



**UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)**

**European identity as a unifying category: National vs. European identification among native and immigrant pupils**

Agirdag, O.; Phalet, K.; Van Houtte, M.

*Published in:*  
European Union Politics

*DOI:*  
[10.1177/1465116515612216](https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116515612216)

[Link to publication](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Agirdag, O., Phalet, K., & Van Houtte, M. (2016). European identity as a unifying category: National vs. European identification among native and immigrant pupils. *European Union Politics*, 17(2), 285-302.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116515612216>

**General rights**

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

**Disclaimer/Complaints regulations**

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

# European identity as a unifying category: National vs. European identification among native and immigrant pupils

European Union Politics

0(0) 1–19

© The Author(s) 2015

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/1465116515612216

eup.sagepub.com



## Orhan Agirdag

Laboratory for Education and Society, University of Leuven, Belgium; Department of Educational Sciences, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

## Karen Phaet

Center for Social and Cultural Psychology, University of Leuven, Belgium

## Mieke Van Houtte

Department of Sociology, Ghent University, Belgium

## Abstract

This article investigates whether European identity is a feasible and functional alternative to national identity. We examine the extent, determinants and consequences of national and European identification among (immigrant) Turkish and native Belgian pupils, with data gathered from 1629 pupils across 68 Belgian schools. The results show that immigrant Turkish pupils identify more strongly with Europe than with Belgium. The groups are closer to each other with respect to their European identification, while the latter is not in conflict with national identification. Moreover, European identity is less ethnically and more civically defined than national identity. Importantly, European identification was moderately related to academic achievement, though it is hard to make a causal claim.

## Keywords

Academic achievement, diversity, European identity, immigrants, national identity

---

## Corresponding author:

Orhan Agirdag, Laboratory for Education and Society, University of Leuven, Andreas Vesaliusstraat 2 – bus 3761, 3000 Leuven, Belgium.

Email: orhan.agirdag@gmail.com

## Introduction

Due to the continuing immigration and the increased political tensions after a set of terrorist attacks in the first decade of the 21st-century, multiculturalist policies have come in for significant criticism in various Western countries. At the same time, the issue of national identification is placed at the centre of national policies. That is, policy makers argue that multicultural policies of the earlier decades undermined immigrants' identification with their country of settlement (their host national identities), while this national identification is considered to be a key determinant of successful integration into the host society (Kundnani, 2007; Levrau and Loobuyck, 2013). However, as noted by Verkuyten and Martinovic (2012), the need for a common identity is not only advocated by assimilationist politics, but the proponents of multiculturalism as well argue that besides the recognition and affirmation of distinctive (ethnic) identities, a shared sense of nationhood is important for a well-functioning society.

There are structural obstacles that make it difficult for immigrants and their children to develop a sense of belonging to their host nation (see Alba and Foner, 2014; Verkuyten and Martinovic, 2012). Most importantly, in many countries, national identity is not represented as a civic category, but as an exclusive ethnic/racial category that does not include the ethnic background of immigrant minorities. This is particularly the case for second generation Muslim immigrants in European countries. For instance, labels such as 'German', 'Belgian' or 'Dutch' are commonly used to only refer to the native (Caucasian) majority group, even though second- and third-generation Muslims are formally citizens of their countries of residence (Alba and Foner, 2014; Pehrson et al., 2009). As such, in these sociopolitical contexts where national identity is primarily regarded as an ethnic/racial category connoted to the native majority, immigrants and their children are deprived of the legitimacy to claim a national membership (Fleischmann and Phalet, 2015; Kunovich, 2009).

One possible political strategy to change this situation might be the redefinition of national categories, so it can be combined with ethnic minority identities, to open the way for the creation of multiple identities (see Modood, 2005; Verkuyten, 2004). A second approach – which received less political and scholarly attention – is to look for an alternative common identity that is functionally equivalent to national identities. At a higher level, there is supranational identity, in our case, European identity. Like national identity, European identity is a unifying category. Yet, European identity has an important advantage over national identities: according to Habermas (2001, 2002), the European citizenship is not defined in ethnic/cultural terms (like old European nations are), but it is defined in political terms, that is, by the sharing of democratic cosmopolitan values. In other words, European identity is more conceptualized as a civic identity, one which is less determined by ethnic characteristics such as language, religion or common descent. As such, for immigrant minorities, European identification might be a more realistic common identity than national identities are.

An interesting immigrant minority group to consider in this respect is the Turkish group, which is one of the largest minority groups in Europe as well as in Belgium where this study is conducted. Turks in West-European countries tend to have low levels of national identification, even lower than other minority groups such as Moroccans (Vroome et al., 2014). However, less is known about their level of European identification.

The relevance of European identity for Turks dates at least back to the proclamation of the modern Turkish Republic in 1923. The main goal of the newly established republic was to 'Europeanize' the economic, political and social structures of the country. As early as 1959, Turkey applied for associate membership in the European Economic Community and in 1987 it submitted its application for a formal European Union (EU) membership (Risse, 2012). Until recently, opinion polls in Turkey have consistently shown that the majority remains supportive of the idea of EU membership (Kösebalaban, 2007), even though the support is declining as a reaction to the slowing of the EU membership process. An important obstacle to Turkey's membership remains European public opinion, which largely opposes it due to cultural concerns, i.e. fears of losing one's national culture (Gerhards and Hans, 2011; McLaren, 2007). Nevertheless, the Eurobarometer survey of 2009 shows that 46% of Turkish citizens have a 'fairly positive' to 'very positive' image of the EU. This percentage is at the same level as the Dutch and French citizens' regard of EU, i.e. both about 44% positive. Although the feeling of belonging to Europe is in Turkey lower than most European countries, it is comparable to British citizens' connectedness to Europe (see also Ecirli, 2011). Given this background and the historical, geographical and political relationships between Turkey and Europe, European identity might be permeable for ethnic Turks in Western Europe, as an alternative for the low level of national identification.

This study aims to explore these ideas from an empirical perspective by using data collected in Belgian schools at the end of the primary school; this is the age when children's national and European identities get a shape and remain relatively stable after that (Barrett, 1996; Reizabal et al., 2004). First, we will compare the levels of national (Belgian) identification and European identification among Turkish immigrant and native Belgian pupils. By doing so, we will establish whether both groups are closer to each other with respect to their European identification than with respect to their national identification. Secondly, we will examine social and ethnic determinants of both common identifications. Our expectation, based on Habermas (2001, 2002) is that European identification is less defined by 'ethnic' variables such as language use, religiosity and interethnic friendships than pupils' national identifications. Third, even if European identification turns out to be a *feasible* alternative (by which we mean: more strongly exhibited and less ethnically defined than national identification), the question arises whether it is a *functional* alternative. To provide an answer to this question, we will investigate how both common identities are related to pupils' successful incorporation into society, by examining the impact of national and European identification on the academic performances of pupils.

## National identification

National identification can be regarded as a part of the individual's social identity. Tajfel (1981: 255) defines social identity as 'that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership'. Drawing upon this definition, national identification can be considered as the self-identification and emotive meaning that an individual derives from membership in a national group.

With respect to immigrant and ethnic minorities, for a long time, a one-dimensional model was the dominant framework. Theories based on this model suggest that national identification and ethnic identification are antipodal, implying that the strength of ethnic identification is negatively related to national identification. By contrast, current scholars argue in favor of a bi-dimensional model. They point out that ethnic identification does not necessarily compete with national identification, since people can combine multiple identities (Hutnik, 1991; Phinney et al., 2001).

Previous empirical studies have generally shown that immigrant and ethnic minority groups identify less with the national category than natives and ethnic majority groups do (Maxwell, 2009; Phinney et al. 1997), although this depends on the given sociopolitical context (see Fleischmann and Phalet, 2015). Verkuyten and Martinovic (2012) note that the mean scores for minority groups are typically around the neutral midpoint of the scale, indicating a weak national identification. Research with children and young adolescents reveals similar results (Barrett, 2002; Carrington and Short, 1995; Lam and Smith, 2009).

There is an elaborated list of factors that can contribute to the development of a sense of national belonging of ethnic and immigrant minorities (for an overview, see Verkuyten and Martinovic, 2012). First, intergroup relations might play an important role in the development of national identification of minorities. For instance, most studies find a positive correlation between the number of native friends and nation identification (e.g. Agirdag et al., 2011; Sabatier, 2008; Vroome et al., 2014); although Leszczensky (2013) notes that this relationship might not be a causal one. Second, for religious minorities, the level of religiosity might have a negative impact on the level of national identification. Among European Turks, this is in particular the case for Sunnite Muslim (Verkuyten and Martinovic, 2012; Verkuyten and Yildiz, 2007). Third, group norms and behaviours such as the language use can contribute or impede the development of sense of national belonging. Previous studies have found that the extent to which the national/dominant language is spoken is related to higher levels of national identification (Hochman and Davidov, 2014; Vroome et al., 2014). As such, we expect that 'ethnic' characteristics such as religiosity, language use and interethnic friendships will have a significant impact on the level of pupils' national identification.

## European identification

Since the 1970s, the idea of European citizenship has been widely promoted by politicians, intellectuals and administrators involved in the European Community

(Bruter, 2005). With the rise of Eurosceptic politics, the discussion of the construction of a European identity has become increasingly popular and it has prompted the European policy makers to search for new ways to bond with its citizens (Hooghe and Marks, 2005). A substantial number of studies have examined the theoretical/political issues behind the notion of European identity, such as its definition, its place and function in the European integration process and the relationship that exists between European identity and national identities (e.g. Carey, 2002; Risse, 2003; Sigalas, 2010). Other researchers have identified various determinants that can inform whether people feel a sense of European identity, such as gender and social class (e.g. Citrin and Sides, 2004; Medrano and Gutiérrez, 2001; Verhaegen et al., 2013).

Barrett (1996) found that the sense of European identity tends to emerge when children are between 6 and 10 years old. The same study also found that the awareness of belonging to the European supranational group seemed to peak around 10 years old, staying relatively stable between the ages of 10 and 14. In another study that examined European identity amongst English children, Barrett (1996) demonstrated that, in terms of forming their sense of identity, European identification was less important for children than their gender, their religion or their national identity. This was also found in several other studies, including those conducted with children in the Basque Country (Reizabal et al., 2004), with children in Greek Cyprus (Philippou, 2005) and with young adults across six European countries (Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Slovakia, Spain and United Kingdom) (Boehnke and Fuss, 2008).

Previous studies point out that people's identification with Europe is influenced by their socioeconomic, gender and immigration background. With respect to gender, studies have consistently found that men are more likely to exhibit higher levels of European identification than women do, although this correlation is rather weak (Agirdag et al., 2012; Fligstein, 2009; Quintelier et al., 2014; Verhaegen et al., 2013). For pupils, higher parental socioeconomic status (SES) has also been found to be related to a stronger European identification (Agirdag et al., 2012; Medrano and Gutiérrez, 2001). The role that an immigration background plays in whether – and to what extent – an individual identifies with Europe is increasingly being studied. In a cross-national study among adolescents in 21 European countries, Verhaegen et al. (2013) report that first-generation and second-generation immigrants exhibit lower levels of European identity than native young adolescents. Similar results are shown by Agirdag et al. (2012) who find that in Belgium children with Moroccan and Turkish roots identified less strongly with Europe than native Belgian children. In another study in Belgium, Quintelier and her colleagues (2014) show that only immigrants from the Netherlands had lower European identification than native-born Belgian students, while no significant differences are found with other groups of immigrants. In the more Eurosceptic sociopolitical context, Cinnirella and Hamilton (2007) find that Asian–British respondents exhibited a stronger sense of European identity than did native White–British respondents.

In the present study, we will compare the extent and the determinants of both common identities, i.e. national (Belgian) and supranational (European) identification. European identity is sociopolitically more defined as a *civic* category than national identities which are ethnically connoted to the (Caucasian) native majority (Habermas, 2001, 2002). Moreover, Europe is represented as being dynamic (e.g. EU as a growing entity) and as indispensable multinational (e.g. Europe consist of many nations). This makes European identity a more accessible and permeable category (see also Bruter, 2004; Faas, 2007). The higher permeability of the European identity for ethnic minorities can also be framed with the Ingroup Projection Model (IPM; see Bianchi et al., 2010; Mummendey and Wenzel, 1999). IPM posits that people tend to spontaneously project their features onto the superordinate category. The higher the level of the superordinate category, the more easily groups can be counted as being part of that identity. For instance, while immigrant Turkish pupils are rarely seen as a representative of a national (Belgian) identity, it is easier for them to reach some aspects of being European.

Given this implication of IPM and the Habermasian idea of European identity as a civic identity, we expect that (1) immigrant (Turkish) pupils will identify more strongly with Europe than with Belgium (2) and that for both groups (native Belgians and Turkish pupils) ethnic variables (such as language use, inter-ethnic friendships and religiosity) will be more strongly associated with national identification than European identification. However, we also expect that native Belgians still identify more strongly with Europe than pupils of Turkish descent, as Turkey has a historical and political ambivalent relationship to Europe. For instance, Turkey is a member of Council of Europe, but not a member of EU.

## Common identities and academic achievement

Above and beyond the question whether immigrant students identify more with Europe than their host nation, the question arises about the relevance of both common identities. Previous studies point out that a stronger European identification is a predictor of higher levels of tolerance towards ethnic minorities (Dejaeghere and Quintelier, 2008) and that it promotes democratic values (Kennedy, 2013). However, no study that we are aware of has examined the relationship between European identification and academic performance. Yet, with respect to young people, the level of academic achievement is one of the most important indicators of successful incorporation into society. But can we theoretically expect an association between pupils' national or supranational identification and their educational achievement?

Classical assimilation theory posits that cultural assimilation is a prerequisite to the structural adaptation of immigrants into the institutions of the society (Alba and Nee, 1997; Gordon, 1964). Ogbu (1994) makes a similar point with respect to



the education of ethnic minorities. He observed that school success for minorities largely depends on the extent to which students corroborates to the value system of the school, which is in line with the dominant/national culture and identity. Different empirical studies show that a higher identification with the nation is associated with higher levels of academic achievement (Baysu et al., 2011; Hannover et al., 2013; Phinney et al., 1997; Trickett and Birman, 2005). However, for minorities, there might be a downside to higher national identification as well. Especially in contexts such as Western Europe where national identities are historically connoted with the ethnic majority, a higher sense of national identification among minorities goes together with lower ethnic identification (Fleischmann and Phalet, 2015). This diminishing ethnic identity might be detrimental for achievement. Indeed, empirical studies show that a stronger ethnic identification buffers against the negative effects of discrimination on school performances (Branscombe et al., 1999; Eccles et al., 2006) and that a stronger sense of connection to one's ethnic identity and community is related to higher levels of educational attainment (Altschul et al., 2006; Phinney et al., 1997). Identification with the ethnic group improves academic achievement because it is associated with higher self-esteem and it forms a protective factor against stereotype threats (Davis et al., 2006; Wong et al., 2003). For the native majority group, on the other hand, high levels of national identification might also be detrimental as it predicts negative attitudes against minorities (Maddens et al., 2000; Stevens et al., 2014) and goes hand in hand with reduced social capital (Reeskens and Wright, 2013).

It is here where the importance of European identification as a form of supra-national identity comes in. On the one hand, it might be functionally equivalent to national identification because both common identities are legitimate parts of the value systems of schools in West Europe. As such, a higher attachment to Europe might facilitate pupils' attachment to school or, to put it differently, their sense of school belonging. A sense of school belonging is not only very important because pupils have the right to feel welcomed at their schools, but it is also important because a higher sense of school belonging improves academic achievement and reduces anti-school behaviour (Johnson et al., 2001). On the other hand, European identity has the advantage that it is a multinational, a more civic and more inclusive category than national identities that are more ethnically defined. If European identity is indeed less in conflict with ethnic identities, a higher sense of it is less likely to trigger a loss of 'multicultural capital' or a loss of connectedness to one's own ethnic community. This is in contrast with the potential negative effect of national identity on ethnic identities. Along those lines, European identification might combine the positive aspects of national identification (i.e. sense of belonging to the dominant value system school) without the risk of losing the benefits of ethnic identity. As such, we expect a stronger relationship between European identification and academic achievement, than between national identification and academic achievement.



## Methods

### Sample

We used data gathered in 2008–2009 from 1629 pupils (with a mean age of 11.51) from a sample of 68 primary schools in Flanders, Belgium. Multistage sampling was conducted. First, three cities with a high numbers of immigrants were selected. Second, based on data gathered from the Flemish Educational Department, we asked 116 primary schools in these selected cities to participate; this yielded a positive response of 54%. In all of the 68 participating schools, we gave a questionnaire to all the fifth-grade pupils. If there were fewer than 30 fifth-grade pupils present, all the sixth-grade pupils were surveyed as well. The pupils completed the questionnaires and a math achievement test in their classroom in the presence of one or two researchers. Given time limitations, not all curriculum subjects could be tested, so the focus was on math achievement because a large proportion of the respondents were not native Dutch speakers, and math tests are less linguistically biased than subjects such as reading (Abedi et al., 2004). While a total of 2845 pupils completed the questionnaire, we will only use the data of native Belgian and Turkish students. Students are categorised as native Belgian if both their parents and grandmothers were born in Belgium ( $N=1178$ ). They are categorized as Turkish, if one of their parents or grandmothers was born in Turkey ( $N=451$ ). Other students are excluded from the sample.

### Research design

We began the analysis by comparing the mean level of national and European identification of both groups and we examine the difference between European and Belgian identification within both groups. For this purpose, we conducted an independent sample *t*-test. Furthermore, we used *Pearson's* correlations to examine whether both identifications are positively or negatively related to each other. For these analysis, SPSS21 was used.

To examine the determinants and consequences of European and Belgian identification, we conducted multilevel regression analyses as the data set consists of a clustered sample of pupils nested within schools (using MPLUS 6, TWOLEVEL procedure). First, we examined the impact of grade, social variables (gender and parental SES) and ethnic variables (i.e. interethnic friendships, religiosity and language). Second, we investigated the relationship between both common identifications (national and European) and academic achievement, while controlling for the covariates in the previous model (i.e. grade, gender, parental SES, language use, religiosity and interethnic friendships) to account for spurious and confounding relationships.

Missing data were dealt with using the full information maximum likelihood method (FIML). FIML uses all available data to estimate parameters on the basis of the available complete data as well as the implied values of the missing data, given the observed data (see Enders and Bandalos, 2001). Metric predictors are

grand mean centered in the multilevel regression analysis. Unstandardized effects are reported in the tables. Standardized effect sizes are reported in the Results section. The so-called StdYX standardization is reported which is achieved by the multiplication of the effect size with the standard deviation of the predictor variable divided by the standard deviation of the dependent variable.

## Variables

To assess the levels of *European identification* and *Belgian identification* among the children in our sample set, we used a scale based on five items from the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (Luhtanen and Crocker, 1992). The items on European identification scale were 'I consider myself a European', 'I often regret that I am a European' (reverse score), 'I am glad to be a European', 'I often feel that Europe is worthless' (reverse score) and 'I feel good about Europe'. Same items are used for Belgian identification where the notion of 'European' is replaced by 'Belgian' for these items. (It should be noted that it is very common for Flemish people to identify with both Belgium and Flanders, and most people identify equally strong with both categories (Billiet et al., 2003). There were five answer categories, ranging from *absolutely do not agree* (score 1) to *completely agree* (score 5). Responses to these five items were averaged. The Belgian and European identification scales yielded satisfactory Cronbach's alphas of respectively 0.806 and 0.817.

*Academic achievement* is measured by math achievement, measured using a test developed by Dudal and Deloof (2004), which is based on standardized educational attainment levels for Flemish students in the fifth grade of their primary education. The test consists of 60 items, which cover elementary arithmetic, problem solving, fractions, decimals and long division. The reliability (alpha) coefficient for the tests was 0.920. Scores are calculated by using a two-parameter Rasch Model Item Response Theory (IRT).

Students' *parental SES* was measured by means of the occupational status of students' father and mother (Erikson et al., 1979); the highest of both was used as an indicator of the family SES.

We measured *Dutch language use* with seven items. Pupils indicated the degree to which they speak Dutch or another language (1) at home with their father; (2) at home with their mother; (3) at home with other siblings; (4) in the classroom with friends; (5) at the playground with friends; (6) outside the school with friends and (7) on the internet. Each item has five possible responses ranging from 'always another language' (score 1) to 'always Dutch' (score 5). Responses to these five items were averaged. This scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.912. It should be noted that this variable is relevant for both immigrant and native Belgian pupils as in Flanders many native Belgian pupils are from families where French is spoken.

Two items measure the level of *religiosity*. First, pupils were asked 'how important is religion for you' and the answers ranged from 'completely not important' (score 1) to 'very important' (score 5). Second, they stated how many times they go to a mosque or church and the answers ranged from 'never' (score 1) to 'very

frequently' (score 5). Mean score of both items is calculated as indicator of religiosity.

And finally, to measure pupils' *interethnic friendship*, we asked non-native pupils to state how many of their friends at school had a Belgian origin and we asked native pupils to state how many of their friends at school had a non-Belgian origin. There were five possible answers: nobody (score 1), a few (score 2), half of them (score 3), most of them (score 4) and all of them (score 5).

Finally *gender* and *grade* (fifth grade coded 0; sixth grade coded 1) are included in the models as well. See online appendix (Table A1) for descriptive statistics.

## Results

### *The extent of national and European identification*

Native Belgian pupils have a higher level of both national identification and European identification than pupils with Turkish roots. The independent sample *t*-tests show that the difference between both groups is statistically significant for national identification (difference = 1.371;  $t = 33.38$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). In terms of Cohen's  $d$  ( $= 1.81$ ), this is a large difference. For European identification, the difference between native Belgian pupils and Turkish immigrant pupils is significant (difference = 0.813;  $t = 14.32$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and large ( $d = 0.91$ ). However, for native Belgian pupils, the level of national identification is higher than their level of European identification (difference = 0.164;  $t = 6.545$   $p < 0.001$ ). The reverse is true for Turkish pupils: they identify more with Europe than with Belgium (difference = 0.392;  $t = 8.403$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). See online appendix (Table A1). Consequently, native Belgian pupils and Turkish pupils are closer to each other with respect to their European identification than with respect to their sense of Belgian identity. Moreover, European and national identities are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, as shown in the online appendix, for both groups, there is a significant correlation between their national identification and their European identification ( $p < 0.001$ ). While both correlations were medium in effect size, the correlation is slightly stronger for the Turkish subsample ( $r = 0.479$ ) than for the native Belgian subsample ( $r = 0.383$ ). See online appendix (Table A2).

### *Determinants of national and European identification*

Table 1 displays the determinants of national and European identification. A significantly higher level of national identification is predicted for Turkish pupils who speak more often Dutch (*standardized* effect size [ $\beta$ ] = 0.312;  $p < 0.001$ ), those who are less religious ( $\beta = -0.175$ ;  $p = 0.002$ ), and those with more native Belgian friends ( $\beta = 0.227$ ;  $p < 0.000$ ). On the other hand, Turkish pupils' gender and their parental SES do not have a significant impact. Hence, 'ethnic' variables such as language

**Table 1.** Multilevel regression on national identification and European identification: Unstandardized coefficients (*b*), standard errors (*SEs*), *p* values (*p*) and variance components.

	Turkish sample						Native Belgian sample					
	National identification			European identification			National identification			European identification		
	<i>b</i>	( <i>SE</i> )	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	( <i>SE</i> )	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	( <i>SE</i> )	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	( <i>SE</i> )	<i>p</i>
Intercept	2.968	(0.067)	0.000	3.424	(0.088)	0.000	4.460	(0.033)	0.000	4.384	(0.045)	0.000
Grade (1 = sixth)	0.299	(0.109)	0.006	0.256	(0.116)	0.027	-0.022	(0.054)	0.685	0.058	(0.048)	0.228
Gender (1 = girl)	0.026	(0.077)	0.733	-0.149	(0.095)	0.118	-0.035	(0.036)	0.329	-0.256	(0.049)	0.000
Parental SES	-0.020	(0.018)	0.260	0.051	(0.023)	0.029	0.009	(0.012)	0.417	0.067	(0.017)	0.000
Language use	0.357	(0.055)	0.000	0.233	(0.060)	0.000	0.159	(0.078)	0.042	0.024	(0.074)	0.742
Religiosity	-0.176	(0.056)	0.002	-0.052	(0.059)	0.378	0.046	(0.024)	0.058	0.018	(0.025)	0.475
Interethnic friendships	0.184	(0.038)	0.000	0.095	(0.049)	0.052	-0.053	(0.023)	0.024	-0.047	(0.032)	0.138
Variance components												
Student level	0.560	(0.052)	0.000	0.791	(0.055)	0.000	0.388	(0.020)	0.000	0.605	(0.046)	0.000
School level	0.002	(0.044)	0.959	0.021	(0.029)	0.459	0.015	(0.010)	0.119	0.020	(0.011)	0.062
	N pupils = 358			N pupils = 347			N pupils = 1048			N pupils = 1025		
	N schools = 49			N schools = 49			N schools = 60			N schools = 60		

Note: SES: socioeconomic status.

**Table 2.** Multilevel regression on academic achievement: Unstandardized coefficients (*b*), standard errors (*SEs*), *p* values (*p*) and variance components.

	Turkish sample			Native Belgian sample		
	<i>b</i>	( <i>SE</i> )	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	( <i>SE</i> )	<i>p</i>
Intercept	-0.212	(0.084)	0.012	0.142	(0.081)	0.079
Grade (1 = sixth)	0.420	(0.088)	0.000	0.479	(0.074)	0.000
Gender (1 = girl)	-0.201	(0.101)	0.045	-0.101	(0.050)	0.043
Parental SES	0.071	(0.022)	0.001	0.127	(0.016)	0.000
Language use	-0.053	(0.065)	0.419	0.089	(0.072)	0.217
Religiosity	-0.022	(0.051)	0.658	-0.001	(0.027)	0.966
Interethnic friendships	-0.089	(0.040)	0.027	0.020	(0.032)	0.533
National identification	0.050	(0.061)	0.416	0.058	(0.043)	0.179
European identification	0.137	(0.055)	0.013	0.160	(0.036)	0.000
Variance components						
Student level	0.470	(0.039)	0.000	0.526	(0.030)	0.000
School level	0.126	(0.055)	0.021	0.129	(0.041)	0.002
	N pupils = 347			N pupils = 998		
	N schools = 49			N schools = 59		

Note: SES: socioeconomic status.

use, religiosity and interethnic friendships are more closely related to national identification than 'social' variables such as gender and parental SES are.

Regarding Turkish pupils' European identification, the parameters in Table 1 indicate religiosity is not related to European identification, a finding that contrasts with the significant effect of this variable on national identification. While Turkish pupils' language use is significantly related to European identification ( $\beta = 0.202$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), language use was more strongly associated with national identification (difference in unstandardized effect size = 0.124). Turkish pupils' European identification is more closely defined by parental SES, which has a significant effect ( $\beta = 0.099$ ;  $p = 0.029$ ). That is, Turkish pupils from lower SES families tend to identify less with Europe. Finally, Turkish pupils in a higher grade (i.e. sixth grade) exhibit higher levels of both Belgian and European identification than in fifth grade, which implies that their common identities increase over time.

Regarding the parameters for the Belgian sample with respect to both common identities, Table 2 makes clear that the predictors are in line with those for Turkish pupils. Ethnic variables (language use, religiosity and interethnic friendships) are significantly related to native Belgian pupils' national identification. That is, native Belgian pupils who speak more frequently Dutch ( $\beta = 0.108$ ;  $p = 0.042$ ), who are more religious ( $\beta = 0.066$ ;  $p = 0.058$ ) and who have less non-native friends ( $\beta = -0.067$ ;  $p = 0.024$ ) tend to exhibit higher levels of national identification.

Social variables (gender and parental SES) are not significantly associated with native Belgian pupils' national identification.

The social background also affects the level of European identification of native Belgian: native Belgian girls tend to identify less with Europe than boys ( $\beta = -0.160$ ;  $p < 0.000$ ) and pupils from higher SES families identify more with Europe ( $\beta = 0.155$ ;  $p < 0.000$ ). Ethnic variables (language use, religiosity and inter-ethnic friendships) do not have a significant impact on native Belgian pupils' European identification.

### *Effects on academic achievement*

In Table 2, the effects of national and European identification on pupils' academic achievement are shown. The results indicate that, all else being equal, national identification is *not* significantly related to pupils' academic achievement. This is the case for native Belgian pupils ( $\beta = 0.045$ ;  $p = 0.179$ ) and for Turkish pupils ( $\beta = 0.056$ ;  $p = 0.416$ ). The level of European identification, on the other hand, is significantly related to academic achievement of Turkish pupils ( $\beta = 0.170$ ;  $p = 0.013$ ) and to the academic performance of native Belgian pupils ( $\beta = 0.160$ ;  $p < 0.000$ ). According to Keith's (2014) rules for standardized effect sizes on school learning, both correlates are moderate in effect size, that is, they are larger than 0.1. Other covariates reported in Table 2 are not the primary concern of this study.

## **Conclusion and discussion**

The historical understanding and the present-day representation of national identities in European democracies are those of static categories that are primarily connoted with the (Caucasian) ethnic majority. In such sociopolitical contexts, immigrants and their children are deprived of the legitimacy to claim an affinity with a nation (Alba and Foner, 2014; Fleischmann and Phalet, 2015). Consequently, the question arises whether there are alternative, unifying common identities. The aim of this study was to investigate whether European identity is a potentially unifying, feasible and functional alternative to national identity. For this purpose, we examined the extent, the determinants and the consequences of national and European identification among (immigrant) Turkish and native Belgian pupils, with data gathered from 1629 pupils across 68 schools in Belgium.

The first focus of this study was the extent of both common identities among both groups. The results made clear that Turkish pupils identify more with Europe than they do with Belgium. The reverse is true for native Belgian pupils: they identify more with the national category than with Europe. While native Belgian pupils still have a stronger European identification than Turkish pupils, both groups are closer to each other with respect to their European identification than with respect national (Belgian) identification. Moreover, in line with previous research (see Duchesne and Frogner, 2008; Medrano and Gutiérrez, 2001), the

results of this study show that national identification and European identification are not mutually exclusive; they are rather positively related to each other. These findings support the idea that in ethnically diverse contexts, European identity has a higher potential than national identities to become a unifying common identity. That is because European identification forms a middle ground where both groups can meet. At the same time, it has the benefit that it does not conflict with national identities (like ethnic identities are perceived to be).

Secondly, we investigated how both common identities are determined by ethnic and social factors. Our results indicated that for both groups (Turkish pupils and native Belgian pupils), the level of national identification is more closely defined by ethnic variables (i.e. language use and religiosity), than by social background variables (i.e. gender and parental SES). The latter turns out to be unrelated to the level of national identification. The reverse is true with respect to European identification. Socioeconomic background seems to have a small but significant effect on pupils' European identification: pupils from more wealthy families tend to identify slightly more with Europe than pupils with less wealthy parents do. Again, this holds true for both groups. Ethnic variables, on the other hand, were mostly unrelated to the level of European identification of both native Belgian and Turkish pupils.

These results are in support of Habermas' (2001, 2002) assertion that European identity is less ethically defined, but is a civic identity. That is, European identification is not dependent on religiosity and is less dependent on language use than national identity is. In other words, European identity is more *permeable* than national identity. However, the gender and SES effect on European identification implies that there are social thresholds to overcome before European identity can be promoted as an alternative unifying category. Previous studies also noted the gender gap and social class effects on European identity (e.g. Citrin and Sides, 2004; Fligstein, 2009), but it is surprising that the elitist and masculine character of European identity is already present at the age of 11.

A third focus of this study was the relationship between the examined common identifications and pupils' academic performance as measured by a standardized math achievement test. The multilevel analyses revealed that the level of national identification was not significantly related to pupils' academic achievement, not on the performance of Turkish pupils, nor on those of native Belgian pupils. In contrast, the level of European identification was moderately related to higher academic achievement for both groups. However, we are aware of the fact that it is hard to make a causal claim here. Indeed, the direction of the observed relationship cannot be defined with cross-sectional data and it is impossible to rule out causality issues with any non-experimental design. Nevertheless, even a scenario where academic performance is the steering force behind the level European identification is interesting and deserves further research attention, preferably with longitudinal data from different sociopolitical contexts. If it turns out that European identification has a positive effect on pupils' sense of belonging to their schools, and consequently to their academic performance, this might be a very solid argument



to further promote the European identity as for the next generations in Europe. On the other hand, if it turns out that academic success results in higher European identification, further analyses should be carried out to determine why this relationship emerges.

But even apart from the relationship between European identification and academic achievement, this study has shown that European identification is a promising category, one that is more permeable than national identities, while the two categories are not mutually exclusive. Most importantly, as European identification seems to form a middle ground for natives and immigrant children, it has the potential to become a shared identity, something that is critically needed in the current political context of the ever diverse Europe.

### Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: O Agirdag was supported by a Veni-grant by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) (project no. 451-14-010).

### References

- Abedi J, Hofstetter CH and Lord C (2004) Assessment accommodations for English language learners: Implications for policy-based empirical research. *Review of Educational Research* 74(1): 1–28.
- Agirdag O, Huyst P and Van Houtte M (2012) Determinants of the formation of a European identity among children: Individual- and school-level influences. *Journal of Common Market Studies* 50(2): 198–213.
- Agirdag O, Van Houtte M and Van Avermaet P (2011) Ethnic school context and the national and sub-national identifications of pupils. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34(2): 357–378.
- Alba R and Foner N (2014) Comparing immigrant integration in North America and Western Europe: How much do the grand narratives tell us? *International Migration Review* 48(1): 263–291.
- Alba R and Nee V (1997) Rethinking assimilation theory for a new era of immigration. *International Migration Review* 31(4): 826–874.
- Altschul I, Oyserman D and Bybee D (2006) Racial-ethnic identity in mid-adolescence: Content and change as predictors of academic achievement. *Child Development* 77(5): 1155–1169.
- Barrett M (1996) English children's acquisition of a European identity. In: Breakell G and Lyons E (eds) *Changing European Identities: Social Psychological Analyses of Social Change*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, pp. 349–370.
- Barrett M (2002) Children's views of Britain and Britishness in 2001. In: *Annual conference of the developmental psychology section of the British Psychological Society*, Sussex, UK, 5–8 September 2002, pp. 1–28. Available at: <http://epubs.surrey.ac.uk/1644/1/fulltext.pdf> (accessed 23 September 2015).
- Baysu G, Phalet K and Brown R (2011) Dual identity as a two-edged sword identity: Threat and minority school performance. *Social Psychology Quarterly* 74(2): 121–143.
- Bianchi M, Mummendey A, Steffens MC, et al. (2010) What do you mean by European? Evidence of spontaneous ingroup projection. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin* 36(7): 960–974.

- Billiet J, Maddens B and Beerten R (2003) National identity and attitude toward foreigners in a multinational state: A replication. *Political Psychology* 24(2): 241–257.
- Boehnke K and Fuss D (2008) What part does Europe play in the identity building of young European adults? *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 9(4): 466–479.
- Branscombe NR, Schmitt MT and Harvey RD (1999) Perceiving pervasive discrimination among African Americans: Implications for group identification and well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77(1): 135.
- Bruter M (2004) On what citizens mean by feeling ‘European’: Perceptions of news, symbols and borderlessness. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30(1): 21–39.
- Bruter M (2005) *Citizens of Europe? The Emergence of a Mass European Identity*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Carey S (2002) Undivided loyalties Is national identity an obstacle to European integration? *European Union Politics* 3(4): 387–413.
- Carrington B and Short G (1995) What makes a person British – Children’s conceptions of their national culture and identity. *Educational Studies* 21(2): 217–238.
- Cinnirella M and Hamilton S (2007) Are all Britons reluctant Europeans? Exploring European identity and attitudes to Europe among British citizens of South Asian ethnicity. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30(3): 481–501.
- Citrin J and Sides J (2004) More than Nationals: How identity choice matters in the new Europe. In: Herrmann R, Risse T and Brewer M (eds) *Transnational Identities: Becoming European in the EU*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Davis C, Aronson J and Salinas M (2006) Shades of threat: Racial identity as a moderator of stereotype threat. *Journal of Black Psychology* 32(4): 399–417.
- Dejaeghere Y and Quintelier E (2008) Does European citizenship increase tolerance in young people? *European Union Politics* 9(3): 339–362.
- Duchesne S and Frogner AP (2008) National and European identifications: A dual relationship. *Comparative European Politics* 6(2): 143–168.
- Dudal P and Deloof G (2004) *Vrij centrum voor leerlingenbegeleiding. Leerlingenvolgsysteem. Wiskunde: Toetsen 5 – Basisboek*. Antwerpen: Garant.
- Eccles JS, Wong CA and Peck SC (2006) Ethnicity as a social context for the development of African-American adolescents. *Journal of School Psychology* 44(5): 407–426.
- Ecirli A (2011) Feeling “European” and European identity. Public perceptions in Turkey–EU relation. *Sociologie Românească* 9(1): 80–87.
- Enders CK and Bandalos DL (2001) The relative performance of full information maximum likelihood estimation for missing data in structural equation models. *Structural Equation Modeling* 8(3): 430–457.
- Erikson R, Goldthorpe JH and Portocarero L (1979) Intergenerational class mobility in 3 Western European societies – England, France and Sweden. *British Journal of Sociology* 30(4): 415–441.
- Faas D (2007) Youth, Europe and the nation: The political knowledge, interests and identities of the new generation of European youth. *Journal of Youth Studies* 10(2): 161–181.
- Fleischmann F and Phalet K (2015) Identity conflict or compatibility: A comparison of Muslim minorities in five European cities. *Political Psychology*. Epub ahead of print 16 June 2015. DOI: 10.1111/pops.12278.
- Fligstein N (2009) Who are the Europeans and how does this matter for politics. In: Checkel JT and Katzenstein PJ (eds) *European Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 132–166.

- Gerhards J and Hans S (2011) Why not Turkey? Attitudes towards Turkish membership in the EU among citizens in 27 European countries. *Journal of Common Market Studies* 49(4): 741–766.
- Gordon MM (1964) *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Habermas J (2001) Why Europe needs a constitution. *New Left Review* 11: 5–26.
- Habermas J (2002) Toward a European political community. *Society* 39(5): 58–61.
- Hannover B, Morf CC, Neuhaus J, et al. (2013) How immigrant adolescents' self-views in school and family context relate to academic success in Germany. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 43(1): 175–189.
- Hochman O and Davidov E (2014) Relations between second-language proficiency and national identification: The case of immigrants in Germany. *European Sociological Review* 30(3): 344–359.
- Hooghe L and Marks G (2005) Calculation, community and cues public opinion on European integration. *European Union Politics* 6(4): 419–443.
- Hutnik N (1991) *Ethnic Minority Identity: A Social Psychological Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Johnson MK, Crosnoe R and Elder GH (2001) Students' attachment and academic engagement: The role of race and ethnicity. *Sociology of Education* 74(4): 318–340.
- Keith TZ (2014) *Multiple Regression and Beyond: An Introduction to Multiple Regression and Structural Equation Modeling*. New York: Routledge.
- Kennedy R (2013) The role of supranational identity in promoting democratic values. *European Union Politics* 14(2): 228–249.
- Kösebalaban H (2007) The permanent “other”? Turkey and the question of European identity. *Mediterranean Quarterly* 18(4): 87–111.
- Kundnani A (2007) Integrationism: The politics of anti-Muslim racism. *Race & Class* 48(4): 24–44.
- Kunovich RM (2009) The sources and consequences of national identification. *American Sociological Review* 74(4): 573–593.
- Lam V and Smith G (2009) African and Caribbean adolescents in Britain: Ethnic identity and Britishness. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32(7): 1248–1270.
- Leszczensky L (2013) Do national identification and interethnic friendships affect one another? A longitudinal test with adolescents of Turkish origin in Germany. *Social Science Research* 42(3): 775–788.
- Levrau F and Loobuyck P (2013) Is multiculturalism bad for social cohesion and redistribution? *The Political Quarterly* 84(1): 101–109.
- Luhtanen R and Crocker J (1992) A collective Self-Esteem Scale – Self-evaluation of one's social identity. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 18(3): 302–318.
- Maddens B, Billiet J and Beerten R (2000) National identity and the attitude towards foreigners in multi-national states: The case of Belgium. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 26(1): 45–60.
- Maxwell R (2009) Caribbean and South Asian identification with British society: The importance of perceived discrimination. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32(8): 1449–1469.
- McLaren L (2007) Explaining opposition to Turkish membership in the EU. *European Union Politics* 8(2): 251–278.
- Medrano JD and Gutiérrez P (2001) Nested identities: National and European identity in Spain. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24(5): 753–778.

- Modood T (2005) *Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity, and Muslims in Britain*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Mummendey A and Wenzel M (1999) Social discrimination and tolerance in intergroup relations: Reactions to intergroup difference. *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 3(2): 158–174.
- Ogbu J (1994) Racial stratification and education in the United States: Why inequality persists. *The Teachers College Record* 96(2): 264–298.
- Pehrson S, Vignoles VL and Brown R (2009) National identification and anti-immigrant prejudice: Individual and contextual effects of national definitions. *Social Psychology Quarterly* 72(1): 24–38.
- Philippou S (2005) Constructing national and European identities: The case of Greek-Cypriot pupils. *Educational Studies* 31(3): 293–315.
- Phinney JS, Cantu CL and Kurtz DA (1997) Ethnic and American identity as predictors of self-esteem among African American, Latino, and White adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 26(2): 165–185.
- Phinney JS, Horenczyk G, Liebkind K, et al. (2001) Ethnic identity, immigration, and well-being: An interactional perspective. *Journal of Social Issues* 57: 493–510.
- Quintelier E, Verhaegen S and Hooghe M (2014) The intergenerational transmission of European identity: The role of gender and discussion within families. *Journal of Common Market Studies* 52(5): 1103–1119.
- Reeskens T and Wright M (2013) Nationalism and the cohesive society: A multilevel analysis of the interplay among diversity, national identity, and social capital across 27 European societies. *Comparative Political Studies* 46(2): 153–181.
- Reizabal L, Valencia J and Barrett M (2004) National identifications and attitudes to national ingroups and outgroups amongst children living in the Basque Country. *Infant and Child Development* 13(1): 1–20.
- Risse T (2003) The Euro between national and European identity. *Journal of European Public Policy* 10(4): 487–505.
- Risse T (2012) Identity matters: Exploring the ambivalence of EU foreign policy. *Global Policy* 3(1): 87–95.
- Sabatier C (2008) Ethnic and national identity among second-generation immigrant adolescents in France: The role of social context and family. *Journal of Adolescence* 31(2): 185–205.
- Sigalas E (2010) Cross-border mobility and European identity: The effectiveness of intergroup contact during the ERASMUS year abroad. *European Union Politics* 11(2): 241–265.
- Stevens PA, Charalambous P, Tempriou A, et al. (2014) Testing the relationship between nationalism and racism: Greek-Cypriot students' national/ethnic identities and attitudes to ethnic out-groups. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 40(11): 1736–1757.
- Tajfel H (1981) *Human Groups and Social Categories*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Trickett EJ and Birman D (2005) Acculturation, school context, and school outcomes: Adaptation of refugee adolescents from the former Soviet Union. *Psychology in the Schools* 42(1): 27–38.
- Verhaegen S, Hooghe M and Meeusen C (2013) Opportunities to learn about Europe at school. A comparative analysis among European adolescents in 21 European member states. *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 45(6): 838–864.

- Verkuyten M (2004) *The Social Psychology of Ethnic Identity*. Hove, UK: Psychology Press.
- Verkuyten M and Martinovic B (2012) Immigrants' national identification: Meanings, determinants, and consequences. *Social Issues and Policy Review* 6(1): 82–112.
- Verkuyten M and Yildiz AA (2007) National (dis) identification and ethnic and religious identity: A study among Turkish-Dutch Muslims. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 33(10): 1448–1462.
- Vroome T, Verkuyten M and Martinovic B (2014) Host national identification of immigrants in the Netherlands. *International Migration Review* 48(1): 76–102.
- Wong CA, Eccles JS and Sameroff A (2003) The influence of ethnic discrimination and ethnic identification on African American adolescents' school and socioemotional adjustment. *Journal of Personality* 71(6): 1197–1232.