

# THE PROMOTION OF EUROPEAN IDENTITY

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## Introduction

Over the past two decades, the European Union (EU) has become an important political force in Europe, despite varying support in its member countries. During a speech in Brussels on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2003 Romano Prodi, at that time President of the European Commission, expressed his feelings regarding the future of the European Union. He claimed, “the EU must take on new responsibilities. And these new responsibilities call for intensifying the integration process”.

Among the main objectives of the integration project the creation of a supranational democracy is taking a particular role. In fact the European Union, as it is now, is not a state even though it has increasingly acquired many of the functions and characteristics of one, but it is defined as an “unfinished project”; an “evolving entity” or “network of networks” (Leonard, 1999) characterized by multiple tiers of sovereignty and governance. Certainly the European Union cannot be defined a state, as it has, at the moment, no monopoly over the means of coercion, no central government, and no powers of taxation, instead it has acquired a structure typical of supranational democracies. Becoming a supranational democracy requires structural changes aimed at modifying EU status of “unfinished project” to something more concrete and tangible. To reach its goal EU commissioners need to develop a stronger structure, which embraces the best knowledge of each member state. Not only this, they need to attract Europeans’ attention on issues of extreme importance, such as the new constitution, the role of the Commission and Parliament, etc.

These and others are the reasons why the European Union has a deep need for investing money and energy to increase its credibility and image in Europeans’ eyes. Hence, the function of a European identity is specifically to increase the EU’s reputation and to create a positive image. European identity, as we will see, has emotional implications, which are directly connected to the political development of EU institutions and powers. The origin of this interrelation is based on the concept of European identity and its different psychological and sociological aspects. These aspects drive citizens of the Union towards a deeper political involvement and attachment. In particular, a stronger European identity will move Europeans from a status of semi-passive players to that of active ones, where citizens will advocate the European Union cause, these by strengthening its future.

The intent of this paper is not only to demonstrate the meaning of European identity and its importance for the Union but also to analyse EU communication activities and their persuasive effects on European citizens. Persuasive communication strategies play a key-role in political developments. In fact more and more political projects are realized by using the power of communication directly in the implementation of specific information campaigns, which serve specific purposes, and indirectly in the organization of other activities aimed at persuading the EU cause by

means of different emotional messages. Among these indirect actions there is the promotion of European identity.

After a brief explanation of the implication of European identity and its meanings, an in-depth analysis of EU communication strategies will show some of the reasons for the promotion of European identity and its importance for the future political development of the Union. Furthermore it is important to analyse the data that Eurobarometer, the European survey centre, obtained last autumn about Europeans' perceptions of their identity and EU institutions. This data will clearly demonstrate the actual idea that Europeans have about their identity, their ideology and their opinions on EU institutions. It is from this data that the Commission's Directorates-General (DG) Press and Communication plans its communication strategies and actions. Finally, an overview of the EU activities will be presented and discussed in the light of the ethical aspects of the use of propagandistic methods of disseminating information.

## **The EU context**

The Treaty of Maastricht (1992) introduced new forms of co-operation between the member state governments - for example, on defence and in the area of justice and home affairs. By adding this inter-governmental co-operation to the existing Community system, the Maastricht Treaty created the European Union. Since that time the EU has tried to initiate among the member states more and more different processes which focus on the realization of the project, called the "Union of European nations". This means union in defence, economics, politics and social matters.

Many steps towards this direction were made, such as the recent introduction of a single currency and the new EU Constitution. In fact, in 2002, the euro was introduced as the national currency in only 12 of the old member states. Many reservations were expressed by the other 3 members, namely Denmark, Sweden and the UK who, by referendum, rejected it. In those countries the EU's reputation is lower than in other EU member states (European Commission, 2001); the reasons are economic, political and institutional. In these countries, a massive promotional campaign has been developed to improve the perception of EU institutions and work. This promotional message seeks to move the people of these nations emotionally, and convince them that the EU is held together by a common framework of acceptance, some sense of mutual understanding and recognition based on certain historical and cultural legacies.

Although this message has been spread by all the possible mass media available (European Commission- Edition speciale, 2000), it seems that this common framework is familiar enough to push people towards stronger integration. In September 2003 the murder of the Swedish Foreigner Minister and the negative results of the Swedish referendum about the introduction of the euro were a direct slap in the faces of those, who support EU integration. In effect, the economic situation and stronger national identity were uniquely combined in opposition to the idea of the euro. This is a clear example of a situation where image, identity and reputation do not correspond positively to each other.

Furthermore, another negative answer from Europeans was given during the last Parliamentary elections, which were marked by a particularly low rate of participation, especially in the 10 new member states (Flash Eurobarometer, 2004). The reason was the lack of confidence or dissatisfaction in the political domain, which is again related to a feeling of distrust towards the EU and its development. In light of these events it

seems that the EU's image is not positive enough to persuade people to support its goal of deeper integration.

Although EU institutions have many bureaucratic and structural problems, they claim that information activities are well developed and visible in all of Europe. However, it is justified to ask questions about the efficacy of EU information dissemination. If EU information is so diffused and visible as they claim, why do people still mistrust it? (Flash Eurobarometer 162, 2004). Public participation in the recent EU elections clearly demonstrates that the information Europeans received everyday was going in one ear and out of the other. Even though the statistics show that EU information penetrates the market strongly, there is a misconception of what commissioners want to achieve and how they want to achieve it (Eurobarometer 60; 2004). Additionally, the impact of the negative election results is pressuring them into focusing more on information campaigns and activities. In this socio-political context the importance and power of the mass media has recently been re-considered and strengthened. By informing and educating people about EU activities and promoting common policies among all the member states, the commissioners hope to improve citizens' participation in the creation of a supranational democracy. This is a clear propaganda strategy, which aims at improving the image and reputation of EU.

Promotion has become the core strategy for the creation of a supranational democracy. Only by promoting a more tangible sense of identity and belonging, it will be possible to achieve this goal. The concepts of identity and belonging are strictly related to the idea of nationality. If Europeans start to perceive themselves as part of this project, and to consider they belong to it, it will be possible to assume that a European identity has been developed (Closa, 1992; Reich, 2001). Hence it needs efforts from all the member states to make an emotional appeal to Europeans hearts (Shore, 2004). In this sense emotional appeal is related to feelings of belonging. If Europeans see themselves as part of a bigger nation-state, called the European Union, they will be more active in social, economical and political life. They will see themselves as part of a big community where differences only concerns life-styles and are not democracy-related (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000). For all these reasons European identity, with its implications, plays a key-role in the future of the EU, an above all will have direct consequences in the political sphere.

## **The main problems for integration**

Among the numerous problems that are undermining EU legislation, identity is assuming a big part of politicians' concerns. The concept of identity has deep implications for questions related to currencies, languages and democratic deficits. A key debate in Europe concerns the possibility of a European identity when language and currency are different among Europeans.

Each national currency and language attaches persons to their territory and collectivity, defines membership criteria, and circumscribes social and economic opportunities (Risse et al., 1999; Verdun, 1999; Berenzin, 2000). In this sense different languages and currencies come in contrast with the idea of unity and European identity, if their characteristics deeply differ from those promoted by the EU.

Although one of these concerns, the currency problem, was partly solved in 2002 with the introduction of a single currency in Europe, linguistic identity, which was the core feature of past projects of territorial consolidation, poses a more intractable

problem. It is not possible to consider the creation of a unique European language for obvious reasons, but it is legitimate to ask what language citizens will speak in a trans-territorial Europe, and the recognition, if not domination, of multiple languages. Laitin (1997) argues that to solve the European language dilemma, Europeans will need to speak two languages, plus or minus one, depending upon the degree of diffusion of their mother tongue. It is important to remember that the Treaty of Rome (1957) guaranteed the integrity of the national languages of its signatories, and this principle of linguistic integrity has been upheld through succeeding treaties. Currently all official documents, plus parliamentary sessions, must be translated into all the languages officially spoken in the EU member states (Kraus, 2000). Promoting “unity of diversity” and respecting the “mosaic of cultures” are considered the basic dogma for the creation of a European identity. It is certain that multiculturalism, as the right to be different and to foster one’s own culture, will be elementally asserted as the natural and inalienable right of all individuals, which nobody can abnegate.

Furthermore, another practical problem constantly undermining the function of European legislation is the “democratic deficit” (Sharpf, 1999; Schmitter, 2000). As Schmitter and Sharpf have explained, the democratic deficit refers to the citizens’ lack of direct power in decision-making. In fact many regulatory decisions that affect the daily lives of citizens of individual nation-states are made in Brussels without their explicit consent. The general impression of people is that political decisions may be less transparent and more difficult to control in the EU than at the national level. Thus, citizens will have to assess whether it pays to support integration accompanied by the uncertainty about the functioning of politics at the supranational level (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000). Public opinion surveys show evidence of general approval by European citizens of the EU. This is accompanied, however, by an increasing feeling of mistrust and concern over its perceived insufficient democratic performance. Consequently, citizens’ protest directed against European governance and institutions are on the increase (European Commission, 2000; Flash Eurobarometer 2004).

## **European Identity**

Explaining what European identity is implies a general definition of “identity” and of “Europe”. In sociology and political science, the notion of identity is captured by individuals’ labelling themselves as members of particular groups such as nation, social class, subculture, ethnicity, gender, employment and so forth (Taylor, 1989). It is to this sense which sociologists and historians refer when speaking of the national identity of a particular country. Europe is a continent whose boundaries are the Atlantic Ocean in the west, the Arctic Ocean to the north, the Ural Mountains and Ural River in the east, the Caspian Sea, Caucasus Mountains and Black sea in the southeast, and the Mediterranean Sea to the south<sup>1</sup>.

Nowadays, Europe is easily considered synonymous with all EU member states for the reason that the largest part of this continent is under EU jurisdiction. Associating Europe with the European Union is a quite common error and one which is reflected also in the definition of European identity. In fact European identity, if it is to express the general definition of the word “European” should include also those countries, which are not part of the European Union. This is not the case in the general discussion.

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<sup>1</sup> Definition of Europe: <http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Europe>.

European identity is something seen as directly related to EU membership, and in this light it is supported and valorised.

Hence, European identity can be defined as a specific type of existing, or emerging, collective identity which is founded on “the feeling of belonging to a certain entity, the EU, defined by different collective identities (each European identity) agreed upon and shared objective and subjective criteria” (Žagarl, 2000). It is important to notice that every individual and/or collective identity as a social phenomenon is a process and not a state; it appears, changes, is transformed and eventually ceases to exist. Identity might be an objective fact, but it is above all a feeling and belief that one belongs to a specific category determined by common characteristics. However, “a feeling of an individual might not be enough; it is very important that also others perceive and recognize this individual as a member of a specific entity” (Žagarl, 2000). In this context, identity acquires its social dimensions and becomes a social phenomenon.

Furthermore the concept of European identity offers a radically new paradigm, where Europeans’ identities and rights are duplicated nationally and supranationally (EU), while at the same time it is based on adherence to civic and political norms rather than ethno-cultural ties (Weiner, 1998; Weiler, 1999; Reich, 2001; Shore, 2004). This separation of the legal from the cultural and territorial dimensions of identity is seen as crucial for developing “civil society beyond the physical boundaries of the nation-state”. If this supranational project continues developing in this direction, the EU will become a clear example of a multi-ethnic society, where different ethnic groups irrespective of differences in culture, race, and history are integrated under a common social identity larger than one "nation" in the conventional sense. Such a multi-ethnic society is a precondition of what Curtin (1997) described as “post national democracy” and a more relational form of supranational “citizenship practice” (Weiner, 1998; Weiler, 1999).

Regarding the origin of European identity there are two different approaches to its definition, one based on political origins and the other on history. Both are valid and aim at explaining the importance of European identity in the EU context.

## **Political origin**

For those scholars who do not believe in the historical origins of European identity, it is a product of political demand rather than social contingency (Darnton 2002; Kumar 2003). Manuel Castells, in his book “End of Millennium”(2000), defines European identity as a project where the social dimensions which characterise the definition of European identity can be identified as “shared feelings concerning such issues as following: the need for universal social protection of living conditions; social solidarity; stable employment; workers rights; universal human rights; concern about poor people around the world; extension of democracy to regional and local levels, with a renewed emphasis in citizen participation; the defence of historically rooted cultures, often expressed in linguistic terms; and for women, and for some men, gender equality”. In this sense European identity is a political construct, with the main objective of guarantying peace, democracy, and economic stability to Europeans and giving legitimacy to European decisions.

## The Territory of European Union

The concept of territory is a possible explanation supporting those who believe that European identity has a political origin. Territory represents identity in the sense that it embodies relations of social, political, cultural, and cognitive power in physical space. Moreover it is identity, for the reason that it gives physical place to the iterations of individual or collective groups that constitute social, political and economic life. It describes a state of being as well as a category of social knowledge and classification. Accordingly, identity is the “cognitive form that lends transparency to the emotional dimension of territory” (Berenzin, 2003). This emotional dimension of territory is very important because it clarifies the idea of the self and the *raison d'être* of participation in meaningful social and political actions. In addition identity suggests similarity and demands acknowledgment of what Taylor calls a “defining community” (1989, 36).

Therefore, not all the scholars in this field believe that the perception of a common space is connected to the feeling of being European. In one of his studies, Sánchez-Cuenca has shown that the perception among Europeans of a common territory is not directly connected to the level of acceptance of European identity and integration (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000). In Europe, feelings towards European integration differ from the northern to southern countries. That is, the Mediterranean countries are clearly more pro-European than the Scandinavian ones: the reason is not founded on the fact that citizens of the Mediterranean countries have a stronger sense of European identity, but rather because their states, as the institutional hypothesis assumes, do not work as they would like. Identities, for professor Sánchez-Cuenca, are a consequence of complex economic and political calculations. The same author shows through his research that the European Union will come into existence as territory if and when enough people become convinced that the benefits at the supranational level are greater than the costs derived from the loss of sovereignty. In this sense the possibility of constituting such a territory depends on the interaction between supranational and national politics and, hence, it is endogenous to European politics.

It has not yet been proved how much the interaction between supranational and national politics will affect Europeans' feelings of being part of a European identity. Nonetheless, it is possible to state that there is a clear link between identity and the concepts of territory, not only because it involves the rights and duties of politicians to govern in a nation-state, but also because it personifies and legitimates the concepts of identity and belonging. If the citizens of a nation-state belong to a specific identity and accept national democracy it is because they have a territory which establishes its right to exist. Territory is not only a physical space, but it is the natural justification of a government. Hence, a supranational democracy cannot exist without a territory.

## Historical origin

Identity through historical origin is represented by a clever remark of Ernest Renan (1993) in connection with national identity. Even though this remark on national identity was made more than one century ago, it has also been associated with European identity. He said: “*A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things that are in reality only one make this soul, this spiritual principle. One is possessing in common a rich heritage of memories, the other the present perception, the wish to live together, the will to uphold the heritage that has come down to us undivided*”.

Here national identity can be defined as the attachment of a person to his own country and group of origin and it represents his feelings of belonging and consequently feelings of participation in social, economical and political life. For Weale (1995) European identity is comparable to national identities, where everything is a matter of habitual norms and practices, as it is a product of some deeper cultural unity. Habitual norms, or habitus, as Bourdieu explained in “The outline of a theory of practice” (1977) are the mental structure through which people deal with the social world. They can be thought of as a set of internalised schemes through which the world is perceived, understood, appreciated, and evaluated. A habitus is acquired as the result of long-term occupation of a position in the social world. Depending on the position occupied, people will have a different habitus. Hence European identity can be regarded as a matter of habitual norms/habitus and practices or can mean developing this sense of belonging and attachment to a bigger territory, called Europe. In both cases a specific feeling is necessary because the creation of a stronger European identity in Europe is a precondition for the future of European Union.

For some other scholars European identity is a natural consequence of mutual influences among European countries. According to Burgess, there is a common sense among Europeans which goes behind nationality and each culture (Burgess, 2002). Therefore a European identity exists, if it is considered as a mix of individual identities, not countries. Past history shows that the shape of many countries was not the same it is now, thus it is not likely to define an identity for a specific country. History has shown how battles, conquests and great marriages have changed the nature of the nation-state. In this “countries’ game” many states became dominions of other powerful kingdoms, and consequently they had to adopt new rules and life systems.

In addition to these nations there are few which did not have a direct contact with the powerful European nations. Those which benefited from their separate geographical position had a different role in the “countries’ game”; because by their nature they can be defined as cultural mediators. A cultural mediator is a negotiator who acts as a link between two parties regarding cultural matters<sup>2</sup>. Being the link between two cultures means also that two cultures, which usually do not have any common feature, get in contact and influence each other by the mean of the mediator. Merchants and salesmen, who seek to promote their products and habits in other countries, are an example of cultural mediators. Hence, it is certain that a cultural connection exists among many European countries, if not directly, then indirectly.

Other authors have expressed the same thoughts, even if their approach has been different. As Kumar explains in his “Idea of Europe” (2003), Europeans have for many centuries moved freely over each other’s lands, contributing their distinctive partners to the cultures of different countries. Even in the era of nationalism, in which states aspired to homogeneous national cultures, migrant European groups continued to settle in different European countries and to affect the cultures of those countries.

## **Christianity and European culture**

Whether or not the origins of European identity are historical, there is no doubt that there is something called European culture. In this sense Europe can be seen as a “family of cultures” made up of partially shared historical traditions and cultural

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<sup>2</sup> For the definition of mediator, see <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Mediator>.

heritage (Smith 1992, 70). Undoubtedly the main basis of that is religion, specifically Christianity (Dawson 1960; Eliot 1962).

Many historians believe that Christianity can be considered the glue of Europe, the unifying factor. It has been for centuries the first motivation of battles and conquests and its encounter with and resistance to other religions, specifically the Muslim religion, has created Europe. In this sense religion has given a shape to Europe, dividing it from Asia. Furthermore, history offers many examples of how religions, even of the same kind, divide as much as they unite people. Just to mention some of them the “great Schism” between eastern and western Christianity in the eleventh century and the religion wars between Protestants and Catholics in the seventeenth-century or the more contemporary the religion problem in Northern Ireland.

Additionally, religion created barriers between some Europeans, by strengthening their community rules and by excluding those who did not share the belief. The Roman Empire, which is remembered also for the establishment of European law and administration, created strong barriers between itself and large parts of central, northern and Eastern Europe, by excluding them from important society improvements. The same was true for the countries belonging to Orthodox Europe, which did not, at least until quite late, share in the cultural experiences of the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, and the Enlightenment (Kumar, 2003).

It is important to remember the differences and divisions that have marked the twentieth century, such as those created during the two world wars, as examples of events that marked European civilization. But as many eminent scholars have shown, conflict and diversity are no barriers to considering the idea of a common European culture. François Guizot (Guizot; 1997) offers two main reasons for this. The first represents on the idea that conflicts tend to occur most fiercely between brothers, families, clans, and nations sharing common past. The second is based on the idea that “European civilisation marked itself off from all past civilizations precisely by its principles of diversity, which, paradoxically, also gave it its unity”. So there can be an idea of Europe that accepts difference, even profound division. When Edmund Burke argued, “no European can be a complete exile in any part of Europe” (cited in Davies 1996, 8), he was the last person to look for uniformity of character or harmony of culture.

## **European identity for Europeans**

The concept of religion and territory as evidence for the existence of European identity are only the starting point of a wider discussion about this important topic; what Europeans think about identity and belonging to the European Union and why there are many differences in identity perception are other important aspects in the planning of communication strategies. Eurobarometer surveys provide the data for such an investigation.

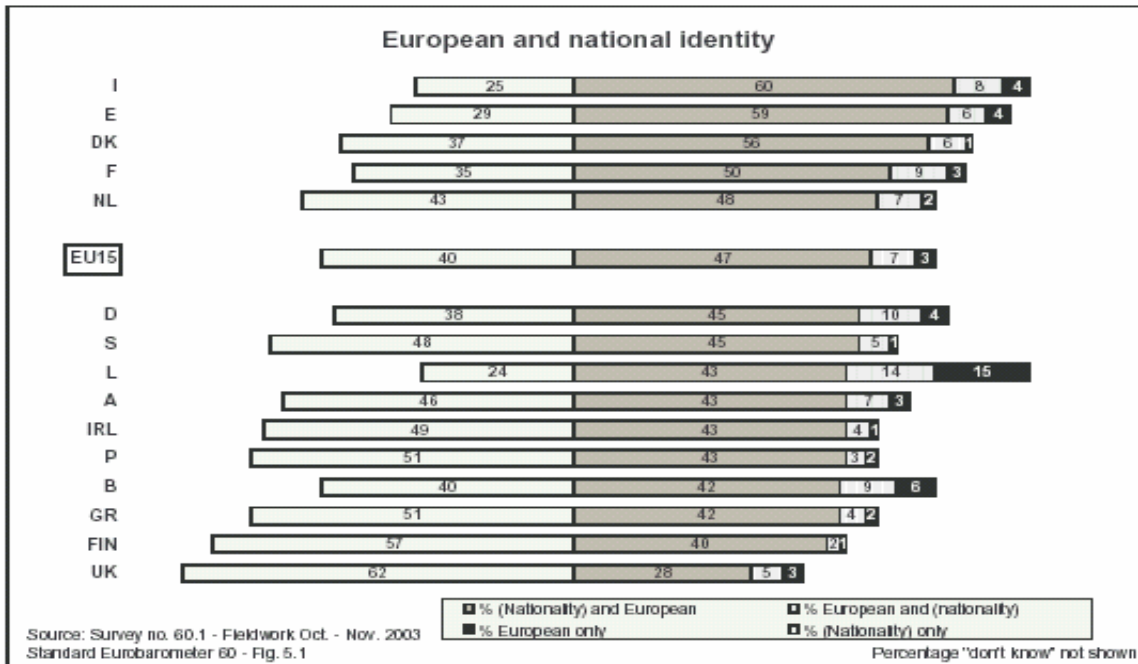
The Eurobarometer survey was initiated in 1974 and conducted on behalf of the European Commission in 5 of the 6 EU countries to collect information about public awareness, knowledge and attitudes towards the European Common Market and the various institutions of the EEC. From 1974 onwards these studies have been conducted on a regular basis twice a year, spring and autumn, with face-to-face interviews and thematic telephone interviews to collect information on attitudes and assessments of social, economic and political conditions of the population in the member countries. A

common denominator of all the barometers is the measurement of public support for the integration activities and institutions of the European Community and people's subjective assessments concerning "quality of life"-questions<sup>3</sup>.

The last survey (Eurobarometer 60, 2004) reveals that the majority of Europeans do not yet believe that a truly European identity exists. Specifically a great majority of European citizens consider themselves to some extent Europeans; but only 40 % of them agreed that there is a shared European cultural identity and 47 % disagree. This data confirms the necessity for better supporting the idea of a European identity.

Seen in greater depth, there are large differences of opinion among the fifteen member states. People in Italy (60%) and Spain (59 %) are most likely to define themselves as Europeans first, before their national identity, followed by people in Denmark (56%) and France (50%). People in the UK (62%), Finland (57%) and Greece (51%) think first of their national than of their European identity, (Fig.1).

**Fig. 1- European and national identity (Eurobarometer 60, 2004)**



Generally it seems that the high percentage of people in the UK, Finland and Greece who feel to be British/Finnish/Greek first, European second, do not believe in a shared European cultural identity. In fact there are more Eurosceptics in those countries than in the others. The explanation is clearly their involvement in what it is called "social and historical origins". As Van Dijk explains in "Ideology- A Multidisciplinary approach" (1998) identity is both a personal and a social construct, that is, a mental representation. This representation is a gradually constructed abstraction from personal experiences of events, which in this case are very different than those shared in the other countries. People may objectively be member of EU and still not identify with it. Such a well-known form of dissociation probably implies that such members do not share the ideology of having a shared European cultural identity. Additionally, for the reason that identity is a social construct, it may also change, and this depends on the ability of the

<sup>3</sup> More information about Eurobarometer at URLs:  
<http://www.nsd.uib.no/data/individ/intStudy/euroInfo.cfm> and  
[http://europa.eu.int/comm/public\\_opinion/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/index_en.htm)

leaders of those countries to make the right emotional appeal to their citizens. Only by finding common and similar values will it be possible to re-direct such groups of Eurosceptics towards forming a positive image of the EU.

Furthermore it is interesting to notice that of these three countries, Finland is taking a particular position that is also an example of conceptual paradox. Even though Finns do not believe in a shared European identity, they appear to be quite involved in Europe, which is considered, in an extent meaning, "their homeland". This attachment to Europe is explained in the concept of territory.

In the new member states, in particular Estonia and also Czech Republic, the citizens have taken a more central position in this question of European proximity. If they feel an affinity to the most highly developed, most organised countries of the north of the continent, they also strongly assert their awareness of both historical and cultural values connected with European identity and the contrast between Europe as a whole, and the United States (Eurobarometer 60, 2004). Additionally, in the new member countries the very notion of European identity seems to be more widely discussed than in the old member states. Petr Drulák (Drulák, 2002) believes that there are at least two reasons for that. Firstly, the rise and fall of totalitarian rule put the collective identities of the people in the Eastern region into doubt over what national identity is. This means reconstructing national identity and symbol which, for decades, were suppressed. Secondly, the claim of the new member countries to a shared European cultural identity is an easy solution to solve the problem related to identity in these countries.

Moreover the biggest differences on the perception of European identity, as the survey data show, were between central-southern and northern Europe. The central-south part includes the vast majority of the European countries whose citizens strongly believe in the existence of cultural ties (European Commission, 2001b). Europe for them is a historical entity, a land of culture, a place of constant combination and exchange over the centuries between diverse peoples but with common roots. These relationships have been lost at certain times and degenerated into conflict, but their existence through the ages is undeniable. Citizens of all these countries feel, more or less spontaneously, that the European Union, built on the foundations of cultural and humanistic values, is unique.

Conversely, in a few countries located in the northern part of Europe, the concepts of roots and cultural proximity are given much less prominence, and the sense of common historical and cultural ties is much less present in people's minds. This applies to the UK, the Netherlands, and Denmark and less strongly Sweden. In these countries there is a deep conviction of the superiority or specificity of their model of society that the country has developed according to its own values, and a weak propensity to share it with others, who tend to be seen as a threat. These countries have only weak empathy with other Europeans, particularly with those from the south, whose mentality is seen as very different, and who are even quite overtly despised for not being responsible, hard-working, orderly, etc.

The reason for this division between north and central-south Europe can be explained with reference to different religions and political values. Values are the benchmark of social and cultural evaluation and as group beliefs; they have a broader cultural base (Van Dijk, 1998). Because of the cultural differences, some values may not exist in another culture or the hierarchy of values may be different from culture to culture. This is the case between north and south Europe.

The countries in south, central and east Europe are at least in part based on cultures rooted in Catholicism (or Orthodoxy). Those have, over the course of their

history, belonged to larger groups in which they mixed with others: the Roman or Byzantine Empires, the Holy Roman Empire, the Habsburg Empire, and even the Napoleonic Empire by virtue of the influence it has had on legal systems. The countries in the northern part of Europe on the other hand are characterised by the predominance of strict Protestant values, such as punctuality, industry, frugality and honesty, which are also the cultural foundation of what Weber termed capitalist markets and investment, (Weber, 1992).

Another possible framework for interpretation is the one proposed by the French demographer Emmanuel Todd (1992) in his book “The invention of Europe” which distinguishes four basic family types in Europe: one of them, the “absolute nuclear” family, characterised by the significance of the values of freedom and non-equality, is typical of the population of England (except for the West) the Netherlands and Denmark, as well as the south of Norway. As the author explains in this study, those countries are considered the geographical area with the greatest reservations about the conception of Europe as a strong community. Such historical explanations suggest that the distances seen here are not circumstantial, but based on age-old, lasting foundations, even though the feeling of closeness or distance between European nations may, of course, vary over time.

### **The importance of European identity for the future of Integration**

There are two reasons why European identity is of such importance for the future of integration. The first is mostly a naïve explanation, expressed in the concept of “unity in diversity” and the second of great value, is embodied in the idea of supranational democracy.

Since the establishment of the European Union, the European Commission has worked harder and harder to promote its identity and public awareness, mainly because Europe as a “cultural space lacks affectivity, that is, emotional attachment” (Weiler 1999b, 329). The European Commission acknowledges that the absence of a European people, and territory, is undermining the legitimacy of EU projects and this is the main reason why it has invested so much in its campaign for European identity (Shore, 2000). Each year the over 500 million euros are spent on cultural policy, which aims to promote the richness and diversity of Europe’s shared cultural heritage. “Unity in diversity” has become the official slogan for this policy (Shore, 2004). In this context, the goal of the EU, summed up in the Treaty of Rome, has been to “lay the foundations for an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe”. Not the creation of one people, but a union of many.

The idea of the unification or integration is necessary, for the EU commissioners, to provide equal and guaranteed benefits that are not available at the domestic level, to all the member states. These are peace, economic well-being, which is probably related to the creation of a larger and more competitive European market, greater international influence, political stability, broader citizenship, etc. In this sense it is reasonable to conclude that the EU is promoting integration with the slogan “the UNION is strength”. In this context socio-political interests are combined with the concept of ideology. In Van Dijk’s opinion there are two types of ideologies, the positive, which aims at empowering a dominated group, creating solidarity, organising struggle and sustaining opposition, and the negative, which serves to legitimate power and inequality, and is assumed to conceal, hide or otherwise obfuscate the truth, reality or indeed the

objective, material conditions of existence, or interests of social formations (Van Dijk, 1998). Both negative and positive ideologies serve to protect interests and resources, whether these are unjust privileges, or minimal conditions of existence. Dealing with the promotion of European identity means taking into consideration the real reason for such promotion, and its direct consequences.

The second explanation of the promotion of European identity bases its validity on the idea that a true democracy can exist at the European level only if a European territory and consequently, identity exist. For democracy to work there must be people and territory, that is, a set of individuals who agree to make collectively binding decisions under some democratic rules. If the binding decisions are applied to individuals who do not recognize themselves as members of the society taking collective decisions, then democratic rule appears to become an imposition, a non-consented procedure (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000). In this way, the constitution of a territory is a precondition for the development of a supranational democracy and for future of the European integration.

The importance of territory, as expressed by Sánchez-Cuenca, is important in the context of Europeans' opinions about their national-state and their identity. In view of the Eurobarometer results, Europeans, on average, still feel attached to their nation states and they are not prepared to accept decisions by majority rule at the supranational level in crucially important political areas. Moreover Europeans are not keen to observe the decisions taken at EU level simply because these decisions have been approved by a majority of citizens of the other member states. This negative feeling is held by the biggest proportion of citizens of the northern countries and in lesser extend by the citizens in the smaller central Europe. According to this argument, supranational democracy is possible only if Europeans from very different countries begin to feel that, in addition to their current territories, they belong to a wider, supranational territory; the European Union. The main problem so far is the dependence between the concept of territory and the feelings, shaped by history and culture, of each member state.

Solving this problem is a big challenge for politicians supporting integration. Accordingly, the European Union is trying to build up and re-enforce positive affect towards the Union by specific actions to improve its visibility; those actions are mainly information disseminated by the mass media and targeted communication plans. In this line of argument, the fact that Europeans do not have any deep attachment to a supranational territory, and consequently do not have a stronger European identity, are the main factors which prevent the creation of a supranational democracy. As long as citizens do not think of themselves as Europeans, European democracy is doomed. Consequently the creation of a supranational democracy is only possible when citizens from different member states share a sense of being involved in a common project and forming part of a single community.

### **Promoting European identity: propaganda versus information**

The European Commission, in the document about EU information and communication strategy (COM 2002; 350 final/2), underlines the importance of having a coherent and comprehensive communication program to improve public perceptions of the Union and its role. The new strategy that EU commissioners are trying to implement is declared to be “a genuine communication on EU information”, or at least this was the idea, when this was established.

The kind of information that Europeans receive everyday, more or less frequently, even though it tries to facilitate comprehension and to set both action and policy in a real context, carries specific meanings, i.e. pro-European Union ones. It seeks to create dialogue within national public opinion so as to enhance the participation of the general public in the European debate with the aim of improving popular perceptions of the Union and increasing the general awareness of the European dimension of citizenship. This debate is many times a “one side debate”. The EU strategy does not provide any opportunity for the negative side of EU membership to be brought up during this debate. The reason is obvious; no-one promotes their cause by telling the whole truth. What would have happened if the EU had told Europeans the short-term negative effects on prices level before the introduction of the euro? Maybe not all the current Euro-zone states would have adopted it. Telling only one side of the story is not lying; it is just playing a promotional game.

### **What is information?**

Information is generally understood as a message transmitted by a code over a channel through a receiving (decoding) device to a particular destination (Ong, 1996), this term refers to any data that is demonstrably true. According to Jacques Ellul (cited in Cole, 1998), information is “addressed to reason and experience, it furnishes facts.” How it is used gives the term a much more complex meaning: technically “information” when communicated is intended to inform rather than persuade. However, when it is communicated in value-laden form it becomes propaganda, the purpose of which is to persuade. Its inherent element of objectivity has given information a positive image; the myriad of ways in which it has been abused from time to time has given propaganda a negative image.

### **What is propaganda?**

The term propaganda has religious origins and originates from the creation in 1597 by the Roman Catholic Church of the “Congregatio de Propaganda Fide “ - Congregation for the propagation of faith. The terms traditionally describe “the promotion of ideas and values that help sustain particular governmental, political or societal systems” (Cole, 1998). However, it was not until the second quarter of the twentieth century that the word entered common negative usage "to describe attempts by totalitarian regimes to achieve comprehensive subordination of knowledge to state policy . . . by overcoming the broadly based cultural hegemony of antecedent regimes" (McLean, 1996).

In modern political debate it is commonplace for people to call any political message that they disagree with “propaganda”, but in reality not all the advertising and information campaign are aimed at manipulating people’s mind for some specific purpose. EU communication strategies can be defined as propagandistic in the sense that they propose a doctrine, a dogma, or an ideology (pro-European identity) aimed at people’s emotional state, not their rational state (Larson, 1995). In fact the EU slogan is “Unity of diversity”, which is a clear example of an emotional message. Hence, the main question is whether this definition of propaganda has a negative connotation or not, and if it is legitimate.

For the purposes of this study three different definitions of propaganda are used as benchmarks by which it is possible to define whether any of the EU's activities come into this category:

1. Smith, Laswell, and Casey (1946) suggested that the difference between education and propaganda is that the former involves the teaching of uncontroversial information whereas propaganda relates to issues that are controversial.
2. Pritkanis & Aronson (1992) stated that, "the word propaganda has since evolved to mean mass suggestion or influence through the manipulation of symbols and the psychology of the individual".
3. O'Shaughnessy (1999) proposed that propaganda "...Simplifies and exaggerates; it often is propelled by a clear, purposive, and coherent ideology. Idealism, even utopianism, may motivate its sponsors and often may characterise its imagery. Propaganda eschews argumentative interchange; seldom is there any element of give-and-take."

If these definitions apply to a particular EU information campaign then it will be included in this study. If not, it will be discounted as a form of legitimate communication.

## **EU activities**

The European Union believes that it has a mission to educate people about the advantages of EU membership. This concept has been expressed in the EU De Clercq report 1993, which devised initiatives to ensure that European identity must be "ingrained in people's minds" as a "good product" using marketing techniques and that certain social categories, particularly "women and youth", should become "priority target groups" (cited in Ball, North, Oulds, Rotherham, 2004). The idea of using propaganda methods, especially addressed to the youth, the future generation, and women, who usually take care of the home finances, seems an adaptation to the European context of the famous injunction made to the Italian Senate by Massimo D'Azeglio after the legal unification of Italy on 1860. He said that after having made Italy, they had to make Italians. EU information campaigns incorporate this idea of making Europeans after having made the EU.

According to Shore (2004) EU use of propaganda is legitimised in view of integration. "Europe- Shore said- needed a human face, a spiritual dimension, even a soul, because no-one falls in love with a common market". The role of information is, in this context, to bring Europe closer to its citizens. Considering EU policy about information procedures and methods, there is no doubt about the importance of EU objectives, but an ethical question remains concerning the use of mass media. It is not clear if the European Union is using certain kinds of persuasive strategies to generate awareness and combat ignorance and apathy. Moreover if it is so that the European Union is seeking to develop a stronger sense of European identity and citizenship on a supranational level, while simultaneously contributing to the emergence of local, regional and national cultures and identities, then it is logical to ask whether these objectives are complementary or contradictory. Another question concerns whether it is possible to create a meaningful citizenship beyond the level of the nation-state.

The European Commission believes that supranational and local, regional levels are not contradictory, but complementary, if every part involved works in the same

direction. That is, if national and regional structures completely support EU policy instead of contrasting it. In those countries where the EU message is less accepted, the EU has increased its efforts by involving more and more organisations within its activities.

In general, the European Union provides funding, either directly or indirectly, for a range of pro-EU and pro-Euro organisations across Europe such as the European Movement, the Federal Trust, the Local Government Group for Europe and the Association for the Monetary Union of Europe and other organisations, which, together with the national governments, have the task to promote a European image in each member state. In fact, one of the EU primary goals is to establish a strong relationship with all the member states, which can then diffuse its voice easily and quickly all around. In this sense each nation plays a key role in EU information policy.

With respect to the creation of meaningful citizenship beyond the level of the nation-state, EU commissioners believe that it is possible, and they are trying to accomplish this objective by concentrating their efforts around seven main points:

*1- Education.* First, they are trying to introduce at all levels of the education system of every country, some common elements, including the history, culture, and language of other countries. Second, they are trying to promote mobility between EU countries among teachers and students (Erasmus/Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci, Lingua, Jean Monnet Fellowship etc). Third, they are trying to create equivalence between pedagogic systems and programs, which will allow passages from one system to another, and will enable the degrees obtained in one country to be used across the entire European market. Currently this possibility exists only on paper, since in most cases, qualifications and language skills are not really equivalent, from the perspective of employers. This problem is also reflected in EU work mobility. Statistics show that less than 3% of European Union citizens work in a EU country different from their own country (Castells, 2000). Fourth, at university and research centre levels the EU is founding different programs aimed at "helping solve problems and responding to major socio-economic challenges such as increasing Europe's industrial competitiveness, job creation and improving the quality of life for European citizens" (cited in Ball, North, Oulds, Rotherham, 2004). These projects are all related to the European context and are aimed at increasing cooperation among different nations and researchers.

*2- Culture.* The EU has been a long-standing promoter of co-operation between creative artists, cultural players and cultural institutions, and recently it is trying to implement these activities by making available special grants. Some of these ongoing projects are: The European City of Culture (since 1985), The European Cultural Month (since 1990), the European Union Youth Orchestra (since 1976), and the European Community Baroque Orchestra (since 1985).

*3- Languages.* If Europeans do not understand each other, they will not be able to work together and be part of the construction of the supranational democracy. That is why it is necessary to create a pan-European linguistic policy, aiming at the cross-cultural diffusion of all languages in all countries, through the education system at all levels, via the Internet, by cultural programs etc. The European Union hopes to find some interesting incentives on the cultural and educational levels to motivate Europeans to learn more languages.

*4- Symbols.* The EU has developed its symbols, including its own flag and anthem, to represent its identity on public occasions. It has its own "official birthday", Europe Day on the 9th of May, to mark the anniversary of Robert Schumann's 1950 call for France, Germany and other nations to combine their iron and steel manufacturing.

And finally, the process of creating twinning cities in Europe is a symbol related to the idea of promoting integration. Jean Bareth, one of the founding fathers of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), defined twinning after the Second World War in 1951 as follows: “A twinning is the meeting between two municipalities to act together within a European perspective, confronting problems and developing increasingly closer and friendlier ties between one another” (Bertramo, 2003).

5- *Publications.* Traditional publications such as leaflets, brochures, books about EU institutions and activities also remain essential sources of facts and information for many Europeans. In light of the new strategy proposed, appropriate guidelines should therefore be produced and adopted for the publications policy of European institutions.

6- *Internet.* Since 1995 the European Union has created a web page in all the official languages as an essential instrument for bringing the institutions closer to ordinary people and facilitating contact between Europeans. This service should be developed more on an inter-institutional basis, focusing primarily on the priority topics identified, but also expanding its direct-reply facility on all issues of relevance to the daily life of Europe's citizens. The Internet is a very potent tool of communication and access to information, but it is not yet deeply diffused inside the European Union, excluding Finland, where the percentage of adults, who use Internet, is highly above the EU average. For this reason, the EU idea is to create an Internet-literacy campaign, aimed mainly at the adult population, which will motivate Europeans to improve their Internet skills and will bring, we do not know yet how, all societies to the same technological level.

7- *Media.* In an era where movie and entertainment are closely bound up with the new generation it is worth focusing more on this field as a means of communication in Europe. Such communication is intended not only to be informative but also to promote cultural diversity as expressed by new form of art. In view of this the EU commissioners are aware that a pan-European media policy is needed, especially as contrast to Hollywood multimedia products, which are widely distributed in Europe and which have a deep impact on the cultural habits of our society. So far the reaction of EU member states have been nationalistic, defensive, and ultimately predestined in a national market economy. As professor Castells said in his speech for the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union (2000): *“In the age of Internet and satellite communication it is not by imposing quotas that we will bring people to alternative sources of culture and communication, different from the ones currently dominating in the business world. Europe should not subsidize private groups just because they are European, but European governments should allow their merger and strengthening, or they will not be competitive”.*

It is in the interest of the European Union that single governments in each member states help media groups to express and diffuse the European culture. Moreover the possibility of creating a European network of joint ventures among public European televisions and studios, which could be globally competitive, both serves multicultural diversity and act as a direct vehicle for EU propaganda. For instance, the European Union is planning to use satellite television to cover all events directly linked to the information campaigns. Similarly, the audiovisual communication policy of the Union in general and the Commission in particular are re-considering the powerful impact that TV and radio have on public opinion.

Consequently at the “top of the EU agenda” is the relationship with the media. It is in the interest of the European Union to train journalists and editors as to the credibility of its institutions and activities. This is an important group, considering that,

at present, 66% of Europeans see television as their main source of information on the Union. The European Journalism Centre, located in Maastricht, plays a key role in the subversion of the media. Its stated aim is to promote closer European ties and integrate a European dimension into all fields of information, and it works alongside not only trans-European but also international organisations for this purpose. One of its functions is to operate as a “physical place” for training journalists about European integration, whether they come from within the EU or beyond.

The idea to develop a European media policy to improve the knowledge of EU activities and culture is important in view of the fact that TV and radio programs are the first and most powerful media for many Europeans. In contrast it is a fact that no major changes have been made in the relationship between central European organisations and actual opinion leaders in each member state in relation to making Europe a more tangible reality for ordinary people (both on television and at the local level). One of the main problems of the European Union continues to be its lack of a face, which ordinary people can relate to. Who is to blame? Obviously, responsibility in this area lies primarily with the European institutions, but local, regional and national politicians also have a part to play.

Although the Commission's Directorates-General (DG) Press and Communication is playing a central role within this communication strategy, its role is more that of service provider and coordinator to the other DGs, the other institutions and the member states. The task of DG Press and Communication is to assist its partners under the political authority of the President or the relevant member of the Commission, in conjunction with the member chiefly responsible for the information topic in question. Clearly, this function of serving the political authority also applies to the Commission representations in the member states and indeed to all the instruments. All these considerations have moved the European Union in the direction of the maximisation of all available tools and resources in mounting massive information campaigns (EU propaganda) to ensure that the new strategy succeeds.

## **Conclusion**

This article cannot provide a solution to this debate about the negative or positive aspects of the promotion of a European identity, but tries to look at it from a different angle. It tries to measure the actual diffusion and practical efficacy of the EU campaigns, its practices and perceptions among Europeans.

Furthermore this paper demonstrated EU communication strategies have many characteristics of persuasive strategies, although there is not enough evidence to prove that they are propagandistic in the negative sense, frequently claimed by the Eurosceptics. As Larson (1995) defined it, persuasion is a process that changes attitudes, beliefs, opinions or behaviours. Persuasion is the co-creation of a state of identification or alignment between a source and receiver that results from the use of symbols. The idea of co-creation means that what is inside the receiver is just as important as the source's intent or the message's content. In one sense, all persuasion is self-persuasion, that is, we are rarely persuaded unless we participate in the process. The promotion of European identity is, in this sense, a process that implies the will of Europeans to accept and believe in it.

A future where a deeper integration exists among the European countries, with a belief in European identity is necessary both to the European Union and Europeans. The

former see in this mental construction a way to legitimate its policy and activities, the latter needs to believe in its existence as motivation to participate in its activities. Without any territorial and identity attachment, the European Union will not be able to create a supranational democracy based on freedom, equality and brotherhood.

In particular, the concept of brotherhood is very important for the EU, because it represents a feeling among Europeans that centuries of wars have eroded. The slogan “unity of diversity” is more and more present in all the cultural activities at supranational level as a representation of these values. Although these values, which European identity embodies, have more than 2000 years of history behind them, they are considered today the foundations of modern democracy, the rule of law, and civil society. The idea of “unity of diversity” should also be a pretext for the creation of a more democratic continent where everybody has the same right and duties, the same respect and freedom to move and have peace. To reach this goal, sacrifices are needed, especially from those countries where welfare and economies are stronger.

Nowadays it is very selfish to elude from the reality that the “Union is the strength”; however, on the other hand, Europeans should be more critical and attentive on the information they receive. The line that divides good propaganda from bad propaganda is very thin. Past history has shown that communication strategies played a key-role in the gaining of power and have had a major impact in mass persuasion. For these reasons it is very easy to fall into the same mistakes.

Furthermore, it has been shown in this article that Europe is not so much a given fact but a project under changing conditions and perspectives. It is a plurality of languages, geographical and cultural areas as well as social systems. The uniting of these different discourses with the institutional communications depends on the will to cooperate among the parts involved. The future shape of the European Union will be a result of Europeans’ decisions, and needs all the possible support and feedback from all of its citizens. As a result there is still much work to do on the national and European level before arriving at effective cooperation between these parties. Beside this, the support and the political pressure of Europeans have a key-role for the development of EU project.

Nonetheless many Europeans, as the Eurobarometer statistics revealed, feel left out of the EU decisions, many also believe they are under-represented. The EU is perceived as a complex and bureaucratic mechanism, which deals with a mountain of systemic, technical, administrative, economic and monetary measures. The recent European elections are a clear example of the negative image of the EU. Although the rate of abstention was quite high, the motivation was not related to a spontaneous decision to abstain at the European elections for reasons associated with Europe. Abstention was first of all an expression of disappointment in the political system and this is because the European Parliament failed to take account of the concerns of its citizens. Beside this, the lack of comprehension is reflected in the lack of adequate communication inputs by the European Union, aggravated by the weak attachment to Europe as a territory and a physical space of identity. The European Union cannot be democratic while the essential shared features of the citizens (collective identity, language, culture) remain deeply rooted in national politics (Grimm, 1995; Greven, 1998). Several events reminded the political leaders of the pressing European need for better communication on Europe with their citizens.

Hence, the information of the citizens on the objectives and the activities of the European Union has become a permanent concern of the European institutions. It is in view of this concern that the institutions of the European Union have proceeded to re-

examine of their policy of communication, whose objective was to adapt a friendly manner in informing the citizens of the European Union about activities and institutions (Ohlendorf, 1998), although in reality they have been shown to use largely persuasive approaches to promote important themes. The more a country is shown to be resistant to EU information campaigns, the more it is exposed to larger-scale propagandistic activities. Surely an intensification of existing activities is not the only and possible means to reach a goal. Different studies have shown that trying to persuade people to accept policy they are against, such as supra-nationality, new identity and centralisation of powers, can have a negative effect and increase their hostility towards them.

In certain countries such as UK, Sweden, Estonia and Poland the information campaign has been given much more visibility than the opposite side. The so-called Eurosceptics do not have enough of a chance to present their ideas in this European communication context. The reasons are obvious, but the effects of this not entirely democratic way of presenting facts definitely gives many advantages to those who complain about EU behaviour and lack of respect for different opinions. For example, in some of the Eastern countries the opposition is trying to focus on EU communication activities and find their weakness in order to attack the entire system. The persuasive communication adopted by EU institution is frequently compared to the Soviet Union propaganda with all its implications.

In view of this, the most important task facing the European Union today is coming up with a new and genuinely clear reflection on what might be called European identity, a new and genuinely clear articulation of European responsibility, an intensified interest in the very meaning of European integration in all its wider implications for the contemporary world, and the recreation of its ethos (Havel, 1994).

In order to develop a stronger community, where the citizens legitimate and trust their institutions and policies, the European Union should clarify its responsibilities and should be as transparent as possible. On the other hand citizens' participation in this process should be encouraged as a method for enhancing transparency, increasing the diffusion of information and thereby reducing the chances of its being used narrowly as an instrument of power.

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