



# World Scientific News

An International Scientific Journal

WSN 104 (2018) 1-15

EISSN 2392-2192

---

---

## Identification of Young People with European Identity Features

**Eva Poláková**

Faculty of Education, Matej Bel University, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia

E-mail address: [epolakret@gmail.com](mailto:epolakret@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

The issue of the national and the European identities is the subject of many specialized discussions as far as problematic social-political situation is concerned, which is the consequence of the migration crisis as well as Brexit – not only in the European Union, but also in its member states. The paper presents the research in which 484 students of Slovak secondary schools and universities participated; the results are interpreted in the context of creating the regional, national and European identities. According to the research results in the form of respondents' opinions, the importance of the European identity features can be characterised as follows: high degree of legal protection, democratic values, single currency, collective political system, “unity in diversity” principle. The majority of respondents connects the personal identity mainly with the national identity, and subsequently with the European identity, while the collective identities are perceived as complementary, not contradictory. The age factor represents one of the most important variables. Therefore, we assume that the educational influence aimed to strengthen the European identity will prove more effective in the youngest individuals.

**Keywords:** personal, regional, national, European identity, attributes of the European identity, identity research in the Slovak youth

## **1. THEORETICAL BASES**

The expert opinions defining terms related within the “identity” topic are current in the society and discussed over a long period. On the other hand, the very term “identity” is understood differently, depending on the particular discipline and base paradigm. Moreover, there is no univocal agreement in definition and application of the related relevant terms. Therefore, the basic approaches toward the understanding of the term “identity” will be summed up at the beginning.

The term “identity” began to appear more often only in the 1960s in humanities and social sciences, especially in sociology, social psychology, historiography, anthropology, politology, philosophy, and other disciplines. The term “identity” contains two defining aspects of the comparison of persons/phenomena - similarity and diversity. (Jenkins, 2008: 17). These are being explored mostly in terms of creating an individual personality, attitudes, opinions, values (a personal identity) and in terms of their social integrity - i.e. relationship to other members of society or social group (collective/social identity).

Social sciences employ a constructivist as well as dynamic approach to the identity. Bačová uses the following definitions. P. Weinreich describes identity as a whole of self-constructs of a subject, in which a self-construction expresses a continuity between the past self-construction and the aspirational self-construction in the future. According to B.R. Schlenker, identity expresses an idea of self-construction as a theory (or scheme), constructing who the person is and how they should be perceived, who they are supposed to be, how they should be treated in social life. He concludes that identity is an organized knowledge (theory) of oneself in the past, present, and imagined social situations and relations.

When constructing the concept of identity, we can proceed from an essentialist or instrumentalist approach.. Essentialist approach views identity as being given a priori, firm and unchanging; an individual does not perceive it as being created by their decisions. Instrumentalist approach is based on identity as an individual’s conscious creation with an infinite construction process. Regarding the target group of this research the major impact is put on the developmental view of identity (Kroger, 2000). This view describes an ontogenetically new self-reflection quality that one achieves in a certain stage of personality development. This concept was first introduced by Erikson who distinguishes a self-identity (personal identity) and an ego-identity. Personal identity is understood as an act of temporal and spatial self-awareness. The ego-identity has a lifetime importance for an individual, being formed mainly in the late adolescence (Erikson, 1969). In the process of creating a personal identity, it is important to experience one’s own uniqueness, which makes an adolescent to define themselves in the social environment and to evaluate their social experience in a new way (Miller, 1989). In terms of personal identity, the cultural identity, i.e. identification with some of the cultural attributes, including common origin, history, traditions, values, language, religion, and way of life, is a very important feature.

### **1. 1. Social identity**

Social identity includes the processes of integrating an individual into social group or society. The European understanding of this term is based on the works of Tajfel, Turner (1986) and Turner (1985), who examined identity in the context of group formation. Social categorization and social impact have been important mechanisms in the creation of a

collective (social) identity. Social identity is a fusion of knowledge and evaluation (awareness and experience) of belonging to different groups. It is a subjective reflection that is objectively conditioned. The way a person identifies themselves with a particular group has usually an impact on their self-awareness. Recognizing the collective category of membership is a prerequisite for a person's sense of belonging to a group, distinguishing WE (ME) - THEY, i.e. an expression of self-identification in relation to the particular group and society.

In the social sciences there are five persistent ways of understanding this term, according to Brubaker and Cooper:

- 1) Identity as the basis of social and political activity, as opposed to the “interest of an individual”.
- 2) Identity as a specific collective phenomenon, which identifies the fundamental and essential sameness of the group members or category.
- 3) Identity as a key to understand an individual and a social group without which it is not possible to comment on essential issues of individual and group existence.
- 4) Identity as a product of social and political activity (in terms of its procedural character).
- 5) Identity as a product of several mutually competing ways of defining personal and collective belonging, emphasizing their instability. (Brubaker – Cooper, 2000: 6-8).

Social identity will be understood as a subjective reflection of belonging to the social groups, which is objectively conditioned and overlapping with personal identity. While examining the social identity, the experts are interested in the processes of identification with the small groups (work teams, political parties, associations...), as well as with the bigger geopolitical structures characterized by the sharing of the cultural range of these communities. Spatial, European, ethnic, national, and identity are also included in this area. The notion of “territorial” or “spatial” identity is perceived as a specific type of regional identity (Nikischer, 2013). Regional identities are based on the interaction between spatial identities and socio-political organisation of a given area.

## **1. 2. Spatial identities**

National identity can be defined as a positive relationship with a nation, which is understood in sense of cultural (ethnos) – political (demos) community. In the modern society, the national identity is explored at three levels: individual (social-psychological), political-system, and ideological level (Vlachová – Řeháková, 2004). National identity reflects the specific features of the psyche contents of an individual – a member of a particular nation (ethnicity) – that are manifested in their lifestyle: in identifying with a particular national culture and language. It is a mixture of historical experience, customs, and traditions, and varies with each generation. Language as a part of cultural identity, constantly progressing and modifying, could be an example here. National language connects and unifies the citizens inside a particular geographical and cultural area. The “Unity in diversity” principle plays an important role in relation of the national language with the dialects. The existence of the national cultural identity does not cause a suppression or dissolution of regional and local identity.

On the territorial level, Marks recognizes three types of identity: multiple, exclusive and none that form the vertices of the triangular model of spatial identity; in practice, the majority

of people are around the centre of this space. Regional and local identity is joined by another –the national identity, represented by a common national language, creating national awareness (Marks, 1999).

The understanding of the concept of European identity is even more diverse and its interpretation even more complex than in the previous concepts. The theoretical foundations of European identity and Europeanization take into account its historical sources as well as the development of national identities in individual states and historical solidarity within larger political groupings. At the same time, a development of a new post-national European identity is foreseen, which until recently did not exist.

### **1. 3. The European identity**

In a broader context, the European cultural identity, is nowadays perceived as an intersection of national identities, mutual influence and enrichment of national cultures, with a tendency towards multiculturalism and multilingualism, while preserving the specific features of a given culture.

The European Union is trying to promote pluralism of cultures and languages at the level of both declarations and programme. The ethno-linguistic theory of identity is also oriented on the language, regarding it as an important aspect of the group identity. According to Giles and Johnson, the language helps to categorise our social world and may become an important distinguishing feature in identification with a social group. The ethno-linguistic identity is stronger in individuals who have not had an opportunity to identify with other groups. On the contrary, individuals existing at the borders of various groups have a more diffuse identity (Giles – Jonhnon, 1987). Especially at the present we should consider this aspect as a consequence of globalisation and population migration.

We can say that in the search for a certain consensus on the concept of European identity, three commonly accepted theoretical models of its consolidation have been gradually identified.

The first, cultural model based on the cultural concept perceives Europe as *Family of the nations*. The second is a political model, *The Civil Europe*. A core of this model is represented by common political culture based on the universal principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. European identity is formed through the process of sharing the same political and civic values, but individuals do not lose their original cultural identity, which should remain a private affair of citizens.

The third, intercivilisation model, called *Europe as a clash area* is based on the assumption that the European identity is a result of intensive civil, political and cultural exchange and cooperation. “Unity in diversity” principle is understood as a participation in collective and political events. Critics of this model point out the danger of underestimating the natural need of people for stability and overestimating their ability to adapt quickly to a changing world.

We have noticed that particular European Community Member States refuse cultural integration efforts and try to protect their national cultural sovereignty, identity and values. A trend of uniting and “deepening” the European Union (a tendency to get “more Europe and less national state”) naturally leads to a protective counter-pressure of states and nations<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> However, we cannot regard this type of protectionism as nationalism, because it does not contain its typical features - in this case, they adopt more of the character of patriotism. Patriotism relies on the protection of

## 2. RESEARCH: “MY IDENTITY”

### 2. 1. Research problem

In the researches of collective identity, the European identity is mostly explored in five areas defined by Ross (2008): fundamental human rights and freedoms, social care, education, mobility and attitude towards language and communication – always from the point of view of a particular discipline. This research focused on exploring this issue from the point of view of pedagogy, namely what identification reflection in relation to own identity predominates among young people<sup>2</sup> and how it could be influenced by education. The author has applied the developmental view of identity (Kroger, 2000) as a starting point.

This view describes identity as an ontogenetically new self-reflection quality acquired by an individual in a certain phase of their own personal development. Erikson, who first introduced the concept, distinguishes the self-identity (personal identity) and ego-identity. Personal identity is understood as an act of self-awareness in social space and time; ego-identity has a lifetime importance for an individual, being formed mainly in late adolescence (Erikson, 1969). In the process of creating a personal identity, it is important to experience of one’s own uniqueness, which makes an adolescent to define themselves in the social environment and to evaluate their social experience in a new way (Miller, 1989).

Bolfiková and Frankovský (1998) also discovered a dependence of the identification on the geographical social formations. Therefore, it can be assumed that significant differences in the attribute of time change (age) and declared opinions on the European identity. Cultural identity, i.e. identification with cultural attributes, including common origin, history, traditions, values, language, religion, way of life, is a very important feature of the personal identity. These then also determine the identification with a particular spatial identity.

The *Young Europeans without Borders survey* was carried out from December 2011 to June 2012 and the results showed that in most cases, the young people identify themselves as Slovaks, where the state or national identity was concerned. National identity was their fundamental level of identity. It can be assumed that the most important attributes among the respondents when defining the concept of European identity will be common history, culture and geographical location.

In pedagogy, however, there are much more problems encountered when proposing educational and pedagogical pro-European models trying to strengthen European awareness. The previous research did not identify the relevant attributes of the personal and collective identity of the young people. Therefore, the order of their importance in the personal perception of the concept of identity and European identity is yet unknown., the research called “My identity” was carried out based on the published analysis of theoretical and

---

national identity, but also enables development of other (i.e. regional or European) identities. On the other hand, nationalism promotes a national identity above other identities and its manifestation is stronger in political, rather than in linguistic spheres.

<sup>2</sup> Youth is characterized by specific biological, psychological, social, economical, civic and political features, interests and needs. Its social position in a society is connected with a social role of preparation and integrity to the common structure, reproduction and development of society. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNGA Resolution 44/25) defines a child as any human being under the age of 18, adolescents from 15 to 17 years old and young citizen as a human being over 18 years old. A term “Youth” is used by the European Commission and Council of Europe when researching the European youth policy, understanding them as human beings 13 to 30 years old.

research papers. The basic attributes of European identity considered within the scope of this research are:

- 1) Attribute of temporal change (depending on the age of respondents)
- 2) Spatial attribute (examined by self-reflection of a membership towards micro, meso, macro – social groups (municipality/region, state, Europe): exploring interests and views on language, politics, economy, and social sphere).
- 3) Attribute of cultural diversity (relation to others – migration, equality, opportunities).

The research aims to find and identify the term “I am the European” given the specific contexts of their identity constructions, including personal, local, regional, ethnic, and national identity. The attitudes of young people to the individual elements that can be included under this term were analysed under the degree of consensus with selected statements reflecting basic attributes of personal and European identity. The opinions at the political, legal, social, economic and cultural level were analysed as well. Regarding the possibility of further application of the research data obtained in the educational model, it was also necessary to identify the differences between according relevance to particular attributes to respondents of different age categories.

## **2. 2. Research Methodology**

Identity attributes perceived by adolescents were the subject of the research carried out on the, secondary school and university students in the Slovak Republic. The research tool was a self-design questionnaire. Since identity research is a complex system of properties studied at the cognitive, emotional and conative personality level, a mixed methodology was used. The self-reflection of a value scale, opinions and attitudes were obtained by operationalisation – a formulation of relevant statements to the given attributes and rating scale, which were subsequently processed using a testing statistics tool.

The questionnaire included scaled items in which respondents expressed the degree of agreement with individual statements. Scale 1 represented full agreement, scale 8 - absolute disapproval, neutral attitudes were expressed on scales 4 and 5 (average 4.5). The closer the average value to 1, the higher the degree of respondents' agreement with statement. On the contrary, the more the average value to 8, the lower the degree of their agreement with a particular statement.

The initial relations between independent variables – gender (male, female), age (secondary school student, undergraduate student), type of residence (city, countryside), region (Bratislava, Western Slovakia, Central Slovakia, and Eastern Slovakia) – and qualitative variables expressed by statements in the scaled items were tested by the chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) independence test.

In all sub-groups of the items and in all variables we rejected the hypothesis of the distribution normality at the level of significance  $\alpha = 0.01$ . Therefore, when testing hypotheses of the dependencies of the individual categories observed on the basis of the arithmetic mean (AM) and standard deviation (SD), a significance of the differences was tested, using non-parametric statistical tests either the Mann-Whitney or Kruskal-Wallis test. Differences at the significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$  ( $p < 0.05$ ) were considered statistically significant.

When preparing a questionnaire, the starting point was multidimensionality of personal and collective identity. Therefore, the questionnaire items were formulated to explore the following issues in respondents:

- attitudes towards European and national identity (national/ethnic identity is understood as optional group membership based on subjective decision),
- interest in Europe and the European Union,
- language skills and attitudes towards the teaching of the languages,
- migration within Europe,
- equal opportunities for foreigners in Slovakia,
- views on European policy,
- views on enlargement of the European Union,
- participation in activities that go beyond the borders of Slovakia.

### 2. 3. Research group

A total of 484 students participated in the research. The respondents were selected by the stratified selection method. The main factors of the selection included: gender, age (study), type of residence (city, countryside), region (capital, Western Slovakia, Central Slovakia, Eastern Slovakia). The research group included 316 women, 168 men; 244 students of secondary schools, 240 undergraduate students (age difference was approximately five years); 260 respondents lived in a city, 224 respondents in a countryside, 204 respondents lived in the Western Slovakia (including the capital of Bratislava), 150 respondents lived in the Central Slovakia, 130 respondents lived in the Eastern Slovakia.

**Table 1.** Basic characteristics and self-identification of respondents

| Gender | Number of respondents |      | Study            | Number of respondents |      | Region           | Number of respondents |      | Type of residence | Number of respondents |      |
|--------|-----------------------|------|------------------|-----------------------|------|------------------|-----------------------|------|-------------------|-----------------------|------|
|        |                       | %    |                  |                       | %    |                  |                       | %    |                   |                       | %    |
| male   | 168                   | 34.7 | Secondary school | 244                   | 50.4 | Bratislava       | 80                    | 16.5 | countryside       | 224                   | 46.5 |
| female | 316                   | 65.3 | undergraduate    | 240                   | 49.6 | Western Slovakia | 124                   | 25.6 | city              | 260                   | 53.6 |

|       |     |     |  |     |     |                  |     |      |  |     |
|-------|-----|-----|--|-----|-----|------------------|-----|------|--|-----|
|       |     |     |  |     |     | Central Slovakia | 150 | 31.0 |  |     |
|       |     |     |  |     |     | Eastern Slovakia | 130 | 26.9 |  |     |
| Total | 484 | 100 |  | 484 | 100 |                  | 484 | 100  |  | 484 |

## 2. 4. Research results

In order to identify the answers more precisely, it was very important to know not only the basic characteristics of the group (gender, age/study, type of residence, region), but also civic-political characteristics of all respondents introduced in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Civic-political identification of respondents

| I consider myself:   | Total number of respondents | %     | Male % | Female % | Secondary school student % | University master's degree student % |
|--|-----------------------------|-------|--------|----------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| First a citizen of the European Union and then a citizen of Slovakia | 17                          | 3.5%  | 4.2%   | 3.8%     | 3.3%                       | 3.8%                                 |
| First a citizen of Slovakia and then a citizen of the European Union | 340                         | 70.2% | 64.8%  | 68.4%    | 68.0%                      | 72.5%                                |
| equally a citizen of Slovakia and a citizen of the European Union    | 127                         | 26.2% | 31.0%  | 27.8%    | 28.7%                      | 23.8%                                |

|  |     |       |       |       |       |       |
|--|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| If there was a referendum about Slovakia exiting the European Union, I would vote: |     |       |       |       |       |       |
| In favour  | 97  | 20.0% | 25.6% | 17.1% | 23.8% | 16.3% |
| Against  | 283 | 58.5% | 53.0% | 61.4% | 53.7% | 63.3% |
| I do not know  | 104 | 21.5% | 21.4% | 21.5% | 22.5% | 20.4% |
| I trust  |     |       |       |       |       |       |
| The Slovak Parliament more than the European Parliament                            | 33  | 6.8%  | 7.1%  | 6.6%  | 4.9%  | 8.8%  |
| The European Parliament more than the Slovak Parliament                            | 159 | 32.9% | 31.0% | 33.9% | 40.2% | 25.4% |
| Equally both parliaments   | 33  | 6.8%  | 3.0%  | 8.9%  | 5.3%  | 8.3%  |
| I trust neither of them  | 259 | 53.5% | 58.9% | 50.6% | 49.6% | 57.5% |

Significant statistical dependence of the initial variables was confirmed only in two cases:

- between age/study (secondary schools and universities) and one of the variables in the civic-political identification of respondents: “I trust” (the Slovak Parliament more/the European Parliament more):  $p = 0.03$ .
- between the gender of the respondents (male – female) and the variable formulated in the questionnaire as “migration policy” (respondents were divided into groups according to whether they agreed that the migration policy should fall within the full competence of the national states/that it should be the same across the European Union:  $p = 0.09$ . (Table 3)

The basic research task was to find out which factors are important for the youth when creating European identity and how their own identity is reflected.

*Important elements in creating European identity*

Table 3 shows the average (AM) of the rating scale of the respondents' opinions (in the first column - no differentiation, in other columns - differentiation by gender and respondents' views on migration policy) on the significance of selected phenomena in creating European identity.

Based on the comparison of the average values and the confidence interval calculated from the standard deviation, the most important criteria for the respondents while creating European identity are: 1) high degree of legal protection, 2) democratic values, 3) common currency, 4) common political system, 5) the "unity in diversity" principle.

**Table 3.** The significance of selected phenomena in creation of European identity.

| Significant aspects in creation of European identity: | Mean  | AM male | AM female | AM migration policy within the competence of states | AM equal migration policy across the European Union |
|---|-------|---------|-----------|---|---|
| Common history  | 3.645 | 3.685   | 3.623     | 3.59  | 3.73  |
| Geography   | 3.492 | 3.444   | 3.535     | 3.44  | 3.58  |
| Democratic values                                     | 2.579 | 2.577   | 2.579     | 2.52  | 2.67  |
| High degree of legal protection                       | 2.543 | 2.571   | 2.528     | 2.43  | 2.71  |
| Common culture  | 3.647 | 3.702   | 3.617     | 3.55  | 3.80  |
| Adoption of a common official language                | 4.864 | 4.899   | 4.845     | 5.02  | 4.62  |
| Common religious heritage                             | 4.669 | 4.738   | 4.633     | 4.56  | 4.84  |
| Common currency (€)                                   | 3.273 | 3.250   | 3.285     | 3.29  | 3.24  |
| Symbols: flag, anthem                                 | 4.019 | 3.994   | 4.032     | 4.06  | 3.96  |
| The declared "unity in diversity" principle           | 3.386 | 3.792   | 3.171     | 3.44  | 3.31  |
| A common political system                             | 3.244 | 3.583   | 3.063     | 3.43  | 2.96  |

Once the respondents were differentiated by gender and age, a slightly different ranking of individual aspects of European identity was obtained:

- a) When dividing the respondents by their gender, we found differences in male and female responses, with a significant statistical dependence on the level  $\alpha = 0.05$  for the following phenomena:

The declared “unity in diversity” principle ( $p = 0.001$ ) and the common political system ( $p = 0.002$ ).

- b) In the case of the age/study division (secondary school and university students), a statistically significant dependence in the item “geography”,  $p = 0.024$ , and in the item “acceptance of a common official language,”  $p = 0,000$  was found. This fact enables the assumption that an equally probable result within the basic group (including all Slovak secondary school and university students) can be obtained. 2) *Reflection of respondents' own identity*

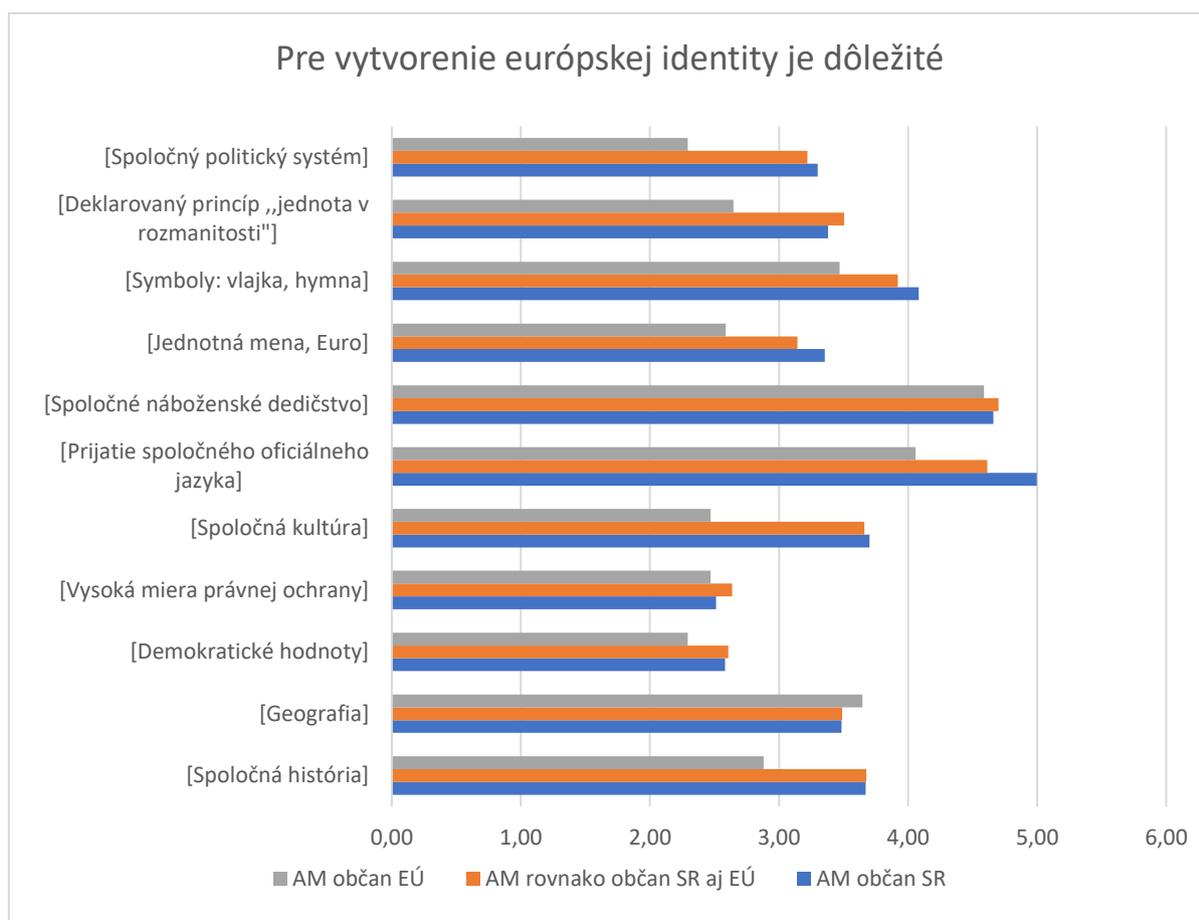
From the point of view of identification self-reflection, the respondents were divided into three groups: a) those who feel being more Slovaks than Europeans (50% of respondents); b) those who feel equally both Slovaks and Europeans (39.46% of respondents); c) those who feel being more Europeans than Slovaks (10.54% of respondents).

Then the dependence of respondents' identification in the edge positions - *I feel rather being Slovak* and *I feel being rather European* – was tested. In order to test the significance of differences the Wilcoxon signed-rank test at the level of significance  $\alpha = 0.05$  was used. This non-parametric test was used due to a non-compliance with the distribution normality. The test result showed that the differences were statistically significant ( $Z = -10.459$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). It was found that the respondents felt more likely to be Slovaks (average AM = 2.19, median Med = 2) than Europeans (AM = 3.18, Med = 3). For the statement “I feel rather being European”, the standard deviation is greater, in other words, the values were more different from the average, and in the statement “I feel to be Slovak,” the answers were more balanced.

The respondents who felt being more Europeans than Slovaks, expressed a major agreement with the following statements: European countries should adopt a common language policy; The European countries should make an effort to adopt a common official EU language; The European youth should learn at least two foreign European languages; and life in the European Union would be easier if the European Union adopted a common official language. The findings related to civic-political identification of respondents have been also very interesting (Table 4). It is noticeable that the respondents considerably exceeded the feeling of civic belonging towards Slovakia (70%), compared to identification with the European Union (3.5%). On the other hand, the majority of them (58.5%) would vote against in the case of the referendum about Slovakia leaving the European Union. At the same time, they stated they trust neither of the parliaments (53.5%), 33% claimed that they trust the European Parliament more than the Slovak Parliament.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it was examined whether and to what extent would the opinions of the respondents – differentiated by the civil-political view on what is important in the creation of European identity – vary. Figure 1 shows the average (AM) of responses for the significance of a particular phenomenon for groups identified by the citizenship.

---

<sup>3</sup> For comparison: according to Eurobarometer, since the autumn of 2010, the confidence of Europe's citizens in the European Union reached the highest level in 2016. Europeans still trust the European Union more than their national parliaments and governments. (EB87, 2016/17)



Important aspects in the creating of a European identity:

[A common political system]

[The declared “unity in diversity” principle...]

[Symbols: flag, anthem]

[Common currency, €]

[Common regional heritage]

[Adoption of a common official language...]

[Common culture]

[High degree of legal protection]

[Democratic values]

[Geography]

[Common history]

I AM citizen of European Union. I AM equally citizen of Slovak Republic and European Union I AM citizen of Slovak Republic

0.00 1.00 2.00 3.00 4.00 5.00 6.00

**Figure 1.** The importance of selected phenomena in the creation of a European identity (respondents divided by their civic-political identification).

When comparing the answers in two groups with border identification *I consider myself first being Slovak/versus I consider myself first being an EU citizen* – no statistically significant dependence in any of the answers was found. Taking into account the impact of the standard deviation, it can be said that the responses were mostly positive, ranging between the values 1.3 and 5.6.

The relation of the respondents' answers to the important elements of European identity was also observed. The responses were compared in terms of respondents' trust / distrust in parliaments (Slovak Parliament, EU Parliament).

**Table 4.** The importance of selected phenomena in the creation of a European identity (respondents divided according to their trust in the parliament)

| Important aspects in the creation of a European identity: | Trusts rather in the Slovak parliament | Trust both parliaments equally | Trust rather in the European parliament | Trust in neither of them |
|---|--|--------------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| Common history  | 3.30                                   | 3.52                           | 3.73                                    | 3.65                     |
| Geography   | 3.03                                   | 3.58                           | 3.61                                    | 3.47                     |
| Democratic values   | 2.67                                   | 3.24                           | 2.54                                    | 2.51                     |
| High degree of legal protection                           | 2.21                                   | 3.15                           | 2.56                                    | 2.50                     |
| Common culture  | 3.12                                   | 3.12                           | 3.60                                    | 3.81                     |
| Adoption of a common official language                    | 4.61                                   | 4.48                           | 4.47                                    | 5.19                     |
| Common religious heritage                                 | 4.03                                   | 4.09                           | 4.85                                    | 4.71                     |
| Common currency (€)                                       | 3.45                                   | 2.70                           | 3.00                                    | 3.49                     |
| Symbols: flag, anthem                                     | 3.45                                   | 4.18                           | 3.78                                    | 4.22                     |
| The declared “unity in diversity” principle               | 3.48                                   | 3.73                           | 3.16                                    | 3.47                     |
| Common political system                                   | 3.64                                   | 3.09                           | 2.82                                    | 3.47                     |

Statistical dependence was found in the answers of border groups of respondents, who defined themselves by the following answers: I trust both parliaments / versus I trust neither of them, either, in these statements: *Democratic values* ( $p = 0.025$ ), *Adoption of a common language* ( $p = 0.025$ ), *Common currency (€)* ( $p = 0.028$ ).

### **3. CONCLUSIONS**

The research answered the basic question: What elements are important for creating a European identity. Based on the respondents' replies, the following order was identified: 1) a high degree of legal protection, 2) democratic values, 3) a common currency, 4) a common political system, 5) the "unity in diversity" principle. The assumption that a common history, culture, and geographical location will occupy the first places has not been confirmed. The respondents do not find the common religious heritage and the adoption of a common official language of the European Union very important.

When comparing respondents' views in terms of time change (age/study), the results showed that secondary school students attach greater importance to the geographical location and the adoption of a common official language than the university students. Where the "gender" criterion is concerned, significant differences were found: men tend to attach more importance to the "unity in diversity" principle and a "common political system" than women.

There were no significant differences between the young people from different types of settlement and regions.

When examining how respondents define themselves in relation to Slovakia and the European Union, the research has confirmed what has already been suggested by other studies (Nikischer, 2013) – in the present day Slovakia, there are three different levels of regional identities with considerable territorial elements – supra-national (the European Union identity), national (Slovak identity) and sub-national (regional and local identities). Local and national identities are slightly prevalent over European awareness. The research showed a majority of the respondents feeling rather Slovaks (62%) as opposed to feeling rather European; approximately half of them are proud of living in Slovakia (56%) as opposed to "I live in Europe"; and almost three quarters of them consider themselves Slovak citizens (70%) as opposed to "European citizens". However, respondents do not perceive a national and European identity as opposing, but rather complementary. The results of the correlation analysis confirmed a moderate positive correlation between the variables *I feel being rather Slovak* and *I feel being rather European*.

That means the more the individual feels to be Slovak, the more they feel to be a European, and vice versa.

On the whole, it can be concluded that on the basis of statistically significant dependencies we can assume that the views on the issues of European identity and the importance of its characteristic elements will vary with the independent variables "age / study" and the variable "gender" (male / female). This entitles us to re-think (in terms of the object of our interest - education and education) that lower population classes (secondary school students) will be more educated in the development of European identity.

On the basis of statistically significant dependencies it can be assumed that about the views on the issues of European identity and the importance of its characteristic features will vary with the independent variables "age / study" and the variable "gender" (male / female). In terms of education, these results allow for the assumption that the younger individuals (secondary school students) will be more open to the educational influence when creating a European identity.

### **Acknowledgement**

This paper has received funding from the VEGA 1/046/16: Attributes of a European identity in the context of youth education.

### **Biography**

Prof. Paed Dr. Eva Poláková. PhD. (SK), prefers multidisciplinary approach and a mixed research strategy when performing research tasks. In the present she focuses mainly on human rights issue and issues of creating a European identity in youth, as well as on the implementation of these issues in education programmes.

### **References**

- [1] Miroslav Frankovský, Eva Bolfíková, An intergenerational differences in the perception of belonging to the macro-social units. *Individual and Society*, 1998, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 7-12.
- [2] R. Brubaker, F. Cooper, Beyond „identity“. *Theory and Society* 2000, 29: 1- 47.
- [3] E. H. Erikson, Identity and the Life Cycle. Psychological issues, (1969). Monograph 1, New York: International Universities Press.
- [4] D. Faas, Youth, Europe and the Nation: The Political Knowledge, Interests and Identities of the New Generation of European Youth. *Journal of Youth Studies* Volume 10, 2007, Issue 2, Pages 161-181
- [5] H. Giles, P. Johnson, Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory: A Social Psychological Approach to Language Maintenance. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 1987, 68, 66-99.
- [6] R. Jenkins, (2008). Social Identity. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge.
- [7] J. Kroger, Identity Development. Adolescence Through Adulthood. (2000). London: Sage Publications, Inc.
- [8] P. H Miller, Theories of Adolescent Development. (1989). In Worell, J. - Banner, F. (eds.): The Adolescent as Decision-Maker. New York: Academic Press, Inc., 13-46.
- [9] R. Nikischer, (2013). The formation of territorial identity if the Czechs and Slovaks. *Young Science* 2013, vol. 1. n. 2, 4-21.
- [10] Anssi Paasi. The institutionalization of regions: a theoretical framework for understanding the emergence of regions and the constitution of regional identity. *Fennia* Vol 164 No 1 (1986).
- [11] H. Tajfel, J.C. Turner. The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. (1986). In S. Worchel, W. Austin (eds.): Psychology of intergroup relations. Nelson Hall, Chicago.
- [12] J.C. Turner, Social categorization and the self-concept. (1985) In A social cognitive theory of group behavior. *Advances in Group Processes*, Vol. 2, pp. 77-121.