of this practice.

<sup>5</sup> As Eurosceptic and nationalist political groups at the EU Parliament we consider IND/DEM (Independence/Democracy) in 2007 and ECR (European Conservatives and Reformists), EFDD (Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy) and ENF (Europe of Nations and Freedom) in 2019.

don't matter" (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018), i.e. the way in which individuals from lagging-behind regions manifest their discontent with the EU.

The third element is related to the response of the different communities to the economic recession of 2008. The decision of the EU to enforce policies of austerity after 2008 has been interpreted by several studies (Polyakova and Fligstein, 2016; Börzel and Risse, 2018) as one of the most important factors associated to the resurgence of nationalism. According to this perspective, citizens in the countries most affected by the crisis perceived these policies as the proof that EU institutions preferred to secure financial stability at the expenses of people's wellbeing. This undermined the identification with Europe, in favour of a stronger attachment to the country.

Finally, the last factor expected to have played a role in the divergence between European and national identity is represented by the direct intervention of the EU in the social and economic life of local communities. Recently, this issue received great attention, witnessed by the funding of two Horizon 2020 projects<sup>6</sup> (Capello and Perucca, 2018; Aiello et al., 2019), aimed at understanding the relationship between Cohesion Policy implementation and citizens' identification with Europe. This stream of research generally pointed out a positive association between EU funding and European identity, subject however to the mediation of several factors, namely the level of awareness and satisfaction with the actions undertaken (Capello and Perucca, 2019), the implementation of effective strategies of information, communication and the involvement of the local population (López-Bazo & Royuela, 2019; Smętkowski & Dąbrowski, 2019). Coherently with this evidence, in the context of this paper Cohesion Policy is expected to decrease the identity gap in favour of national over European identity.

The next section presents the empirical analysis, discussing the data and methods used to measure the gap between the identification with one's own country and Europe, and the abovementioned elements expected to influence this imbalance.

### **3.2. NATIONAL VS EUROPEAN IDENTITY: MEASUREMENTS AND EMPIRICAL APPROACH**

Measuring identity is a complex task, being an abstract and subjective construct. Most of the empirical studies on this topic make use of survey data where a sample of respondents is asked to express, over a predetermined scale, her level of identification with the region, country or other supranational constructs (Kohli, 2000). Among the available sources of data, Eurobarometer studies play a prominent role in supplying evidence on citizens' identification with both their country and Europe. Eurobarometer studies are survey analyses conducted periodically on behalf of the EU Commission since 1973. Among the several recurrent topics covered by the surveys, a question concerns the level of identification of the respondents with their country and with Europe.

More specifically, the question wording used in Eurobarometer studies is the following one "Please tell me how attached you feel to Europe/ your country". Respondents have to choose their answer among four options: "very attached", "fairly attached", "not very attached", "not at all attached".

Table 1 reports some descriptive evidence on the share of people associated to the different degrees of identification. Data in Table 1 come from different Eurobarometer waves conducted in the whole EU28 between 2014 and 2017.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The two projects are COHESIFY ([www.cohesify.eu](http://www.cohesify.eu)) and PERCEIVE (<https://www.perceiveproject.eu/>).

<sup>7</sup> Details on the Eurobarometer waves used here can be found in the references (European Commission 2018, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2016, 2014).

TABLE 1.  
European and national identity: percentage of respondents for different levels of identification  
(EU28, 2014-17)

Attachment to:		Europe				Total
		Not at all attached	Not very attached	Fairly attached	Very attached	
Country	Not at all attached	0.58 %	0.18 %	0.20 %	0.10 %	1.06 %
	Not very attached	0.84 %	2.37 %	1.49 %	0.32 %	5.01 %
	Fairly attached	3.08 %	10.76 %	16.82 %	1.50 %	32.15 %
	Very attached	5.94 %	13.88 %	26.99 %	14.97 %	61.78 %
	<b>Total</b>	<b>10.43 %</b>	<b>27.19 %</b>	<b>45.49 %</b>	<b>16.89 %</b>	<b>100.00 %</b>

**Note:** total number of respondents = 124,803.

**Source:** Eurobarometer (survey issues are reported in the reference list).

The table shows that, in general, attachment to the country of origin is higher than the identification with Europe. Only the 6.07 per cent of the respondents claimed to be either “not at all attached” or “not very attached” to the country of origin, whilst the same share reaches the 37.62 per cent when considering people either “not at all” or “not very” attached to Europe. Nevertheless, the two sentiments are positively associated: 60.28 respondents out of 100 are simultaneously very or fairly attached to the country of residence and to Europe.

This positive association, however, is matched by an imbalance of identification in favour of the country over Europe. In fact, as shown in the grey section of Table 1, the 33.66 per cent of respondents stated to be either very or fairly attached to their country and, at the same time, either not very attached or not at all attached to Europe. Notice that the opposite situation, i.e. high attachment to Europe and low for the nation, concerns a minority of respondents (2.11 per cent).

The classification of statements provided by Eurobarometer surveys poses a concern about what can be defined as an imbalance between national and European identity. Clearly, the focus of the present analysis is on those cases where individuals’ identification with their own country is higher than their identification with Europe. This definition covers, however, several different combinations of the levels of national and European identity. For instance, it could be restricted to those very attached to the country and not at all attached to Europe or, alternatively, it may include also those who reported to be not very attached to Europe. The focus on just one of these alternative measurements would represent a subjective and *ad hoc* choice. In order to avoid this risk, the imbalance between national and European identity is defined by three distinct dummy variables, corresponding to different intensities of the individuals’ preference for their country:

- weak preference for country: dummy variable equal to one if the individual is “very”/ “fairly” attached to country and “not very”/ “not at all” attached to Europe (33.66 per cent of the respondents);
- intermediate preference for country: dummy variable equal to one if the individual is “very” attached to country and “not very”/ “not at all” attached to Europe (19.82 per cent of the respondents);
- strong preference for country: dummy variable equal to one if the individual is “very” attached to country and “not at all” attached to Europe (5.94 per cent of the respondents).

The goal of the empirical analysis is to study the occurrence of identity imbalances in favour of one’s own country over Europe as a function of the different characteristics discussed in the previous section:

$$\text{Preference for country}_{i,r,t} = \alpha(\text{individual characteristics})_i + \beta(\text{per capita GDP})_r + \gamma(\text{after crisis change in regional GDP})_r + \tau(\text{per capita Cohesion Policy funds})_r + \lambda(\text{other macro controls})_{r,c} + \kappa_t + \mu_c + \delta_r + \varepsilon_{i,r,t} \quad (1)$$

where  $i$  stands for the individual,  $r$  and  $c$  respectively for the NUTS2 and country of residence and  $t$  for the year in which the survey study was conducted. Equation (1) will be estimated separately for each of the measures of the imbalance between national and European identity, i.e. weak, intermediate and strong preference for one's own country. The comparison of the results will allow understanding what are the factors influencing different intensities of the identity gap.

Data come from five Eurobarometer survey studies conducted between 2014 and 2017, those used for the descriptive analysis provided in Table 1. The set of independent variables assumed to be potential determinants of the identity imbalance have been conceptually discussed in section 3.1, and their empirical measurement is reported in Table 2.

The first category of factors expected to play a role on the gap between national and European identity is represented by the individual characteristics of the respondents. Eurobarometer studies disclose information on several of these aspects, like gender, age and occupation. As discussed by previous literature, those with higher education and income are likely to benefit more than the others from the advantages of European integration and, as a consequence, they are expected to have a strong preference for their country over Europe. In order to capture all these potential effects, the individual-level regressors in equation (1) comprehend all the variables made available by Eurobarometer studies (Table 2). It is worth noting that information on individual income is not collected in the survey studies. In order to alleviate the effect of the omission of this variable, equation (1) includes a dummy variable equal to one if the respondent owns the apartment where she is living, and equal to zero otherwise.

The second element assumed to influence the identity gap is represented by the economic performance of the region, which is empirically measured by the per capita GDP in the NUTS2 region of residence of the respondent.

The third factor expected to be associated to the imbalance between country and European identification is the reaction of the regional economies to the economic recession that hit EU countries from 2008 on. Equation (1) includes the change in regional GDP between 2008 and the year in which the survey was conducted. As a further control, the change in regional GDP in the last three years before the interview was also added to the list of independent variables, in order to test whether the preference for one's own country is more sensitive either to long-term economic changes or to short-term, recent economic fluctuations.

The fourth element included in the analysis is represented by the implementation of Cohesion Policy. More in details, two aspects of EU regional policy are expected to influence citizens' identification with their country and Europe: the intensity of funding and the outcome of policy implementation. As far as the former aspect is concerned, equation (1) includes the per capita funds invested by Cohesion Policy in the region of residence of the respondent in the year before the one covered by the survey studies. Apart from the amount of funds received, however, EU regions significantly differ in their capability to absorb and effectively invest these resources. Unfortunately, empirical evidence on the outcome of Cohesion Policy is extremely scarce and poorly comparable across regions and countries. Nevertheless, research focused on the impact of Cohesion Policy documented how the effectiveness of these actions is strongly associated of the institutional quality of the regional policy implementation settings (Rodríguez-Pose and Garcilazo, 2015). Based on this finding, the index of European Quality of Government Index (Charron et al., 2015) is included among the regressors, jointly with its interaction with the amount of funding. The rationale for this choice is that the effect of EU funding on the identity imbalance is expected to be mediated by the quality of local institutions, which is in turn associated to the effectiveness of Cohesion Policy.



**TABLE 2.**  
**List of variables included in equation (1)**

Variable name	Description	Source
<i>Dependent variable</i>		
Preference for country	<i>Weak preference:</i> dummy equal to 1 if the respondent is “very”/ “fairly” attached to country and “not very”/ “not at all” attached to Europe. <i>Intermediate preference:</i> dummy equal to 1 if the respondent is “very” attached to country and “not very”/ “not at all” attached to Europe. <i>Strong preference:</i> dummy equal to 1 if the respondent is “very” attached to country and “not at all” attached to Europe.	Eurobarometer
<i>Independent variables: individual characteristics</i>		
Age	Age (in number of years) of the respondent.	Eurobarometer
Gender	Dummy equal to 1 if the respondent is a female and equal to 0 otherwise.	Eurobarometer
Occupation	Set of dummy variables for the occupation of the respondent: self-employed, manager, other white collar, manual worker, housekeeper, retired, student, unemployed.	Eurobarometer
Marital status	Set of dummy variables for the marital status of the respondent: single, separated/divorced, widower.	Eurobarometer
Apartment ownership	Dummy equal to 1 if the respondent is the owner of the apartment she/he is living in and equal to 0 otherwise.	Eurobarometer
Number of kids in household	Number of kids below 18 years old in the household.	Eurobarometer
<i>Independent variables: regional GDP</i>		
Per capita GDP	Per capita GDP in the NUTS2 region of residence of the respondent.	Eurostat
<i>Independent variables: recovery after the crisis</i>		
Change in GDP (2008 to t)	Change of regional GDP from 2008 to the year of the interview.	Eurostat
Change in GDP (t-3 to t)	Change of regional GDP in the last three years before the interview.	Eurostat
<i>Independent variables: Cohesion Policy funding</i>		
Per capita funds	Amount of per capita funds invested within Cohesion Policy programmes in the year before the interview.	EU Commission
<i>Independent variables: regional characteristics</i>		
Institutional quality	European Quality of Government Index (EQI).	Charron et al. (2015)
Living in the country capital	Dummy equal to 1 if the region of residence of the respondent is the country capital and equal to 0 otherwise.	Eurostat
Living in a rural setting	Dummy equal to 1 if the respondent reported to live in a rural setting and equal to 0 otherwise.	Eurobarometer
Support to Eurosceptic parties	Share of preferences for Eurosceptic parties in the 2014 EU Parliament elections. Eurosceptic parties are those defined by Treib (2014).	EU Commission
<i>Other controls</i>		
Year	Set of time dummies for the year (2014-17) in which the survey study was conducted.	Eurobarometer

Finally, the last category of independent variables comprehends some characteristics of the region where the respondent is living. These include the degree of urbanization of the region of residence and the support to Eurosceptic parties in the country of residence. The degree of urbanization is measured by two proxies. The first one is a dummy equal to one if the region of the respondent is the capital of the country and equal to zero elsewhere. Living in the capital region is expected to reduce the imbalance between national and European identity, because these large urban areas provide high accessibility to foreign countries, they generally host country-representatives of EU institutions and they are characterized by a higher degree of multiculturalism. The second variable for urbanization is instead defined at the individual level, and it is a dummy equal to one if the respondent stated to live in a rural setting and equal to zero otherwise. Living in rural settings (embedded in an urbanized region or not) is assumed to be associated with a stronger preference for one's own country over Europe, given the lower access to the benefits of EU integration. The overall support to Eurosceptic parties in the country of residence of the respondents is captured by the share of votes that anti-EU movements received at the 2014 EU Parliament elections.<sup>8</sup> The inclusion of this variable is based on the assumption that in countries where Eurosceptic parties are more prominent, individuals are more likely to be exposed to the nationalist rhetoric and, as a consequence, to perceive national and European identity as conflicting constructs. Finally, a set of year-dummy variables ( $\kappa_t$  in equation (1)) is included in order to account for any variation of the relationship between country and European identity changing over time.

Equation (1) is estimated by the means of a linear multilevel probability model, consistently with the literature dealing with survey data of this kind (Lenzi and Perucca, 2019).<sup>9</sup> This technique allows treating the hierarchical structure of the data and to correct standard errors from the potential correlation given by unobserved characteristics related to the area in which respondents are living. This hierarchical structure is assumed to be defined at two levels, the country ( $\mu_c$  in equation (1)) and the region of residence ( $\delta_r$  in equation (1)). The next section presents and discusses the empirical findings of the study.<sup>10</sup>

#### 4. THE DETERMINANTS OF THE IMBALANCE BETWEEN COUNTRY AND EUROPEAN IDENTITY: EMPIRICAL RESULTS

Table 3 shows the results of the empirical estimation of equation (1). The same model has been estimated using as dependent variable each of the three different levels of identity imbalance (weak, intermediate and strong, see the rows on top of Table 3), according to the definition provided in section 3.2 (Table 2). In order to test for potential multicollinearity issues, the regressors are introduced separately in the specification of equation (1). First, individual characteristics are included (model [a], Table 3). Model [b] controls also for the characteristics of the regions of residence of the respondents. Model [c] tests for the statistical significance of the interaction between institutional quality and the amount of EU regional funding allocated to the region. Finally, model [d] includes the change in GDP in the three years before the interview.

The analysis of individual characteristics points out some results that are strongly significant and stable over different levels of the identity imbalance (weak, intermediate and strong). Age is positively associated to the probability of preferring the country of residence over Europe, so as the number of kids in the household. The most interesting result, however, concerns those variables expected to mirror, in a more or less direct way, the individual opportunities provided by EU integration. In the case of education,

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<sup>8</sup> The classification is the one provided by Treib (2014), and it includes both soft and hard Eurosceptic parties.

<sup>9</sup> Alternatively, a multilevel model for categorical dependent variable such as logit or probit could have been applied. The results from such an approach are fully consistent with those presented here, and available from the author upon request.

<sup>10</sup> Given the structure of the data set, other statistical techniques could have been applied. For instance, being attachment defined on a four-step scale, multinomial logit models could have been used. Results from alternative approaches to the research question posed in this study provide results consistent with those discussed in the next section. Evidence on this is available from the author upon request.

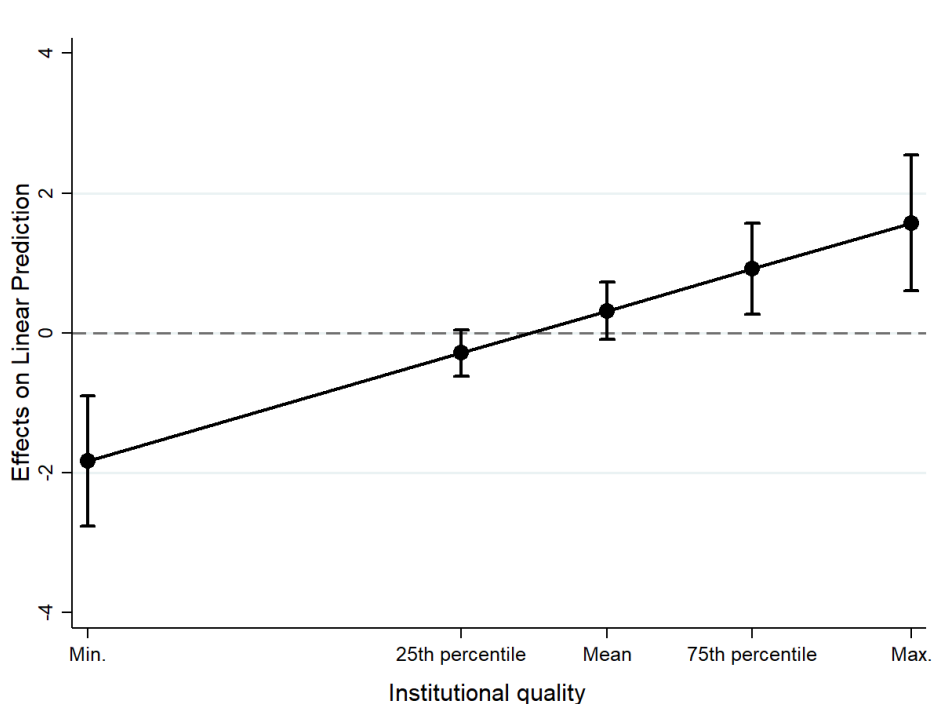
for instance, graduated interviewees are less likely to prefer their own country over Europe than the others. Similar evidence concerns the occupation. Taking students as the reference category, all the other occupations are associated with a significantly higher attachment to the country than to Europe, and this result is consistent for all the three specifications of the dependent variable. The openness to multiculturalism of the younger generations, but also the mobility programmes provided by the EU to students (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003) justifies this finding. However, it is worth noting that the identity imbalance is particularly high for those occupations associated to the lower wages, i.e. unemployed people, manual workers and housekeepers. Finally, being the owner of the apartment of residence also decreases the probability of preferring one's own country over Europe. Taken together, these results suggest that lower individual income and education are strongly linked to the preference for one's own country over Europe.

A similar result is found when we move from the individual characteristic to the regional ones. The higher the level of per capita GDP, the lower the identity gap in favour of the country of residence. This finding is particularly significant for the weak and intermediate levels of the identity imbalance, while it becomes more nuanced in the case of the strong preference for one's own country.

While the association between the identity gap and the current level of per capita GDP is statistically significant, the same does not apply when considering the change in GDP from 2008 to the time of the interview. Living in those regions that suffered more from the effects of the economic recession is not significantly related to the occurrence of the identity imbalance. This result contradicts the assumption that the effects of the crisis, and the EU policies adopted to face it, had a direct effect on the citizens' identification with their own country and Europe. Interestingly, however, the same does not apply if we consider, instead on the long-term change in regional GDP, its short run evolution in the three years before the interview. Results of model [d] in Table 3 show that the recent performance of the regional economy is negatively associated to the identity gap. In other words, the higher the GDP growth in the last three years, the lower the preference for one's own country over Europe. This finding suggest that individuals' identification is mostly related to the overall economic situation (i.e. per capita GDP) and its recent, short-term change, while it is less sensitive to the long-period fluctuations.

FIGURE 1.

Slope of per capita EU regional funds as a function of the institutional quality of the region



The amount of Cohesion Policy funding is included in the model specification [b]. Its association with the identity imbalance is generally non-significant. This implies that the intensity of funds received does not influence the preference for one's own country over Europe. Nevertheless, the interaction with the quality of the regional institutions shows (model [c]) that this average effect is differentiated for local settings of different kind. This is graphically represented in Figure 1.<sup>11</sup>

The figure reports on the horizontal axis the standardized value of the institutional quality of the region of residence, while the vertical one shows the coefficient associated to the per capita Cohesion Policy funds. For regions with a mean value of institutional quality, the coefficient for the funding intensity is not statistically significant, as shown in the figure by the confidence interval of the coefficient, including both positive and negative values. In correspondence of lower levels of institutional quality, however, the coefficient associated to the amount of funds becomes negative and statistically significant. This implies that in regions with poor institutions, increasing the EU support is associated to a decrease of the identity imbalance. The opposite holds in correspondence of high quality institutions. In this case (Figure 1) the coefficient associated to the funding becomes positive and statistically significant, implying that an increase in funding is linked to a stronger preference for the country of residence.

This finding is not consistent with the *ex-ante* assumptions discussed in section 3.1. The main conjecture of the paper is that the impossibility of fully benefitting from the advantages of EU integration leads to a stronger identity imbalance in favour of one's own country. Therefore, based on this reasoning, it is straightforward to expect the effective implementation of Cohesion Policy to be associated with a weaker identity imbalance. Empirical evidence reported in Figure 1, however, suggests that this is not true. This may be explained by the fact that, considering regions receiving Cohesion Policy funding, citizens living in contexts with low quality institutions perceive European integration as a remedy for the inefficiency of local administrations. On the other hand, in regions characterized by a good governance the opposite mechanism holds, and European integration may be perceived as a potential threaten for the good functioning of local institutions.

Finally, considering the other controls, living in the region hosting the country capital is decreasing the imbalance between country and European identity. This is consistent with the expectations, related to the higher multiculturalism characterizing these large urban centres. A similar message is conveyed by the dummy variable, defined at the individual level, equal to one for those living in a rural setting. A rural location, whatever the degree of the urbanization of the region, is associated with a higher imbalance in favour of the national identity over the European one. As expected, the support to Eurosceptic parties in the country of residence is also associated to a stronger preference for the country.

When comparing the results across the different levels of preference for the country over Europe, Table 3 shows that, in general, both individual and regional characteristics maintain the same sign. Statistical significance, however, tends to decrease, in particular for the variables associated to the regional context of residence. This suggests that disparities in GDP and in the recent regional performance explain mostly the occurrence of weak and intermediate preferences for the country. The most intense one, on the other hand, probably are due to cultural and social factors that are not fully captured by the variables included in equation (1).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> More in details, Figure 1 shows the interaction effect of model [c] when the dependent variable is the intermediate preference for country. Notice that this result is consistent when using alternative statistical approaches, like multilevel probit or logit analysis. Results are available from the author upon request.

<sup>12</sup> The output in Table 3 reports also the value of the ICC for the two-level (country and NUTS2) nested models. Taken together, NUTS2 and country random effects account for a share of the total residual variance of about 1.5 per cent. This amount is relatively low, but its statistical significance justifies the use of multilevel models.

TABLE 3.  
The determinants of the imbalance between country and European identity

	Dependent variable: preference for country over Europe (different levels)											
	Weak preference				Intermediate preference				Strong preference			
	[a]	[b]	[c]	[d]	[a]	[b]	[c]	[d]	[a]	[b]	[c]	[d]
Gender (female)	0.014***	0.014***	0.014***	0.014***	0.013***	0.014***	0.014***	0.013***	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Age	0.001***	0.001***	0.001***	0.001***	0.002***	0.002***	0.002***	0.002***	0.001***	0.001***	0.001***	0.001***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Education: graduated	-0.106***	-0.105***	-0.105***	-0.105***	-0.072***	-0.072***	-0.072***	-0.072***	-0.034***	-0.034***	-0.034***	-0.034***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
<u>Occupation categories</u>												
Self-employed	0.061***	0.061***	0.061***	0.060***	0.030***	0.030***	0.030***	0.030***	0.016***	0.016***	0.016***	0.016***
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Manager	0.041***	0.041***	0.041***	0.041***	0.022***	0.022***	0.022***	0.022***	0.016***	0.016***	0.016***	0.016***
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Other white collar	0.078***	0.078***	0.078***	0.078***	0.040***	0.040***	0.040***	0.040***	0.012***	0.012***	0.012***	0.012***
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Manual worker	0.117***	0.116***	0.116***	0.116***	0.062***	0.062***	0.062***	0.062***	0.023***	0.023***	0.023***	0.023***
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Unemployed	0.147***	0.146***	0.146***	0.146***	0.073***	0.072***	0.072***	0.072***	0.037***	0.037***	0.037***	0.037***
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Housekeeper	0.138***	0.137***	0.137***	0.137***	0.082***	0.082***	0.082***	0.082***	0.042***	0.042***	0.042***	0.042***
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Retired	0.106***	0.105***	0.105***	0.105***	0.067***	0.067***	0.067***	0.067***	0.029***	0.029***	0.029***	0.029***
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Apartment ownership	-0.012***	-0.011***	-0.011***	-0.011***	-0.006**	-0.005**	-0.005**	-0.005**	-0.005***	-0.005***	-0.005***	-0.005***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
<u>Marital status</u>												
Single	-0.004	-0.004	-0.004	-0.004	-0.005	-0.005	-0.005	-0.005	0.003	0.003	0.003	0.003
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Separated/divorced	0.021***	0.021***	0.021***	0.021***	0.005	0.005	0.005	0.005	0.005**	0.005*	0.005*	0.005*
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Widower	0.055***	0.055***	0.055***	0.055***	0.054***	0.053***	0.053***	0.053***	0.033***	0.033***	0.033***	0.033***

	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Number of kids in the household	0.004*	0.004*	0.004*	0.004*	0.004**	0.004**	0.004**	0.004**	0.003**	0.003**	0.003**	0.003**
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Residence in a rural setting	0.033***	0.031***	0.031***	0.032***	0.021***	0.021***	0.021***	0.021***	0.012***	0.012***	0.012***	0.012***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Residence in the country capital		-0.036***	-0.036***	-0.037***		-0.011*	-0.011*	-0.012**		-0.006*	-0.006*	-0.006*
		(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)		(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)		(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Per capita GDP		-0.028***	-0.028***	-0.019*		-0.021**	-0.020**	-0.013		-0.008*	-0.008*	-0.005
		(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.010)		(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)		(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.004)
Change in GDP (2008 to t)		-0.029	-0.024			-0.040	-0.033			0.002	0.004	
		(0.033)	(0.034)			(0.028)	(0.028)			(0.016)	(0.016)	
Institutional quality		-0.022*	-0.026**	-0.029**		-0.019*	-0.025**	-0.026***		-0.010*	-0.012**	-0.012**
		(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)		(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)		(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Per capita EU regional funds		-0.657***	-0.318	-0.262		-0.214	0.260	0.316		-0.062	0.078	0.093
		(0.196)	(0.249)	(0.250)		(0.165)	(0.209)	(0.210)		(0.099)	(0.126)	(0.126)
Instit. Quality*per capita EU funds			0.512**	0.518**			0.716***	0.726***			0.213*	0.210*
			(0.233)	(0.232)			(0.195)	(0.195)			(0.117)	(0.117)
Support to Eurosceptic parties		0.004***	0.004***	0.004***		0.003**	0.003**	0.003**		0.001**	0.001**	0.001**
		(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)		(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)		(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Change in GDP (t-3 to t)				-0.104***				-0.105***				-0.027*
				(0.033)				(0.028)				(0.016)
Year 2015	-0.022***	-0.026***	-0.025***	-0.025***	0.005	0.004	0.006	0.005	-0.000	-0.001	-0.000	-0.000
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Year 2016	-0.030***	-0.036***	-0.035***	-0.034***	-0.013**	-0.012**	-0.010	-0.010*	-0.010***	-0.011***	-0.011***	-0.009***
	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.003)
Year 2017	-0.056***	-0.064***	-0.063***	-0.061***	-0.025***	-0.024***	-0.021***	-0.021***	-0.016***	-0.017***	-0.016***	-0.015***
	(0.006)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Constant	0.234***	0.218***	0.208***	0.294***	0.073***	0.070	0.056	0.133***	0.004	-0.022	-0.025	0.009
	(0.023)	(0.052)	(0.052)	(0.048)	(0.021)	(0.046)	(0.046)	(0.043)	(0.010)	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.023)
ICC (Country)	0.010	0.006	0.006	0.006	0.009	0.007	0.007	0.007	0.002	0.001	0.001	0.001
	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
ICC (NUTS2)	0.005	0.005	0.005	0.005	0.003	0.003	0.003	0.003	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	109,176	109,177	109,178	109,179	109,176	109,176	109,176	109,176	109,176	109,176	109,176	109,176

Standard errors in parentheses (\*\*\*) p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1). Reference categories: student (occupation), married (marital status), 2014 (year).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

This paper discussed the determinants of the imbalance between citizens' identification with their own country and Europe. The issue is relevant, given the increasing support to nationalist and Eurosceptic parties occurred in the last decade and the poor evidence documenting it.

The empirical results presented in the previous section convey relevant policy implications.

First of all, the preference for one's own country is strongly associated to measures of wealth disparity, both at the individual and regional level. People with lower education and income are more likely to consider national and European identities as contrasting. The same holds for those living in regions with low per capita GDP. This suggests that citizens perceive the EU objective of territorial cohesion and redistribution of the benefits from economic integration as still not achieved. The asymmetries, within and across regions, in the opportunities provided by being part of a supranational community foster the identity imbalance.

This consideration is strictly linked to the EU regional policy, which is the main instrument of the EU aimed at promoting cohesion and reducing disparities. The results presented above showed that, consistently with other studies (Capello and Perucca, 2019), European identity and its association with the national one is not directly influenced just by the amount of resources invested. Rather, the use of the funds and the characteristics of the local contexts are likely to mediate this effect. The quality of the local institutions is one of these characteristics. Nevertheless, institutional quality does not weaken the association between funding and the preference for one's own country, as it could have been expected but, instead, it reinforces it. This result, in contradiction with the ex-ante assumptions formulated in section 3.1, poses an issue on the relationship between policy effectiveness and identity. While a broad literature demonstrated that regions with high institutional quality are those most effective in implementing Cohesion Policy, the findings presented in the previous section suggest that in these regions the identity imbalance in favour of the country over Europe is stronger than elsewhere. This result requires further research in order to understand whether the simultaneous achievement of policy effectiveness and the reduction of the identity gap may be achieved.

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