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Construction of European identity by the Pro-European Parties

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ABSTRACT

The political scene of the European Union (EU) presents a discursive field where identity construction becomes a vital tool for political parties to claim political credit and legitimize themselves. While pro-European parties utilize the narratives of an in-group of European identity, Eurosceptic parties problematize the gap between 'us' and 'them' by employing narratives of intergroup differentiation as an instrument to re/shape the political reality. The scholarly literature mostly focuses on Eurosceptic populist discourse and right-wing rhetoric relying on discursive socio-political exclusion to form in-group identification of national identities. By adopting a different stance, this article seeks to address the discursive strategies of the pro-European parties employed and mobilized during the 2019 European Parliament election campaigns through the discourse historical approach. It argues that it is of critical importance to reveal the pro-European discourse to reflect the pro-European stance over the debates on the existing identity cleavage within the turbulent European political scene.

Keywords: 2019 European Parliament elections, Discourse Historical Approach (DHA), European identity, European crises, identity construction

Avrupa Yanlısı Siyasi Partiler Tarafından Avrupa Kimliği İnşası

ÖZET

Avrupa Birliği (AB) siyasi sahnesi, kimlik inşasının siyasi partiler için siyasi bir meşrutiye kazanma aracı haline geldiği söylemsel bir alan sunmaktadır. Avrupa yanlısı partiler, Avrupa kimliğinin grup içi anlatılarını kullanırken Avrupa şüpheli partiler, siyasi gerçekliği yeniden şekillendirmek için gruplar arası farklılaşma anlatılarını kullanarak "biz" ve "onlar" arasındaki grup ayrımını sorunsallaştırır. Literatür çoğunlukla, söylemsel sosyo-politik dışlama yoluyla grup içi ulus kimliği inşa eden Avrupa şüpheli populist söylem ve sağcı retorik odaklanır. Bu makale, farklı bir duruş benimseyerek 2019 Avrupa Parlamentosu seçim kampanyaları süresince Avrupa yanlısı siyasi partilerin başvurduğu söylemsel stratejileri söylem-tarihsel yaklaşım yöntemiyle ele almayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalkantılı Avrupa siyaset sahnesindeki Avrupa yanlısı söylemi araştırmak bu partilerin grup içi kimlik bölünmesine ilişkin duruşunu ortaya koymakta kritik bir öneme sahiptir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: 2019 Avrupa Parlamentosu seçimleri, Söylem-Tarihsel Yaklaşım, Avrupa kimliği, Avrupa krizleri, kimlik inşası

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Introduction

The 2019 European Parliament (EP) elections took place within political turbulence that challenged the European Union's (EU) cohesion and solidarity as the core elements of European integration.¹ Repercussions from consecutive crises, namely the 2009 Eurozone sovereign debt crisis, the 2015 European refugee crisis and Brexit, resulted in the rise of Eurosceptic parties utilizing the rhetoric of exclusion and intergroup differentiation. Moreover, they provided suitable ground for the competition of discursive constructions of European and national identities, thereby aggravating old national stereotypes based on the traditional core/periphery divide.² In this context, the 2019 EP elections marked a turning point both for the European democracy and its new vision for the future steps of the Union³ that would be shaped directly by European citizens under the shadow of the Eurosceptic surge.⁴

The rise of Euroscepticism has drawn significant scholarly attention. The literature on the nexus between the formation of European identity and the EU's crises often deals with addressing Eurosceptic discursive strategies that rely on a discursive socio-political exclusion. Yet less attention has been paid to the discursive strategies of Europhiles⁵ endeavoring to promote the collective European identity formation and how they aspire to mobilize European identity construction rhetorically and politically to form pro-European sentiments in times of political turmoil. This article argues that the discursive strategies of the Europhiles and European identity construction as a tool of rhetorical and political mobilization also need to be considered when analyzing the different articulations of European identity. To fill the above-mentioned gap, this research addresses pro-European discursive strategies to increase the sense of belonging to the in-group within the 2019 European parliament elections context. Since the EP is the only directly elected institution within the Union, the election campaigns present political actors' influence through discursive power.

The research qualitatively analyzes party manifestos, press releases, public speeches, and interviews with party leaders obtained as secondary sources. Party groups are chosen based on their affiliation with pro-Europeanism and their representation in the EP. Therefore, the research focuses on the largest political party groups: the Group of the European People's Party (EPP), Party of European Socialists (PES), Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), and the European Green Party (EGP). While the views expressed by these party groups do not represent the views of the EP as a whole, the analysis sheds light on the vision of the largest political groups' agenda in terms of identity politics.

1 Piril Akin Ocak and Cagri Erhan, "A Litmus Test for the EU's Longest Year: Solidarity Principle and Challenges by COVID-19 in 2020", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Advanced Online Publication, 28 May 2021, p. 1-23, DOI: 10.33458/uiidergisi.947511.

2 Charlotte Galpin, *The Euro Crisis and European Identities: Political and Media Discourse in Germany, Ireland and Poland, Switzerland*, Springer, 2017.

3 Results of the elections showed that although the two largest groups, the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) and the European People's Party (EPP) lost seats, support for the Eurosceptic parties increased only moderately. While the elections did not lead to a Eurosceptic blow to European politics because of the pro-integrationist outcome, preservation of harmony and internal balance within the Union remained disputed. It is with this contextualization in mind that the following section analyzes the discursive construction of European identity during the 2019 election campaigns of the pro-European political parties of the European Parliament.

4 Anastasia Deligiaouri, "The 'Lead Candidates' & the European Commission Presidency Are They (dis)connected?", *Euroreflections Report*, No 40, (2019) https://www.miun.se/globalassets/ovrigt/euroreflections/euroreflections_v3.pdf (Accessed 21 April 2021).

5 Europhiles refers to political parties supporting the European integration process.

The study utilizes Wodak's Discourse Historical Approach (DHA).⁶ DHA is valuable to grasp the construction of European identity and to reveal the linguistic manifestations of identity embedded in the social and political context, since its primary focus is on the systematic analysis of context along with its dialectic relation with meaning-making.⁷ In addition, thanks to its triangulation principle, DHA compiles intertextual and interdiscursive relations together while offering a solid ground on which to study numerous theories and empirical observations.

The paper first briefly elaborates different theoretical approaches to European identity to provide a background for the analysis of European identity construction. Then, it discusses the main features of DHA and its concept of topos⁸, which will be utilized as a discourse-analytical tool. Lastly, research findings are discussed by illustrating the pro-European discursive constructions of European identity within two themes, namely the positive representation of the European self and the construction of a common history and vision for the future. By doing so, this article empirically contributes to the existing body of knowledge regarding the Europeanist ways of European identity construction.

Theoretical Framework of European Identity

Social scientists have proposed different explanations of the concept of European identity in the literature. Some scholars examining the patterns of national identity and European identity formation argue that the construction of European identity is similar to national identity construction because it has both objective (territory, legal rights within EU, Schengen passport, Euro) and subjective dimensions (European flag, European day, anthem) in creating the sense of belongingness to an in-group.⁹ In the same way as national identity is exposed, supranational institution-building and the continuous exposition of European values are aimed to reinforce the development of a sense of European identity.¹⁰ Brussels elites employ myths, norms, and values that have symbolic importance to the European community.¹¹ These dimensions are believed to decrease the level of the abstractness of European identity. Castano explains these initiatives with 'entitativity', which foresees psychological existence in the minds of the European public as the prior condition of the formation of European identity.¹² Verhaegen and Hooghe explain such a correlation between the knowledge and identification levels with the cognitive mechanism proposed by Inglehart's theory of cognitive mobilization regarding the support levels for European integration.¹³

6 Ruth Wodak, "The Discourse-historical Approach", Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, London, Sage Publications, 2015a, p. 63-94.

7 André Cocou Datondji and Franck Amousou, "Discourse-Historical Approach to Critical Discourse Studies: Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis, Basic Characteristics and Analytical Tools", *Revue Internationale de Linguistique Appliquée, de Littérature et d'Éducation*, Vol. 2, No 1, 2019, p. 70-80.

8 Topos refers to argumentation scheme as the art of persuasion.

9 Radu Cinpoes, "Thematic Articles: National Identity and European Identity", *Journal of Identity and Migration Studies*, Vol. 2, No 1, 2008, p. 3-14.

10 Michael Bruter, "Winning Hearts and Minds for Europe: The Impact of News and Symbols on Civic and Cultural European Identity", *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 36, No 10, 2003, p.1151.

11 Cinpoes, "National Identity and European Identity".

12 Emanuele Castano, "European Identity: A Social-psychological Perspective", Richard K Herrmann, Thomas Risse-Kappen and Brewer, Marilyn B (eds.), *Transnational Identities: Becoming European in the EU*, Oxford, Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group, 2004, p. 40-58.

13 Soetkin Verhaegen and Marc Hooghe, "Does more Knowledge about the European Union Lead to a Stronger European Identity? A Comparative Analysis among Adolescents in 21 European Member States", *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, Vol. 28, No 2, 2015, p. 127-146.

Similarly, fundamental aspirations of Tajfel's social identity theory also come from the cognitive aspect of the individual correlating social identity of the individual with his/her levels of awareness of group membership.¹⁴ Social identity refers to when the self-concept of individuals is defined through their group memberships.¹⁵ Within the ever-evolving nature of the identity context, people categorize the world around them according to in-groups and out-groups. Group memberships then result in people carrying emotional attachment to the members of the in-group at the expense of the others.¹⁶ Social identity theory defines this process as the construction of its positive self-identity and self-image of the in-group, which forms in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination. In this respect, the formation of European identity is regarded as the process in which the EU models itself on this utopia.¹⁷

The description is aligned with constructivist approaches to European identity. Constructivists regard European identity as a discursive construct that is closely embedded in the discursive elements based on the positive self-images of the EU.¹⁸ These elements imply the distinctive features of the in-group, triggering in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination. As a discursive construct, common European identity is promoted strongly by the EU elites.¹⁹ Yet European identity construction reaches even beyond the top-down elite-level political and rhetorical mobilization. As a transnational referent, it emerges discursively from the interplay between individual, social, agentive, and structural dimensions of society.²⁰ Zappettini argues that construction of Europeanness occurs at multiple sites out of the multiple intersections of social processes at different levels, including supranational, national, and regional both in EU institutions and in daily practice, which cover both top-down and bottom-up conceptualizations.²¹ Thus, the elite-driven project of European identity offers a viable laboratory to test the possibility of supranational identity formation.

Against this background, it is of critical importance to mention post-functionalist theory, which provides a certain room for identity politics in its explanation of the European integration process. Hooghe and Marks argue that there has been a concrete shift from 'permissive consensus' to 'constraining dissensus' within the European public.²² The shift symbolizes the limitation of the EU's decision-making authority, which was traditionally reinforced by Brussels elites.²³ Hence, European elites are no longer able to push for further integration without domestic resistance.

14 Henri Tajfel, "Social Categorization, Social Identity and Social Comparison", Henri Tajfel (ed.), *Differentiation between Social Group*, London, Academic Press, 1978, p. 61-76.

15 John C. Turner, (1982): "Towards a Cognitive Redefinition of the Social Group", Henri Tajfel (ed.), *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p.15.

16 Henri Tajfel, (ed.) *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982.

17 Thomas Diez, "Constructing the Self and Changing Others: Reconsidering Normative Power Europe", *Millennium*, Vol. 33, No 3, 2005, p.626.

18 Ulrika Olausson, "Towards a European identity? The news media and the case of climate change", *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 25, No 2, 2010, p. 141.

19 Amber K. Curtis, "Inclusive versus Exclusive: A Cross-national Comparison of the Effects of Subnational, National, and Supranational Identity", *European Union Politics*, Vol. 15, No 4, 2014, p. 521-546.

20 Franco Zappettini, *European Identities in Discourse: A Transnational Citizens' Perspective*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019, p.4.

21 Ibid.

22 Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, "A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining", *British Journal of Political Science*, 2009, p. 5.

23 Ibid., p. 6.

Moreover, as Börzel and Risse highlight that the crises changed identity politics within the EU, since each crisis incrementally brought up the so-called identity cleavage debates to the surface.²⁴ Now, the EU faces Eurosceptic parties driving exclusive nationalist politics. As Krzyzanowski argues that the discursive articulation of European identity construction as a means of political and rhetorical mobilization gained critical relevance in the wake of populism, the rebirth of nationalism, and economic setbacks.²⁵

Because of the recent rise of exclusive nationalism, the Habermasian universalistic approach of a cosmopolitan European identity²⁶ based on constitutional patriotism, which envisages solidarity among strangers through European constitutionalization,²⁷ became obsolete if not completely invalid. While Habermas' emphasis on the necessity of democratization remains salient as an answer to the EU's democracy and legitimacy deficits in countering the rise of Euroscepticism, the application of his doctrine to the EU is far from an achievement.

Discourse Historical Approach and Method

The theoretical framework briefly elaborated above to investigate the discursive construction of European identity is operationalized through the critical perspective of DHA. DHA is widely applied in various research topics including populism, discrimination, and identity politics.²⁸ Wodak's triangulation approach integrates knowledge about four levels of analysis, namely text level, intertext level, extralinguistic level, and socio-political and historical context, in which discursive practices are embedded.²⁹ This is because DHA maintains that language does not hold any power on its own, it is rather a means to gain and maintain power through the usage of social actors assuming different social groups.³⁰ In this sense, discourses signify a domain of social practice through which power relations are legitimized or delegitimized.³¹ To reveal hidden meanings embedded within the discourse, DHA focuses on discursive, material and semiotic practices that necessitate a multimethodological, multi-theoretical, and self-reflective approach in the in-depth analysis of discursive construction.³² Thus, DHA provides a suitable ground to understand and analyze the complexities of identity construction.

To reveal linguistic or rhetorical means on which the formation of sameness and difference are based, the research utilizes the argumentation schemes i.e. topoi. Wodak defines topoi as "... the content-related warrants... that connect the argument or arguments with the conclusion or the central claim."³³

24 Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse. "From the Euro to the Schengen Crises: European Integration Theories, Politicization, and Identity Politics." *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 25, No 1, 2018, p. 87.

25 Michał Krzyzanowski, *The Discursive Construction of European Identities: A Multi-level Approach to Discourse and Identity in the Transforming European Union*, Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 2010., p.12.

26 Jürgen Habermas, "Making Sense of the EU: Toward a Cosmopolitan Europe", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 14, No 4, 2003, p. 86-100.

27 Jürgen Habermas, "The European Nation State. Its achievements and its Limitations. On the Past and Future of Sovereignty and Citizenship", *Ratio Juris*, Vol.9, No 2, 1996, p. 125-137.

28 Ruth Wodak, "Entering the 'Post-shame Era': the Rise of Illiberal Democracy, Populism and Neo-authoritarianism in Europe", *Global Discourse: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Current Affairs*, Vol. 9, No 1, 2019, p. 195-213; Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear What Right Wing Populist Discourses Mean*, London, Sage Publications, 2015b.

29 Ruth Wodak, "Politics as Usual: Investigating Political Discourse in Action", James Paul Gee and Michael Handford, (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, London, Routledge, 2013, p. 525-540.

30 Ruth Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis, Discourse-Historical Approach", Karen Tracy, (ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction*, Oxford, Elsevier, 2015b, p. 275-287.

31 Ibid.

32 Wodak, "The Discourse-historical Approach", p. 63-94.

33 Wodak, "Politics as Usual: Investigating Political Discourse in Action", p. 529.

Following the Aristotelian tradition, Wodak regards topoi as elliptic arguments (enthymeme) that appeal to commonsense knowledge -endoxon- employed by rhetoricians to persuade their audience.³⁴ Topoi are widely employed to analyze the political discourses aiming to justify the transition from the premise to the conclusion.³⁵ I claim that the concept of topos is salient within the context of analysis of arguments that are widely adopted in discourses constructing the sameness and uniqueness of the in-group of European identity as a community of fate (Table 1). As a rhetorical and dialectical scheme, the concept of topos provides this research a profound ground for systematic in-depth analysis of various arguments that are utilized often by orators to justify and legitimize their opinions.

Table 1- Content-related topoi on European identity construction³⁶

Topos	Strategies	Examples
Topos of threat/ Topos of danger	Unification and Cohesivation • unifying warning against the loss of European uniqueness/way of life • common characteristics and shared threats	“Terrorists are trying to destroy our free societies. We are challenged by populists and demagogues that preach egoism and nationalism... We in the EPP want to take on these challenges” ³⁷
Topos of reality	Discontinuation • backgrounding of discontinuities Positive self-representation Positive political continuity	“Europe’s future is in jeopardy. Now is the time for change. Now, more than ever we need to act. We need to build a democratic and inclusive Europe...” ³⁸
Topos of history	Glorification • difference between then and now/history as a teacher Continuation • positive political continuity Unification and Cohesivation • shared historical sorrows	“Our Founding Fathers had the vision that without the will to reach out together and overcome national egoism, Europe would be doomed to eternal war... Without the determination to commit to our freedom and our values, Europe would remain forever divided between East and West.” ³⁹
Topos of similarity/topos of comparison	Singularisation • supranational uniqueness /commonalities Exclusion • difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’	“What makes Europe unique in the world is our rich cultural heritage, our shared history and our common Judeo-Christian roots.” ⁴⁰
Topos of definition	Continuation • similitive references and founding characteristics Positive political continuity	“Democracy is the founding value of the EU. It must be respected in Europe and promoted in abroad.” ⁴¹

34 Ruth Wodak, “Discourse and European integration”, (2018), Free University Berlin- KFG Working Paper Series, no. 86, <https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/57625>. (Accessed 29 April 2021).

35 Ibid., p. 530.

36 Author’s own elaboration adopted from the background list of; Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl, *The Semiotics of Racism. Approaches in Critical Discourse Analysis*, Vienna, Passagen Verlag, 2001, p. 74-80; Ruth Wodak et al., *The Discursive Construction of National Identity. Second Edition*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University, 2009, p.36-42.

37 EPP, “Manifesto 2019, Let’s Open the Next Chapter for Europe Together”, November 2018, <https://www.epp.eu/papers/epp-manifesto/>, p. 1, (Accessed 5 June 2020).

38 EGP, “Priorities for 2019: What European Greens Fight For”, 23-25 November 2018, <https://europeangreens.eu/priorities-2019-what-european-greens-fight> (Accessed 22 April 2021).

39 EPP, “Manifesto 2019”, p.1.

40 Ibid., p.4.

41 PES, “A New Social Contract for Europe”, 23-26 May 2019 https://www.pes.eu/export/sites/default/.galleries/Documents-gallery/PES-Manifesto-2019_EN.pdf_2063069299.pdf, p.2., (Accessed 23 April 2021).

The research focus is designed for a specific period from November 2018, when political party groups organized party congresses for the elections, to 23-26 May 2019, when the EP elections took place. The data have been collected via the websites of the political parties that characterized themselves as pro-European, namely as the EPP, PES, Greens, and ALDE. In order to offer a comparative approach over the transnational and national levels of European identity construction across different groups and countries, data were collected also from political parties that won the most seats in the Parliament from these political party groups. Accordingly, the relevant data from CDU/CSU from EPP (27 seats), La République En Marche from ALDE (23 seats), Die Grünen from Greens (25 seats), Partido Socialista Obrero Español from PES (21 seats) were collected from the websites of these political parties.

The number of the text corpus analyzed is 113 including manifestos of the parties, press releases, and interviews obtained from the secondary sources. The excerpts displayed and analyzed here are chosen based on their representativeness. They are counted as typical discourse fragments used by a wide array of discursive strategies within the main body of the analyzed sources.⁴²

Discursive Construction of European identity and Analysis

Europeanness as a socio-political construct became the subject of discussion and political mobilization as a complementary political and civic dimension of the European economic and political integration and legitimization process of EU institutions. From the 1970s, identity construction accelerated within the Union's agenda. With the Declaration of the European identity at the European Summit of 1973 in Copenhagen, European identity construction was incorporated into the institutional and legal development mechanisms of the Union from the 1980s onwards. Since then, foundational myths of European identity, Greek and Roman roots, Christianity, and European values have been constantly utilized in national and supranational contexts to foster the EU citizenship and pro-European oriented identity formation.

Questions about European identity revived especially during the waves of enlargement, globalization, and the recent crises of the EU, triggering EU's soul-search and debates on the future of Europe. Eurosceptic discourses often conceptualize European identity in zero-sum terms.⁴³ Driving from exclusive nationalist agenda, they often assert that Europe lacks a demos, interpreted as low levels of identification with Europe at the intra-group level.⁴⁴

Even though they exhibit a serious distinction concerning how they correlate the existence of European identity in respect to national identities, the overlapping stance of pro-European discourses with the Eurosceptic ones appears that identity construction is functionally utilized to gain legitimacy and political credit. The findings of this analysis discerned two main discourse topics over which the European identity was constructed by pro-European political party families of the EP during the 2019 elections: 1) the positive representation of the European self, and 2) the construction of a common

42 Siegfried Jäger and Florentine Maier, "Theoretical and methodological aspects of Foucauldian critical discourse analysis and dispositive analysis", Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, (eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis*, London, Sage Publications, 2009, p.54.

43 Thomas Risse, "Social Constructivism and European Integration", Antje Wiener and Thomas Diez (eds.), *European Integration Theory*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 144-156.

44 Thomas Risse, "No Demos? Identities and Public Spheres in the Euro Crisis", *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 52, No 6, 2014, p. 1207-1215.

history and vision for the future. The analysis revealed that pro-European parties utilize the narratives of in-group built upon the common past, future, values, norms, vision, and culture through defining similarities while excluding common others of Europe as out-group(s). In addition, comparative analysis of European identity construction at transnational and national levels revealed that members of the EP groups enacted different discourses of European identity in transnational and national political settings.

Positive Representation of the European Self

Identity construction is revealed through the "...process of representation through which individuals ... describe to themselves and others the world in which they live."⁴⁵ This process involves social comparison revealing the relational nexus of the differences between the in-group and out-group. Therefore, in-group favoritism, referring to the individuals' tendency to favor the in-group over the out-groups regarding the intergroup perceptions becomes prevalent during the membership categorization.⁴⁶ Construction of the positive self-representation within a territory, which draws a border between self and other, triggers the inner tendency of the individual to affiliate himself with the positive attributions of the in-group. Across the pro-European political parties, Europe is constructed as an in-group upholding democratic values and the rule of law:

EPP: "The EU was founded on principles that aim to safeguard peace, our way of life, democracy and prosperity, equality and human rights. The only safe world is a multilateral rules-based world. Dictatorships and authoritarian regimes lack these values and therefore will always be a source of instability and unpredictability, undermining the rules-based global order. Support for democracy and the rule of law, both within the EU and globally, must remain a cornerstone of our policy. Furthermore, the diminishing space for civil society in authoritarian countries may pose risks to our own freedom. We should aim to halt the spread of authoritarianism and reduce its influence in our own societies. ... Political conditionality must remain an element of all forms of economic cooperation with our partners..."⁴⁷

Guy Verhofstadt: "The nationalist governments in Budapest and Warsaw have been playing with fire for the last couple of years. These countries were prisoners of history for much of the 20th century, living under dictatorial regimes, losing out on economic opportunities and depriving their citizens of fundamental rights for four long decades until the fall of the Iron Curtain. Having embraced the idea of a reunited Europe, and with a strong desire to live in freedom and in respect of each other - after a relatively quick transition period - they became members of the EU 15 years ago. It is painful to see that those very politicians who had been fighting for these freedoms have now decided to take a 180-degree turn ... Judiciary and public service media put under political control, the space for civil society narrowed down. These steps have the potential to fundamentally change Polish and Hungarian society, and lead to authoritarianism and intolerance. We must not let that happen in Europe again."⁴⁸

45 Jutta Weldes, (ed.), *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities, and the Production of Danger*, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p.14.

46 John C. Turner et al., "Social Comparison and Group Interest in Ingroup Favouritism", *European Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 9, No 2, 1979, p. 187-204.

47 "Policy Paper. A Europe that Defends Our Values and Interests in the World", *EPP*, 7 November 2018, <https://www.epp.eu/epp-news/press-releases/>, p.1. (Accessed 1 June 2020).

48 "Guy Verhofstadt: Compromising on EU Values would Mean Selling Out on Our Integrity", *Euronews*, 29 October 2018, <https://www.euronews.com/2018/11/29/guy-verhofstadt-compromising-on-eu-values-would-mean-selling-out-on-our-integrity-view> (Accessed 1 June 2020).

The first excerpt employs the combination of the topos of history, topos of definition, and topos of threat/danger to construct the positive representation of the homogenous and monolithic European Self inculcated with peace, democracy, equality, and human rights. These values are represented essentially as European characteristics. In this way, the essentialist cultural identity of the European community is discursively constructed through the alignment of the 'culturalization' of peace, prosperity, democracy, and human rights. Through the use of the topos of threat/danger, the EU is constructed as the vanguard of these values and the secure space against the non-European and 'unilateral' world, which pose a potential threat to the in-group of collective European identity. The European self is positively represented in opposition to the negative other (i.e. dictatorships and authoritarian regimes as the threat to the stability of the rules-based global order). In this way, the differentiation between the Europeans and the others is established and justified. The argument is further developed by the topos of definition referring to the necessity to preserve the constitutive elements of European identity.

The second excerpt employs the topos of history to fixate the European identity on a particular history that construes Europe. Verhofstadt, President of the ALDE Group in the EP, refers to the destructive consequences of the Cold War period for Poland and Hungary being behind the Iron Curtain by employing the conceptual metaphor 'prisoners of history'. Via this metaphor, he anthropomorphizes both countries as the victims of history. The topos of danger is substantiated by the topos of history, constructing the victimization and transformation of Poland and Hungary. The comparison between the autocratic past of these countries and their recent shift to authoritarianism is interpreted as contemporary struggles of reunited Europe. He directly regards the shift as a political threat to the in-group of the European community. This is correlated with the topos of definition as well, 'if a group is named as European, then they supposedly feel attached to the European values and civilization', which implies the distinction of the European in-group from its political others.

Both excerpts illustrate how the existence of the formation of European identity constructing a community of fate is legitimized as a shield against the threats and challenges to the existence of the in-group of the European communities via its identity markers as the positive representation of European self. As Neumann argues that the construction of identities describes both what it means to be part of the community and the boundaries of the group as who is in and who is out.⁴⁹ The legitimization of European identity is often accompanied by the attempt to differentiate Europeans from their historical, cultural, or political others. Strong adherence to the community values designated as an in-group behavior is equated with preserving the positive identity markers of the in-group of European identity.

The construction of the positive self is widely used and associated as an instrument in explaining the foreign policy priorities and enlargement as well:

PES: "The PES reaffirms that the prospect of EU membership to countries in the Balkan region remains open... We welcome the renewed Western Balkan Strategy, viewing the European future of the region as a geostrategic investment in a stable, united, and strong Europe based on common values. We must also ensure the consolidation of democratic institutions, fair development, and reconciliation in the region. We are very concerned by the situation in Turkey. We strongly condemn breaches of the rule of law and human rights against tens of thousands of

49 Iver B. Neumann, "Self and Other in International Relations", *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 2, No 2, 1996, p. 139-174.

people, including opposition politicians and minorities. In order for Turkey to remain a partner with the EU, we must continue political and diplomatic dialogue. However, it is clear that the current Erdoğan regime is neither capable of, nor interested in, reforms that will bring Turkey in line with the Copenhagen criteria for membership of the EU...⁵⁰

EPP: “We support the concrete European perspective of the Western Balkans and help countries in the region improve their prosperity, as long as they adhere to European standards and achieve progress in the rule of law and the fight against corruption... We cannot leave the Western Balkans to the authoritarian influence of Russia, the Gulf States, Turkey, and China.”⁵¹

The excerpts above construct enlargement as a powerful tool in shaping the EU’s foreign policy dimensions and priorities to safeguard the normative basis of its identity formation. Aydın-Düzgit argues that foreign policymakers discursively construct enlargement as a tool for the foreign policy construct of the EU in line with the fundamentals of the European project and identity.⁵² The European self and its others, subject to the enlargement policy of the EU, are represented by political concepts. Both excerpts above reveal parties’ commitments to the EU enlargement process towards the Western Balkans through the use of the topos of definition on the condition that homogeneity is found in political values such as democracy, rule of law, and peace. The geopolitical discursive use of the Western Balkans located in Southeastern Europe implied the Balkan other of the NATO and the EU since early 1990s. Moreover, the excerpts employ the topos of responsibility to refer to the tutelage of the EU in ensuring ‘European political values’, implying just a nuance between hegemonic control and membership building. This is further reinforced through the representation of Russia, the Gulf States, Turkey, and China as the ‘ultimate’ political other via the topos of threat.

Construction of the Common History and Vision for the Future

Pro-European parties, utilizing myths to cultivate the sense of belonging among Europeans, construct a common history of the EU and community of fate in close association with the construction of the common future of the European communities through the the topos of responsibility:

EPP: “From the Greco-Roman period through to the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, European civilization has been layered on the nuances of each of its countries: our rich cultural and linguistic heritage has created and, in turn, developed through the prism of our landscape, our arts, sciences, literature and religion. In Europe we know that our diversity makes us stronger... Only a democratic Europe acting together defends and preserves our cultural diversity. We will stick to our European way of life in a strong Europe. While Europe is diverse and nuanced, we have one thing in common: in every town and city there is a Christian church. Christmas, Easter and Pentecost are holidays we all share. We have to protect our European way of life by preserving our Christian values and fundamental principles...”⁵³

Green Party: “Europe’s future is in jeopardy. Now is the time for change. Now, more than ever, we need to act. We need to build a democratic and inclusive Europe that is socially just and

50 “Conclusion Report on the Future of the Europe”, PES, 2018, <https://www.pes.eu/fr/policies/democracy-human-rights/documents/>, p. 43 (Accessed 3 June 2020).

51 EPP, “Manifesto 2019”, p. 7, (Accessed 5 June 2020).

52 Aydın-Düzgit, S. (2012). *Constructions of European identity: Debates and discourses on Turkey and the EU*. Turkey, Palgrave Macmillan.

53 EPP, “Manifesto 2019”, p. 5.

environmentally sustainable... In today's globalized world, no country is big enough to tackle problems alone. We can only take back control by working together and looking to the future – not by building walls and retreating into the past... We can build on what has been achieved – and change what has not worked. By working together, Europe can reduce poverty and create jobs, tackle the climate crisis and restore our nature, fight discrimination and defend freedom.”⁵⁴ PES: “... We will ensure that democracy and the respect of everybody's fundamental rights and freedoms are at the core of the European project. We want to strengthen European citizenship in order to create European demos. For us European identity means to be open, solidarity, and united in diversity.”⁵⁵

The excerpts above construct history by fixating upon the exclusiveness of Europe as a historical and cultural entity. The first excerpt's specific referrals to the Greco-Roman period, Renaissance, and Enlightenment indicate the cherry-picked nature of the historical narratives, which resembles the national identity construction. However, in contrast to the exclusive nationalists' othering agenda aggravating the competition between the national identities and the European identity, such a construction rests on the inclusive nature of European identity represented with the 'unity in diversity' manifestation, which is acknowledged and embraced in all the excerpts above. Diversity is constructed as a source of integration, converging the diverse national identities towards a shared European identity. On the other hand, the first excerpt's referral to religious symbols and holidays constructs the EU as a religiously homogenous entity that implicitly others the non-European, and the non-Christian world.

The necessity to preserve what has been achieved in history is aligned with the construction of the community of fate and promise through the topos of responsibility, the topos of reality, and the topos of danger/threat. Such correlation is explicitly demonstrated in the third excerpt, implying the future vision to defend the core of the project. The future is constructed based on the inherent characteristics of the European in-group. In presenting the common future, the second excerpt constructs the EU as a shield against globalization by employing the topos of reality. In this way, the preservation of political integration is justified.

Divergence between Transnational and National Constructions of European Identity

European identity as a transnational referent is often constructed based on the togetherness of the European in-group as a values-based political community, which increases the sense of belonging and positive distinctiveness at the transnational level. At the national level, however, in addition to the construction of the European community as a community of values and fate, national utility-based considerations that can be derived from the EU membership are often uttered by the political parties:

54 EGP, “Manifesto 2019, Time to Renew the Promise of Europe”, November 2018, <https://europeangreens.eu/manifesto/>, p.1., (Accessed 7 June 2020).

55 PES, “Conclusion Report of the High Level Working Group on the Future of Europe”, 07 December 2019, <https://www.pes.eu/en/pes-documents/index.html?topic=&type=&page=3>, p.13, (Accessed 10 June 2020).

Jean-Baptiste Moreau: “Without Europe, there would be no more agriculture in France.”⁵⁶

CDU/CSU: “The EU is also the largest trading partner of the world. As an export nation, Germany benefits from this networking especially.”⁵⁷

Josep Borrell: “wondered if anyone can imagine that any European country, Spain for example, or a piece of Spain, like Catalonia, could weigh on the world in any way, in a world dominated by entire continents...”⁵⁸

Hobolt and Wratil argue that a strong sense of European identification hinges on one’s relative gains from European integration.⁵⁹ Such a utility-based approach foresees that high levels of sense of belonging are determined according to the calculations of advantages, benefits, and chances gained from the membership to the European in-group.⁶⁰ Within the crisis context, where the levels of European identification may have been affected negatively,⁶¹ the pro-European parties often employed utilitarian considerations in their respective national political settings by utilizing the topoi of definition, which is based on the conditional ‘if we remain in the EU, we maximize our national interests’. EU membership as a positive-sum game is promoted especially in the areas where member states give special importance to the EU for national benefits, including economic, security, and international relations. The excerpts above demonstrate such inclination to glorify the EU as a national interest maximizer on relatively significant areas for the national interests of the member states. The first excerpt signifies the importance of the EU for French interests in agriculture since France is the leading producer of agricultural goods in the EU⁶². In the same direction, the second excerpt establishes a direct connection between the export levels of Germany and its EU membership. The last excerpt asserts that Spain could weigh its influence in international affairs as a powerful actor as a result of its membership in the EU. Accordingly, pro-Europeans draw on national interests and benefits derived from EU membership in different areas, which are given primary importance by the member states. In this way, they construct Europe also as a political project maximizing the self-interests of their nation-states.

Conclusion

The 2019 EP elections took place in a highly politicized political context in the EU, which had been aggravated by the respective crises of the Union. In the face of the increased influence of the right-wing and Euroscepticism inserted into the European political setting, pro-European discourses gained relative importance in responding to the increasingly articulated Eurosceptic sentiments.

56 En Marche, “Jean-Baptiste Moreau : « Sans l’Europe, il n’y aurait plus d’agriculture en France »”, *En Marche*, 11 February 2019, <https://en-marche.fr/articles/actualites/podcast-jean-baptiste-moreau> (Accessed 21 April 2020)

57 CDU/CSU, “Faktenblatt Mehrwert Europa”, 9 May 2019, https://www.cducsu.de/sites/default/files/2019-05/cducsu_faktenblatt_Europa_1.pdf (Accessed 22 April 2020)

58 PSOE, “Borrell: “I Present this Candidacy to Build a Socialist Europe: Fair, Open to the World, Tolerant and Cohesive”, 5 September 2019, <https://www.psoe.es/actualidad/noticias-actualidad/borrell-presento-esta-candidatura-para-construir-una-europa-socialista-justa-abierta-al-mundo-tolerante-y-cohesionada/> (Accessed 22 April 2020)

59 Sara B. Hobolt and Christopher Wratil, “Public Opinion and the Crisis: the Dynamics of Support for the Euro”, *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 22, No 2, 2015, p. 238-256.

60 Ibid.

61 Waqas Ejaz, “Analyzing Malaise and Mobilization: The Effects of Media on Political Support and European Identity in Old and New Member States”, *Politics in Central Europe*, Vol. 13, No 2-3, 2017, p. 33-51.

62 “Overview of French Agricultural Diversity”, <https://agriculture.gouv.fr/overview-french-agricultural-diversity#:~:text=France%20has%20the%20biggest%20utilized,third%20in%20pig%20meat%20production,> (Accessed 22 April 2021)

By discursively analyzing and expounding party manifestos, press releases, and interviews with party leaders produced during the 2019 EP election campaigns, this study crystallized how European identity construction was articulated and mobilized by the main pro-European parties of the EP.

The findings of the discourse analysis can be read together with the findings of two other studies. In one of them, Börzel and Risse reveal that crises changed identity politics within the EU, since each crisis incrementally brought the so-called identity cleavage debates to the surface.⁶³ In the other one, Krzyzanowski ascertains that European identity construction as a means of political and rhetorical mobilization gained a critical relevance.⁶⁴ In parallel to these findings, the performed analysis by this paper found out that European identity construction is operationalized against the existent identity-cleavage by the pro-European parties through narratives of an in-group built upon the common past, future, values, norms, vision, and culture of the European communities. European identity is actively socially constructed, instrumentalized, and mobilized to form an imagined community of Europeans based on the common sense of belonging as a complementary political and civic dimension of the European economic and political integration. In this respect, mobilization of European identity construction is aimed to function similarly with the Eurosceptic political parties in terms of achieving political credit within the specific context of the EP elections.

In addition to the motivation of legitimizing the EU institutions and pro-European political parties, European identity construction undertook the critical mission of persuading European citizens to bear the dramatic consequences of the crises. For this reason, the focus and emphasis of European identity construction shifted towards fulfilling the functionalist purposes of the European in-group. Such functionalist purposes were revealed through tracing the identity construction at both national and transnational contexts. While European identity as a transnational referent is often constructed based on the togetherness of the European in-group as a values-based political community at the transnational level, national utility-based considerations prevailed within European identity construction at the national level. The divergence between the national and transnational discourses on European identity construction evidenced the shift of the identity construction towards pragmatic bases. The finding presents important implications for the future research agenda of comparison between the transnational and national discourses on different specific contexts.

By and large, this research contributed empirically to the relevant literature by focusing on the Europeanist ways of European identity construction, which have been overlooked in the literature so far. Moreover, it offered a comprehensive approach to the construction of European identity as a transnational and national referent by providing both diachronic and synchronic approaches to the analysis within the specific context of the EP elections.

63 Börzel & Risse, "From the Euro to the Schengen Crises", p. 87.

64 Krzyzanowski, *The Discursive Construction of European Identities*, p. 12.

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