

**SUMMARY.** This overview briefly introduces the program and its participants, focusing mainly on the theme of the panel discussion, i.e. European identity. The insights of the six panellists are presented in detail, highlighting the different aspects of European identity: its multidimensionality, its use in European Union law, its personal multicultural conception, close relationship with common democratic values, its relationship with national identity, and its permanent change. Different narratives were also highlighted in relation to where Europeans live, their culture, history, and national values. At the beginning and at the end of the discussion, the audience was asked to identify the three things that they most associate with European identity. Based on these, two slightly different word clouds were formed and displayed.

**KEYWORDS:** European identity, common human values, identity change and formation.

Most of us are firm believers that the true benefit of the academy is the interaction, the access to the debate, and the negotiation of knowledge. Dialogue with others is central to transformative learning – learning that creates a profound and lasting change in our practices, that reflects our beliefs and values through our actions and in the connections we make with others. Working with and through each other is a process that can transform us. With this line of thinking, I would like to quickly introduce the final big event of the Transfor4Europe alliance’s first phase of life, which has been quite intense over the last three years, and I believe it will continue to be even more prominent in our joint path to a transformative future.

On October 4, 2023, the T4EU alliance, nurturing the idea of the European University, had a special event. Its members, together with the participants from T4ERI, met in Saarbrücken for a General Assembly that served a double purpose. It was a celebration of the first period and a kick off meeting for the second, but also marked the shift of T4EU presidency. After the end of a one-year term, the presidency was handed over from Saarland University to the University of Silesia in Katowice. Vytautas Magnus University now presides over the alliance.

The General Assembly hosted more than 400 participants and provided a rich three-day program for both day and evening events. A student science slam, successfully organized for the first time, was one of the peak experiences. In their welcoming and rotation speeches, Vice-President of Saarland University, Professor Cornelius König, and the Rector of the University of Silesia, Professor Ryszard Koziolęk, shared their experiences and enthusiasm for teamwork as bases for future cooperation, expressing their trust in the European University which reaches beyond the influence of any individual university and is a driver for the European future. This university alliance transcends borders and differences in values, with trust being the most important of all of them. Nevertheless, it has been mentioned that the European Union is not the same as it was three years ago. The Covid-19 pandemic, refugee crises, and the war in Ukraine taught the alliance important lessons on how to cooperate and strengthen the European community.

The most important part of the opening was a panel discussion devoted to the topic of European identity, an issue of paramount importance to the alliance. Moderated by Prof. Maria Stoicheva, Vice-rector for International Relations, Jean Monnet Chair of Identity and Multilingualism in Europe, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski,” this roundtable hosted guests with a wide range of backgrounds: Prof. Quentin Michel, Liège Université; Irini Tselios, Saarland University; Prof. Iryna Sikorska, Mariupol State University; Prof. Hans-Jörg Trenz, Scuola Normale Superiore, Firenze, Pisa, and Prof. Natasza Styczyńska, Jagiellonian University Kraków.

The discussion began with audience input. Audience members suggested three keywords in answer to the question: *What do you associate with the concept of European Identity?* Displayed as a word cloud, the audience responses revealed prioritized notions like *community, peace, freedom, diversity, skills, multilingualism, solidarity, union, and wealth*. These keywords, reflecting common values, were discussed by the panelists.

Quentin Michel concentrated on the ambiguity of the term *European identity* and its rare usage in legal acts of the European Union. He questioned the possibility of EU identity in the absence of shared values of the member states. The most recent events and the reaction of some governments to these events raise many questions. Although the term *European identity* has become a popular keyword in political speeches and research agendas in the last 20-30 years, it is not properly defined in the main legal acts and primary law of the EU. Professor Michel remembered his own studies and participation in the Erasmus program. During his time, Erasmus students were those to whom the borders of the countries were open. They supported freedom and enlarging and integrating the EU. Quentin Michel believes that EU identity should be defined by its values and citizenship. Correlation between values such as freedom, equity, and non-discrimination, shared and

respected by all, and that the European identity would benefit from the rights granted by EU treaties. He also raised questions concerning EU citizenship: *When we talk about European identity, do we talk about our own identity? How we construct our personal identity? EU is a political community, thus related to citizenship – if we identify ourselves as EU citizens, do we also accept the idea of EU citizenship? Do we identify with the EU or just with our countries of origin?* His suggestion concerning our future in the EU was meant to protect common values, an offer to reunite ourselves and move ahead, slowly but firmly.

Another key word from the word cloud, *multilingualism*, was taken as a starting point by a student of Cultural Studies at Saarland University and a member of the T4EU Student Council, Irini Tselios. In answering the question presented as a title of her speech *Do young adults identify as Europeans*, she presented her approach to EU identity based on her personal experience. Coming from a family with a Greek father and a German mother, having two countries of origin, sharing two cultures and being bilingual, Irini admitted having difficulties answering the question *where are you from?* since she cannot prioritize either of her parents' countries. Although the answer *I am European* is not yet frequently used, she prefers it and really feels like being just European, especially because she was born and grew up in the EU with open borders. It is shocking for her to see borders coming back for migrants and refugees. As far as multilingualism is concerned, Irini feels privileged to have grown up bilingually, even if she is not perfect in any of her languages. Due to her multilingualism, Irini has a greater lexical repertoire and can choose more precise words in the languages she uses. Culture-wise, Irini is taken as German in Greece and as a Greek woman in Germany. Her own experience involves a feeling of longing for the other country than the one she resides in, but this feeling also has its benefits. Moreover, shared values such as tolerance, solidarity, and non-discrimination are common, not specifically regional. As a member of the T4EU Student Council, Irini appreciates how the alliance supports EU student identity with the help of T4EU cultural weeks, bachelor tracks, transformation labs, and most of all the possibility to voice, exchange, and defend her opinion. At the end of her talk, Irini repeated that she truly cherished her European identity.

The value of European identity, especially for Erasmus students, was also central in the talk of Iryna Sikorska, from Mariupol university, located in Kyiv. While introducing her, Maria Stoicheva mentioned the fact that a perplexingly large number of opinion survey respondents support Russia, not Ukraine. She suggests that we should not only celebrate a shared European identity but should also defend it. Clearly, the new Erasmus generation must be more active.

Iryna Sikorska, a sociologist, talked about standpoints of Ukrainian youth and Mariupol State University students, specifically, on what the EU means for students

in Ukraine. She highlighted that EU identity has been their aspiration during all the years of independence, something that has become much stronger after the 2014 events known as the Maidan revolution. Symbolically, Maidan square in Kyiv is called *Euromaidan*. It is said that during these days, Ukraine was the only country whose citizens were dying for the EU and European identity and values. Nowadays, recent polls demonstrate an increasing numbers of EU optimists. A survey from 2023 showed more than half of respondents answered positively to a question about their European identity. In her opinion, possible reasons for Euroscepticism are related to a low level of well-being, sociocultural conditions like language barriers, and lack of European awareness, principles and standards that have not yet become everyday reality. Nevertheless, to become a European is a dream that always has a positive connotation. Mariupol University does its best to apply EU standard in education under the most severe war conditions. Their students go to the front line, or, as they call it, zero line, from which there is no return.

Iryna Sikorska presented statistically proven facts that young people in Ukraine have a positive attitude towards the EU, especially those who have some personal EU-related experiences from the Erasmus program. Regrettably, only a small part of young people can leave for a semester to study abroad. After coming back, when asked if they feel more European than before, in most cases they answer *yes*. European values such as openness and freedom rule of law are appreciated by students from Ukraine. In particular, tolerance to otherness was a value especially appreciated by Ukrainian students since tolerance to otherness in Ukraine is not very high. Iryna said that before Covid-19, less than 5 percent of young people had the chance to socialize with foreigners either virtually or physically, so for the young people in UA, Erasmus is a unique chance to study abroad and to understand cultural diversity personally. Teachers and students from Mariupol University strongly value their participation in T4EU. The impressions collected from Erasmus students after coming back from Vytautas Magnus University, for example, are positive overall. The Mariupol students are encouraged to experience a different life and to broaden their world view. They take their changed views and valuable experiences back home and are expected to make an impact in the classroom on those who did not have the possibility to go. For them, being European is an opportunity to solve common problems and to understand people that think in different ways. Some teachers from the EU who had worked with Mariupol students before Covid-19 enjoyed that students were so positive about the EU. However, it is hard to say the same about Ukrainian society at large, although its Euro optimism increased from 36 percent in 2005 to 51 percent in 2023. Finally, it is not enough to measure EU identity in numbers, as identity is also about self-consciousness and emotions.

Hans-Jörg Trenz, professor of Sociology of Culture and Communication from Pisa, chose to talk about European identity from the point of view of *heritage and future visions*. He started by presenting the most important parts of a narrative that binds people together, i.e., shared ingredients like history, culture, civilization, and political projects. To him, European identity must be constructed in contrast to national identities, *which are rooted in national contexts we are trained in from birth*.

He stated that all collective identities are about both social bonds and isolation from the other. He believes that it is good to have multiple identities. The usual misconception about identities is that they are fixed, stable, and described in books of history. However, identities change; even the concept of national identity has changed over time. He dwelled on some features of European history and elements of culture, like food or cinema, that look so different from an inner-European perspective but have a lot in common if one leaves Europe and sees them from the global perspective. Hans-Jörg Trenz proposed that a narrative must be constructed based on the four ingredients given above, and that such a social agenda of the EU could surpass national agendas. With that aim in mind, it is crucial to move from a European politics of identity to a European politics of solidarity. The EU, together with European identity, should also promote a community of equals based on constitution and democracy. Solidarity is needed in relationship to unequal living conditions, i.e., EU differentiated integration and domination. He states that a crucial element of the EU success story is its prosperity, that the aim of many countries is to join the EU. He hopes that if all EU countries live in prosperity, the world will follow us. Hence, EU identity is more about the future, while national identities bind people together because of their common past. Major challenges of today require new agendas such as an Eco social agenda, an agenda of equality. The Erasmus program helps this effort, with its experience to move from customized, individual, and privileged higher education to systematically filling EU university networks. Sixty European universities, in his view, can do a lot, making the most of their diversity.

In her talk about Internal and External Challenges to European Identity, Natasza Styczyńska made an important observation that *what brings us together can also tear us apart* and drew attention to the diversity of attitudes and approaches towards values, ideas, culture, history, attitudes, and policy making. Approaches differ based on geographic dichotomies such as old vs. new Member States, West vs. East and/or North vs. South Europe, which cause deficits of one common European Identity. Even the word *European* is ambiguous. Some people have the European Union in mind while others see Europe as a continent. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to take into consideration different perspectives and viewpoints of those who are talking. Moreover, some countries have participated in

constructing a European identity from the very beginning, while late comers joined the process of identity construction much later. Answering the question *what kind of Europe do we want?* the presenter mentioned European security especially now, when we have a common enemy, European Policy, and European Narrative, and added that building identity needs time. Sixty EU universities are a strong force to make joint policy and become more confident in constructing a sense of European identity, starting with students. This would be a major step in changing policies. Coming from an alliance other than T4EU, Natasza Styczyńska advocated the role of a joint BA in European Studies.

At the end of the discussion, Maria Stoicheva invited the audience once again to draw a word cloud about European identity based on the most recent comments by the panelists. Words like *diversity, community, freedom, student* dominated the cloud while *scholars, hope, exchanges, open, heritage, multicultural future, and resistance* were less prominent. The moderator summed up the discussion in one sentence: *No one was born with an EU identity, so we have to actively construct it.*

Thanks to the T4EU alliance we have a chance to feel more European.

Ineta Dabašinskiė  
Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas, Lietuva

#### KELETAS MINČIŲ APIE EUROPIETIŠKĄ TAPATYBĘ

**SANTRAUKA.** Apžvalgoje trumpai pristatoma renginio programa ir dalyviai, susitelkiama į pagrindinę diskusijos temą – europietišką tapatybę. Detaliai persakomos šešių diskutantų išvalgos, išryškinančios skirtingus europietiškos tapatybės aspektus: jos daugiaprasmiškumą ir var-toseną Europos Sąjungos teisės aktuose, asmenišką daugiakultūrę sampratą, glaudų ryšį su bendražmogiškais demokratinėmis vertybėmis, santykį su tautine tapatybe ir nuolatinio kismu. Pabrėžiami skirtingi naratyvai, atsirandantys dėl europiečių gyvenamosios vietos, jų krašto kultūros, istorijos, nacionalinių vertybių. Diskusijos pradžioje ir pabaigoje klausytojų paprašyta nurodyti tris dalykus, kurie jiems labiausiai asocijuojasi su europietiška tapatybe. Apibendrinus buvo suformuoti ir parodyti du šiek tiek skirtingi žodžių debesys.

**RAKTAŽODŽIAI:** europietiškoji tapatybė, bendražmogiškos vertybės, tapatybės kismas ir formavimas.