

## EU project analyses the relationship between national and European identities

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In order to better understand the relationships that Europeans have with their own countries and with the EU, the Commission is funding a study of European and national identities in nine EU and accession countries.

The EURONAT project (representations of Europe and the nation in current and prospective Member States) is funded under the Human Potential section of the Fifth Framework Programme. The project's objectives are to revise current understanding of national and European identities in Europe, to study the extent to which these two identities are mutually exclusive or compatible, to study the role of the media and national elites in shaping these identities, and to inform EU media policies on European integration and enlargement.

The EURONAT consortium includes partners in the UK, Germany, Hungary, Greece, Poland, Spain and the Czech Republic, and the project coordinators are from the European University Institute in Florence, Italy. The study focuses on national and European identity in each of the consortium countries as well as Austria.

The research will be carried out in several phases, and combines a number of disciplines including political science, sociology, social psychology, cultural studies, history and international relations. The results of the first phase of the study have been published as a report, and provide the historical, geopolitical and theoretical background for later phases of the project.

The first accession country tackled in the study is the Czech Republic. The research team from the Czech Technical University in Prague start by noting that the country's view of the EU Member States was traditionally determined by the global relationship between East and West. Opinions changed after the fall of the former Soviet Bloc, and were further affected by the break up of Czechoslovakia, which revived the debate on Czech national identity.

Towards the end of the 1990s the debate about Czechs belonging to Europe intensified, according to the report: 'Election statements such as 'Back to Europe!' were supposed to mean clearly the end of the Communist past, that turned into a specific debate about joining Europe.' However, the debate was marked by a certain scepticism towards Europe, and 'the emphasis was put on the inspiration of the British (Thatcherite) attitude held towards the EU.'

This, claim the researchers, led to the current situation whereby the Czech Republic has the lowest public support for the EU among all the central and eastern European countries. This attitude is exacerbated by the reluctance of neighbouring EU countries to open their labour markets, and leads to a suspicion that Western European countries' enthusiasm for enlargement is only motivated by self interest.

'Britain's relationship with the EU is best described as 'half detachment' which is not characterised by clear hostility but a still widely found indifference and ignorance,' according to a team from the London School of Economics. However, as people in Britain become more aware of the more prominent role that the EU will play in their daily lives, they expect public perception of Europe to take a much sharper form in the near future.

Professor Willfried Spohn from the Viadrina European University in Frankfurt, believes that German national perception is not only divided internally into West and East German identities, but also externally in terms of European perceptions. His analysis concludes that West German national identity is more European than its East German counterpart, whereas support for EU enlargement is slightly higher in the former East Germany.

Professor Spohn hypothesises that this difference is an expression of the higher value placed on a peace order with Eastern Europe by East Germans, compared with a certain degree of fear for the implications of enlargement by many West Germans.

Having laid the historical and geopolitical basis for the project with this study, the various teams now aim to analyse the impact of discourses within the media, political and social elites, and society at large in shaping representations of the nation, Europe and the EU in the minds of citizens.

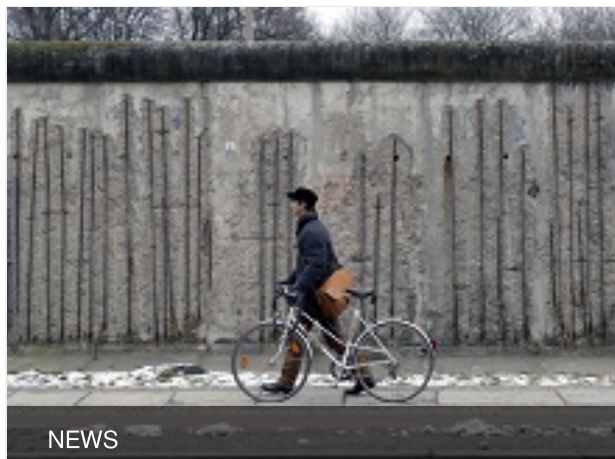
As the Commission's Aris Apollonatos explains in a foreword to the report: 'By

increasing the understanding of the socio-political baggage that we carry, we get a greater insight into the profile and psyche of the passengers who have chosen as their final destination the European Union.'

## Countries

Austria, Czechia, Germany, Greece, Spain, Hungary, Italy, Poland, United Kingdom

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