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Far away but close enough: Possibilities for developing European identity in youth before becoming a member of the European Union

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Abstract

Following the practice of other aspiring countries, certain topics in the formal subject curricula in the elementary and secondary education in the FYRO Macedonia were concentrated on promoting the benefits of the country's integration into the European Union with a clear intention to help develop European-oriented identities which could be considered broader than the traditional, the national or the ethnic ones. However, these efforts were frequently accompanied by double messages coming from the political scene especially after several unsuccessful attempts for obtaining applicant status and in view of the current economic crisis within the Union.

This study is focused on identifying the effects of the formal educational efforts that were situated in a context of conflicting political and media messages on the formation of the common European identity in ethnic Macedonian youth. In order to identify its main features, we developed an Identity Structure Analysis custom-made questionnaire using the method invented by Prof. Peter Weinreich. The questionnaire consists of 10 bipolar constructs that cover the most important dimensions and values of the EU and 13 relevant entities (such as the educational system, the political parties, the media, etc.) or selves (such as current personal self, current ethnic self, or past self). It was administered to 140 (98 female and 42 male) ethnic Macedonian students of various Social Science and Natural Science Departments at the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje.

The results show that, in general, the values of the EU are accepted. The overall identity diffusion is mild and the dominant identity variants are those from the positive categories. There is a tendency for reducing the conflicted identifications and strengthening the empathetic identification (i.e. the perceived similarity between the self and the European values) over time.

Keywords: *European identity; education; identity structure analysis.*

Introduction

The Republic of Macedonia, accepted in the UN by the provisional name *The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)*, is an official EU candidate since December 2005. According to the European Commission, the country is fulfilling majority of the political and economic criteria for membership satisfactorily, although there is still some space for completing necessary reforms especially in the spheres of improving the rule of law, protecting freedom of expression, promoting the independence of judiciary, increasing anti-corruption mechanisms and advancing the inter-ethnic relations.

The biggest obstacle for acquiring a date for starting the accession negotiations is the long-running dispute with Greece over the country's name. While there is a wide-spread belief (prevalently among ethnic Macedonians) that the country should maintain the right to be recognized internationally by its constitutional name regardless of the consequences and mainly because changing the name will irreparably endanger the very core of the national identity, the official politics of Greece, supported by the vast majority of citizens is that keeping the name *Macedonia* implies territorial claims. The dispute was further complicated with several moves made in the recent years which in the eyes of Greece were interpreted as an intention of the Government of the FYRO Macedonia to make use of heroes from ancient Greek history in order to construct what they call to be a false national identity. The negotiations over the name issue have not been successful yet and the media in both countries present the failure as a consequence of the rigidity of the positions of the other country.

The problem has been further complicated by the Bulgaria's veto in 2012 that was mainly due to the conflicting views about the two countries' history and the ethnic distinctiveness of the two nations. While Bulgaria sees no problem in the name of the country, the country authorities repeatedly openly state that Macedonians¹ cannot claim having distinctive ethnic identity, language and history from the Bulgarians.

It could be said that in its relationship with the EU, the position of FYRO Macedonia has fluctuated from being a leader at the Balkans for accession, to a country that is struggling to seize what has been perceived to be the last chance. This has resulted in a largely accepted opinion, very frequently shaped and supported by the media that the country is simply too long in the "waiting-room" even without being responsible for that. Despite the proclaimed willingness of the official politics to work towards the European integration, disappointments about the pace of integration in addition to the widespread perception that the country suffers over very unjust claims, have caused some skepticism among the Macedonian public. Nevertheless, one could argue that this skepticism was never very popular within the official and formal settings, at least not in an open manner. Rather, it is expressed mainly throughout daily discourses and shaped in a very powerful narrative of refusing to sacrifice the national identity in return for joining the European family.

One segment of the society where the support for joining the EU has been clearly articulated is the sphere of education. The promotion of relevant values such as multiculturalism, tolerance, respect for human rights, social responsibility that are typically considered as being related to the European Union scene was one of the goals of the reform processes in the elementary and secondary education. Thus, the official curricula for primary and secondary education have included the norms and values of democracy, citizenship, diversity, peace, stability and democracy as main objectives of the educational process. Such efforts were not left without thorough critical debate from the perspective of the incompatibility between the formal requirements and the

¹ Although we are fully aware that currently, the EU refers to Macedonia in official documents as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), in this paper, we also use terms Macedonia and Macedonians to refer the country and the ethnic majority group as it is called internally.

implementation (Trajkovski, 2003), especially when the implementation is situated in an authoritative and obedience-oriented education (Fotinovska, 2003). Moreover, there is a serious corpus of evidence that these values, promoted throughout several subjects are simultaneously accompanied by messages (coming mainly from History textbooks) that foster ethno-centrism and inter-ethnic hostility (Stefoska, 2013; Petroska-Beska and Kenig, 2011; Petroska-Beska, Najceska, Kenig, Ballazhi and Tomovska, 2009).

The role of media in preparing Macedonian citizens for Euro-inclusion is not straightforwardly clear too. There is no doubt that many efforts have been made to popularize the EU and stress the advantages of membership on many levels. Special broadcasts about the EU were shown on Macedonian TV, followed by debates, the daily newspapers have standard columns designated for these topics and televised quizzes and roundtables about the EU are organized frequently (Siljanovska, 2012). More or less, the main discourse represented in the media is pro-European, with an exception of the imposed perception that Europe is in a way unjust towards Macedonia and in conflict with Macedonian identity, culture, language and history. This message is usually conveyed implicitly, but there are instances when this question is placed openly by the Government representatives as a fault of the EU officials (Ademi, 2012), thus creating an anti-EU atmosphere among ethnic Macedonians.

Nevertheless, the attitudes of the majority of citizens towards EU membership are constantly positive over time, albeit there are some fluctuations in hopes and priorities. There are also considerable differences along ethnic lines. Being not emotionally involved with the 'name dispute', the non-Macedonian ethnic communities are more Euro optimistic and they also trust the EU more than ethnic Macedonians (Public opinion poll by Agency RATING). A recent poll of Gallup Balkan Monitor (2012) has shown that 12.9% of the respondents in the country extremely strongly identify themselves with Europe, 18.6% very strongly and 30.3% do it moderately. The percentages are higher in the strata of subjects who are more educated and younger. As it is a case in all other Balkan countries, the identification is stronger with the own country and nationality, however, one cannot say they the two identities are conflicted.

The first signs of a reluctant skepticism emerged around 2010, but yet, in that time, 82% of Macedonian residents stated that they would vote *pro* EU (Gallup Balkan Monitor, 2010; Manchin, 2011). Moreover, there is a widespread belief among citizens that the country shares European values. A comparative analysis done with the results of a poll conducted in 2010 and the results from the 2009 Eurobarometer questionnaire has shown that only two values are not ranked and respected in a similar manner – all other values were assessed very closely to other EU countries (Bianchini, 2013). Whether this declarative similarity corresponds with the reality is indeed an intriguing question, however, for the purposes of this study, the finding is important since it shows an existence of at least perceived value compatibility.

If the concept of Europeanization is defined as 'the construction, diffusion, and institutionalization of formal and informal rules, creation of shared beliefs and ways of political practice in Europe' (Katzenstein 2006, p.20), it could be said that the FYRO Macedonia is only on half on its way. However, the fact that young people in the country have been socialized in a decade long pro-European atmosphere, suggests that they have had an opportunity to be psychologically well prepared to identify themselves partly as Europeans even without actually living in the EU. It is naive to believe that successful

promotion of the pro-European values is possible without taking care of identity issues as much as it is naive to expect that the inclusion in Europe will bring about only benefits without any political and social short term costs. Taking into account the importance of identity issues, this research is trying to shed some light on the degree in which this opportunity resulted in construing positive identification with European values. Another objective is to see whether there are some identity changes that mirror the EU ambivalence imposed by the Government leading figures who are (ab)using the European economic and constitutional crisis well as the dispute with Greece over the name (Ordanoski, 2011) several years after the mainstream political and social discourse has been nearly ideally Euro – supportive.

Method

Participants

The custom designed instrument for assessing identity structure was administered to 140 (98 female and 42 male) ethnic Macedonian students of various Social Science (Psychology, Defense Studies and History) and Natural Science Departments (Mathematics, Physics and Biology) at the University of Ss Cyril and Methodius in Skopje. The mean age is 21.1 (SD=2.28). All participants live in different urban (87.5%) or rural areas (12.5%) in the country.

Procedure

After being informed of the general goal of the study and the confidentiality of the individual data, the participants who wanted to take part in the research filled out the questionnaire. Less than 5% of the questionnaires were excluded due to more than one missed answer or obvious response set. The data were collected in December 2012.

Instrument

In order to assess aspects and processes of individual or group identity, Peter Weinreich² proposed the identity structure analysis (ISA), which is a theory driven approach that enables creating identity instruments. The ISA approach provides etic (culturally universal) concepts or processes, such as idealistic identification or contra-identification, which situate emic (culturally specific) values and beliefs at the centre of the conceptualisation. The instrument is considered to be internally standardised by procedures that enable these etic parameters to be cross-culturally comparable (Weinreich, 1989). The overall approach was not left without criticism; however, it is considered as being one of the most comprehensive and inclusive ways of analysing personal and group identity structure (Trimble, 2004).

The custom-made identity instrument is actually a matrix of several *entities* and *constructs*. For convenience, the term entities in ISA approach is used to refer to facets of self (present or past), relevant others (such as parents, idols etc.), institutions (e.g. the State, the Government, the school), agencies (such as media), or emblems, symbols and icons. The constructs represent different relevant themes from the social and cultural environment of the respondents that are considered to be important 'messages' in the

² Dr. Peter Weinreich is now Emeritus Professor of Psychology at the University of Ulster, Northern Ireland.

process of developing the investigated aspect of identity. These themes are evoked in terms of emic discourses, presented in the instrument as contrasted personal attitudes. The respondent has to assess the agreement of each entity on each construct on a scale from 4 (complete agreement) to 1 (very mild agreement). The zero point designates neutral position on the specific attitude or not applicable issue for the specific entity.

The instrument designed for this study is a matrix of ten bipolar constructs and thirteen entities – five of them are mandatory and the rest are optional. The constructs (presented at Table 1) cover the most important values of the EU formulated as statements about the anticipated economic development, security, human rights, legislation and cultural diversity in the country as an EU member compared to the opposite status³. The entities that were used in this study are the following:

Mandatory Entities

- Me, as I am now consider that...(Current Self 1)
- A person whom I despise considers that (disliked person)...
- Me, several years ago thought that (Past Self)...
- Person whom I admire thinks that (admired person)...
- Me, as I would like to be, would think that (Ideal Self)...

Non-mandatory Entities

(ethnic-identity related)

- According to ethnic Macedonians...
- As ethnic Macedonian, I think that (Current Self 2)...
- According to the ethnic Albanians in Macedonia...

(relevant institutions)

- In school, we were thought that
- According to the official state's politics...
- According to the most influential media in the country...

(other)

- My parents think that....
- EU supporters think that ...

The instrument estimates people's value and belief system, the degrees of identification with positive and negative role models and the extent to which they feel similar to others in respect of current, past self and in differing situated selves. It also reveals the evaluation of the others and the intensity of ego-involvement with them. Finally, one can have insight into the overall degree of identity diffusion which reflects the ambiguities and inconsistencies in appraising self and the others in different social contexts (Weinreich, 1986).

Statistical analysis

³ The dimensions of the constructs were derived from two sources – literature review (see for example: Kirch, Rull, and Tuisk, 2001, Kirsh and Kirsh, 2006 or Bianchini, 2013) and focus group discussions with students from the Institute of Psychology at the UKIM – Skopje.

The analysis was done by using Idex-nomo for Windows 3.0 (1992-98)⁴. The t-tests for repeated measures were calculated by using SPSS for Windows 16.

Results

ISA offers means of quantitatively representing informal ideologies of the respondents, in terms of the *structural pressure on constructs*. Structural pressure refers to the consistency with which a particular construct is used in the evaluation of self and others. This consistency derives from the compatibility of the construct's evaluative connotations with one's overall evaluation of the entities to which it is attributed (Weinreich, 1986; Weinreich, 2003). Therefore, high structural pressure on a construct means that, in the process of assessing different entities and the self, the person makes compatible evaluations and cognitions. In other words, the constructs with high structural pressure are used in a consistent way to evaluate self and others, thus representing a stable value for the respondent(s). They are considered as being core evaluative themes, whereas the other constructs, depending on the degree of structural pressure may form inconsistent dimensions of identity.

The results for structural pressure (Table 1) reveal strikingly steady informal ideology of the examined group. Only two constructs (construct 3. and construct 5.) are not core evaluative dimensions whereas the judgments made on the basis of all other included discourses are emotionally and cognitively very consistent. In the eyes of these young people, the improvement of the stability and peace, the job opportunities for the youth and the stable legal rules are the most salient potential advantages that would stem from joining the Union. This consistency could indicate an inflexible adherence to what is considered to be a value-point for judging others, which might have roots in rigid socialization practices or in the strong belief that these values are in harmony with other aspects of personal or group identity.

Another intriguing finding is that the majority of participants consistently incline towards the positive pole of the construct, indicating massive acceptance of the potential EU membership as something beneficial. The dissonance in the estimations is highest in the case of possibility for decreasing the corruption and the possibility of preserving the national identity. The last is not especially surprising, since it captures the most exploited rhetoric in the public sphere. Namely, as it was previously mentioned, the issue of losing the national identity in exchange for the EU membership is very frequently used as an explanation of prolonging the negotiations over the name, that are basically the biggest obstacle for the accession.

The values represented at the negative pole of the constructs have very mild structural pressure, suggesting that the minority of respondents who incline towards them do not use these attitudes/values as stable standards in judging self and the others. Only the sixth dimension serves moderately as such evaluative belief, indicating that most probably, the inclination towards the negative pole is in concordance with the skepticism regarding the model of multiculturalism.

⁴ The newest version of this program is available as Ipseus software. For more information, see: http://www.identityexploration.com/Ipseus_-_Software_for_Identity_Exploration.asp

Table 1: Structural pressure (SP) on constructs

no	Construct majority (+pole)	SP*	N	Construct minority (- pole)	SP*	N
2	Macedonia's EU membership will provide peace and stability in the country.	72.6 ***	103	The stability and peace in the country will remain unchanged regardless of its EU membership.	26.5	35
4	Macedonia's EU membership will enable young people to find jobs easier.	71.5 ***	98	It is hard to find a job anywhere; the membership in EU would not change anything.	21.4	42
10	As an EU member Macedonia would have modern and stable legislative.	70.1 ***	104	Changes in the legislation in accordance with the EU requirements make more chaos than order.	37.7	35
6	Our society has better chances to develop as a multicultural one within the EU.	67.1 **	107	The concept of multiculturalism does not function successfully in the EU countries as well.	43.0	32
9	Within the EU, we would have guaranteed democratic system.	66.6 **	96	The EU countries are just smarter in masking the undemocratic governance.	31.7	44
7	Macedonia's entrance in the EU would guarantee respect of human rights for all.	64.1 **	111	Even at the EU countries, human rights are rather "on paper" than they are really practiced.	34.3	29
1	Macedonia's membership in the EU would endow with economic well-being.	64.7 **	91	Macedonia's membership in the EU would not change the economic situation.	18.3	49
8	Within EU, we will benefit from developing a common European identity of all citizens.	62.1 **	100	The development of common European identity has no success even in the current EU states.	27.3	40
3	The EU membership promises the survival of the cultural identity.	57.3	106	Within EU, Macedonians might lose their specific identity.	23.2	33
5	Macedonia's membership in the EU would decrease the corruption considerably.	56.3	79	There was and there will be corruption in R.M. regardless of its membership in the EU.	25.3	59

*Structural pressure ranges from -100 to 100.

*** and ** are core evaluative dimensions

Other important identity parameters are the *evaluation of entities and the ego-involvement*. The evaluation is defined as 'one's overall assessment of the other in terms of the positive and negative evaluative connotations of the attributes one construes in that other, in accordance with one's value system' (Weinreich, 1989, p.23). The results on these variables are presented in Table 2. Findings reveal that students evaluate *EU supporters* moderately high, yet, in the same category as entities that are usually very highly evaluated – the *ethnic self* and the *own ethnic group*. Higher evaluation for the ethnic identity-related entities were expected on the basis of previous research (Kenig, 2000), but the fact that the *EU supporters* are evaluated almost equally as the Macedonians and the parents is surprising. It indicates high appreciation of this entity and at the same time implies it's cognitive and emotional dissociation from the *leading*

media, educational system and the state's official politics that are evaluated considerably lower.

The ego-involvement represents the responsiveness to the other in terms of the extensiveness in quantity and strength of the attributes one construes the other as being possessed (Weinreich, 2003), or it simply shows how important is some entity to the respondent. The ego involvement with the group of *EU supporters* is moderately high, yet in average, a bit less than the involvement with ethnic identity-related entities (entity 1., entity 5. and entity 7.) or institutions (entity 9., entity 10. and entity 12.) reflecting the reasonably mild reaction to what for the respondents this entity represents. On the other hand, results on this parameter show the importance of the socialization agents on conveying the relevant values, i.e. in identity development, most probably mirroring the power they have to affect these young people's lives on a daily basis.

Table 2: Averages of evaluation, ego-involvement aspirational and conflicted identification with entities (Current Self)

Entity	evaluation of entities*	ego-involv. **	empath. identif. ***	idealistic identif. ***	contra identif. †	conflicted identif. ††
1. Macedonians	0.56	3.77	0.74	0.75	0.25	0.33
2. Admired person	0.82	3.40	0.82	0.94	0.02	0.05
3. My parents	0.56	3.30	0.80	0.79	0.19	0.29
4. Despised person	0.19	3.18	0.52	0.55	0.35	0.30
5. Albanians in Macedonia	0.19	3.26	0.55	0.56	0.36	0.33
6. Me in the past	0.42	3.60	0.65	0.67	0.27	0.32
7. Me as Macedonian	0.64	3.59	0.89	0.81	0.16	0.28
8. Me, as would like to be	0.79	3.49	0.73	0.86	0.00	0.00
9. Educational system	0.40	4.06	0.56	0.58	0.24	0.27
10. The state's politics	0.44	4.53	0.65	0.68	0.30	0.32
11. The EU supporters	0.54	3.34	0.75	0.77	0.20	0.27
12. Leading media	0.44	4.44	0.64	0.68	0.31	0.32
13. Me, as I am now	0.65	3.67	1.00	0.83	0.16	0.31

*Scale from -1 to +1 : above 0.70 is very high, 0.30 to 0.70 is moderate and -0.1 to 0.30 is low

** Scale from 0 to 5: above 4 is very high and below 2 is very low

*** Scale from 0 to 1: above 0.70 is high, below 0.50 is low

† Scale from 0 to 1: above 0.45 is high, below 0.25 is low

†† Scale from 0 to 1: above 0.50 is very high, 0.35 -0.50 is high, 0.20 -0.35 is moderate below 0.20 is low

The *aspirational identification* is defined through two opposite identifications - in respect of desired characteristics (idealistic identification) and rejected or not desired characteristics (contra-identification). The degree of idealistic identification shows the perceived similarity between the wanted characteristics ascribed to the entities and the contra-identification is quite an opposite process. Data presented in Table 2 reveal that apart from ascribing desirable characteristics to the current and ideal selves (entity 13.,

entity 7. and entity 8.) and the *admired person* (who is by definition regarded as an entity where it is expected), students idealistically identify themselves with the *Macedonians*, their *parents*, and the *EU supporters*. These three entities are clearly positive role models in regard with the EU joining attitudes/values. This finding may suggest that there is a trans-generational reinforcement of the ideologies and attitudes on one hand and on the other, that an important aspect of the acceptance of the values in question is the perceived congruity between the value system and what is believed to be the values of the 'own' ethnic group. All other averages for idealistic identification are moderate, which indicates that in the eyes of the respondents, none of these entities holds characteristics that are in strong opposition to their value system.

The contra-identification is highest, although moderate, with the *Albanians* who live in the country, which is probably much more a consequence of the inter-ethnic tensions in the country than a salient perceived difference in the value system in respect with the investigated issue. In the same category are the *disliked person*, the *leading media*, the *state's politics* and the past self. Thus, it could be said that regarding the investigated discourses, students do not have undoubtedly defined negative role model among the offered entities.

One's empathetic identification with another refers to the *de facto* state of identification with that other, or, empathetic identification emerges when the ego 'recognizes and comprehends the qualities in the other as closely pertaining to the self' (Weinreich, 1989b, p.223). It is obvious that these young people consider themselves as being very similar to their own ethnic group and the ethnic self, to their parents and the EU supporters (Table 2). The absence of low indices of empathetic identification across all entities indicates that students perceive all of them all as being more or less in accord regarding the evaluation of the offered discourses.

The data presented in Table 3 give information about the changes in this perceived shared 'oneness' with the relevant entities in comparison with 'several years ago'. While the *state's politics* ($t=-3.86(138)$; $p<0.01$) and the *leading media* ($t=-4.74(137)$; $p<0.01$) are seen as being less similar now than in the past, the empathetic identification with the *EU supporters* became stronger ($t=6.82(139)$; $p<0.01$). There is no change in the perceived sameness with the *educational system* which may reflect that the identification processes with this entity are considered as being already 'resolved'.

Table 3: Changes in empathetic identification with relevant entities (t-test for dependant samples)

Entity	Current self M (SD)	Past self M (SD)	t (df)	p
The educational system	0.56 (0.34)	0.57 (0.36)	-0.11 (138)	0.25
The state's politics	0.65 (0.27)	0.74 (0.24)	-3.86 (138)	0.00
The EU supporters	0.75 (0.21)	0.58 (0.27)	6.82 (139)	0.00
The leading media	0.64 (0.28)	0.75 (0.23)	-4.74 (137)	0.00

*high – above 0.70, low - below 0.50

Conflicted identification with entities occurs when one empathetically identifies with them while simultaneously wants to dissociate from certain qualities (contra-identifies with them). Therefore, it is a psychological conflict that arises from the *de facto* state of similarity with another that is locked into some extent of aversion towards that perceived sameness (Weinreich, 1989b). According to the data presented in Table 3, students have

highest conflicts with entities that represent ethnic groups (entity1. and entity 5.) followed by *the media* and the *state's politics*, while the lowest conflict is with the *educational system* and the *EU supporters*. It can be argued that the relative absence of contra-identifications with both ethnicities stem from the generally spread idea that there is a certain degree of conflict between the values associated with Euro-integration and the ethno-centric views, whereas the low degree of conflict with what was learnt at school reflect the agreement with those promoted values.

Table 4 shows the degrees of identification conflict with relevant entities now, compared with those from the perspective of past self. The conflict decreases over time in regards with all entities that are considered most relevant to this issue, probably reflecting the process of 'reconciliation' between the perceived similarity and the wish for dissociation of certain attributes. Although this might be a result of maturation, more than an evidence that students have overcome the simultaneous dislike and similarity with these entities, it is certain that the rising Euro-skepticism in their social environment did not produce higher identification conflict yet.

Table 4: Changes in conflicted identification with relevant entities (t-test for dependant samples)

Entity	Current self M (SD)	Past self M (SD)	t (df)	p
The educational system	0.27 (0.22)	0.33 (0.26)	-4.14 (138)	0.00
The state's politics	0.32 (0.17)	0.38 (0.18)	-3.67 (136)	0.00
The EU supporters	0.27 (0.23)	0.30 (0.21)	-4.02 (137)	0.00
The leading media	0.32 (0.20)	0.39 (0.24)	-4.77 (137)	0.00

*high – above 0.70, low - below 0.50

Finally, the overall identity diffusion index of the whole group from the perspective of current self is 0.30, meaning that there is a moderate degree of conflicted identifications with other people, institutions or groups (Weinreich, 1996). This index is somewhat lower than the overall diffusion index from the perspective of past self (0.32). Again, it suggests that the recent developments in the EU countries, along with the rising ambivalence towards the benefits of the country's membership in the European family, did not produce more conflicts in young people. On the contrary, now they are more successful in resolving conflicted identifications rather than in creating them.

Conclusion

Many scholars are concerned that the efforts to construe a common European identity will fail, especially because it is hard to imagine how national identities that were a core mover of the relations between the European countries over hundred and fifty years can be redefined and overcome (Jacobs and Maier, 1998). This question is particularly complex when the nation has to undergo painful changes in its cultural and ethnic identities, that are very often perceived as serious threats to the survival of its particular unique national identity (Kirch, Rull, and Tuisk, 2001; Kirch and Kirch, 2001; Kirch and Kirch, 2006). In the case of the FYRO Macedonia, this issue reveals itself to the fullest possible extent, taking into account that it is exactly the national identity that has been pointed out as the required sacrifice through public discourses.

On the other hand, if the European identity is defined as a social construct that mainly means a feeling of unity of group of people based on shared and broadly matching

values and beliefs, it seems that its formation is possible even before the formal belonging to the Union. The data from this exploratory study has shown that despite the double messages coming from the political scene and from media, majority of young people very strongly identify themselves with the European values. It is very likely that the positive messages acquired through the formal education and the everyday EU supportive discourses manifested in the media prevailed over the messages which imply that EU will 'soon collapse' or that 'we are better off by ourselves' than in a unity that 'might endanger the ethnic identity'. This does not necessarily imply that the values are accepted beyond the level of mere reproduction, but the exploration of that question could follow in some next research endeavors.

The low conflict in identification with the EU values of Macedonian youth also does not automatically mean that one can be comfortable with what has been achieved, because this cannot be considered as a permanent result. An illuminating research on the influence of the qualitatively different manipulations of political elites on the acceptance of requirements necessary for Europeanization process (Subotic, 2011) suggests that it is exactly the identity issues that make the difference between similar candidate countries where Europeanization is successful or fails.

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