# Mapping EU citizens and regions' identification with the EU project

## Insights from results of PERCEIVE Project

## Introduction

To what extent do **EU citizens** identify with the EU project? Do **European regions** show different patterns and level of **identification**? Are the results driven by specific socio-economic variables?

These are the questions addressed by Task 2.4 and deliverable D2.4 of the PERCEIVE Project. In order to answer these questions, we develop a **novel probabilistic model**, which allows us to **classify citizens and regions** according to their **different patterns of identification with Europe** and the European project.

The model builds on previous **PERCEIVE's research results** that develop the theoretical framework for the definition and measurement of the level of identification with EU and its drivers. In particular, by building on Royuela (2018) we adopt the concept of individual identification with Europe derived from **social psychology**, which is defined as "citizens' self-categorisation as European together with their evaluations of their membership in the European collective and their affective attachment to Europe and other Europeans" (Bergbauer, 2018). Thus, individual identification involves **cognitive, affective and evaluative dimensions** of identity: i) the cognitive component refers to self-categorization as a member of a group (citizens' awareness as European); ii) the evaluative component refers to the assignment of value connotation (negative or positive) to the social group and his membership (citizens' evaluation of their membership); iii) the affective component refers to the emotional attachment and feeling of love and concern for the group (citizens' affective attachment to Europe and other Europeans).

We use a **set of indicators** to approximate these constituents of European identity, derived from the responses to specific questions in the **PERCEIVE Survey** (Bauhr and Charron, 2018):

awareness of Cohesion/regional policies; identification with Europe/country; evaluation of EU membership; perception of effectiveness of EU/country in solving problems of the region; perception of the level of corruption in EU/national institutions, participation to European parliamentary elections, support toward redistribution and aid to poorest European regions.

# Results Highlights

## Profile of the citizens' clusters

The analysis identifies **six clusters of citizens** that are **heterogeneous** with regard to national vs. EU identification, the evaluation of the EU membership and its effectiveness, the level of citizens' awareness of the existence of the Cohesion Policy and the agreement with its solidarity value, the trust in EU institutions and the perceived level of corruption.

We clearly recognize a **dichotomy between two groups** of clusters, on one hand, and clusters 2, 5 and 6 on the other. **Clusters 3, 4 and 1** comprise citizens that **strongly identify** with Europe and positively evaluate the EU membership. On the opposite side, individuals in **clusters 2, 5 and 6** identify **less strongly** with Europe (especially in Cluster 2) and more likely evaluate EU membership as a negative thing. Yet, there are **differences among clusters** inside each of these two groups when considering **trust in the EU institutions**, such as perception of their effectiveness and corruption. We briefly summarize the main characteristics of each cluster.

**Cluster 3 - "Confident Europeans" (17%)**
They strongly identify with Europe, even more than how much they identify with their countries, think the EU membership is a good thing; strongly agree with the values of solidarity represented by the cohesion policy. They perceive a low level of corruption in EU, even in comparison to their national government, whereas they evaluate less positively the effectiveness of EU in solving problems, in particular in comparison to national government. Awareness of Regional/Cohesion policy is quite high.

**Cluster 4 - "Wary pro-Europe" (15%)**
They strongly identify with Europe, even more than how much they identify with their countries, think the EU membership is a good thing; strongly agree with the values of solidarity represented by the cohesion policy. They evaluate the action of EU in solving problems quite effective, even more effective than the action of their own country but do not trust too much the EU institutions because perceive a high level of corruption in EU, even respect to their national governing institutions. Awareness of Regional/Cohesion policy is quite high.

**Cluster 1 - "Disappointed pro-Europe" (27%)**
They strongly identify with Europe, even more than how much they identify with their countries, evaluate the EU membership a good thing and agree with the idea of redistribution implied by the Cohesion policy (though their perception is a bit less favourable than clusters 3 and 4). However, they evaluate quite negatively the effectiveness of EU (less effective or as well their

national governing institutions) and perceive a high level of corruption in EU institutions, equal or more widespread than in national institutions. Awareness of regional/Cohesion policy is high as in all clusters, yet people have a higher chance to be not aware of any European policy than Cluster 4 or 3.

On the opposite side:

**Cluster 2 – "EU Deniers"** (20%)
They have the most negative attitude toward many aspects: they weakly identify with Europe, identify more likely with their own countries, and consider negatively the EU membership of their country. They think the EU is not much effective in solving problems of their region and less effective than national government, and perceive that corruption is widespread in EU institutions, as like as in national institution and even more. Nevertheless, the majority still agree in sustaining the poorest regions but the chance that people disagree with this policy is the highest among all clusters (36%).

**Cluster 5** - "**Disaffected Europeans" (11%)**
They identify more with their own countries than with Europe and have a low chance to strongly identify with Europe but this is somewhat stronger than for the Cluster 2 (EU Deniers) and people less likely consider the EU membership a bad thing (they are equally divided). They negatively evaluate the effectiveness of EU in solving problems in their region and consider national government as well or more effective. On the contrary, they likely trust EU because do not perceive a high level of corruption and think it is lower compared to their country. For the majority, they agree with supporting the poorest regions but a larger proportion of people do not agree.

**Cluster 6** - **Wary cons Europeans (10%)**
They identify more with their own countries than with Europe and have a low chance to strongly identify with Europe but the identification with Europe is somewhat stronger than for the Cluster 2 (EU Deniers) and people less likely consider the EU membership a bad thing (they are equally divided). Contrary to Cluster 5, they quite positively evaluate the capacity of EU institutions in solving problems, especially in comparison to the national institutions. However, most of the people perceive a high level of corruption. Agreement with redistribution towards the poorest regions is high even if the proportion of people that do not agree is greater than other clusters.

## Profile of the regions' groups

At the **regional level**, we are able to identify four groups described by the same dimensions, even if the differences are less marked.

Group 2 - "**High EU identification**" - can be labelled as regions with a high level of identification with Europe and where people trust and appreciate EU institution: people in these regions have

the highest chance of identifying strongly with Europe, of considering the EU membership a good thing, and EU institutions effective in solving problems, even more than national government. In addition, people in these regions do not perceive a high level of corruption in EU and show the highest support to the redistribution policy toward the poorest regions.

The regions in Group 3 **"Medium-high EU identification – Critics"** have a relatively high proportion of people that strongly identify with Europe, as strong as with their own country, and approve the EU financial support to poorest regions. Moreover, the proportion of people that think the EU membership is a good thing is the highest. However, the perception of the effectiveness and corruption of EU institutions is not as good as in the regions of Group 2. Actually, people have a relatively high chance of thinking that EU is not effective in solving region's problems and less effective than national government, and perceive a medium-high level of corruption in EU institutions. Moreover, compared to Group 2, many people are not aware of any EU financed policy.

Two groups, Groups 1 - "**Lower EU identification**" and Group 4 - "**Low EU identification – Skeptical**", are characterized by a weaker level of identification with Europe, especially compared to identification at the national level, and quite critics against the EU institutions. They have a considerably similar profile along many dimensions: people think that the EU is not very effective in solving problems of the region and that corruption in EU institutions is widespread. Although the agreement with the EU policy of supporting the poorest regions is high, it is somewhat lower than that observed for the other two groups. Especially in the regions belonging to Group 4 ("**Low EU identification – Skeptical**") the chance that people negatively evaluate the EU membership is the highest (0.55), whereas the chance of knowing some EU policy is greater in Group 4 than in Group 1 ("**Lower EU identification**").
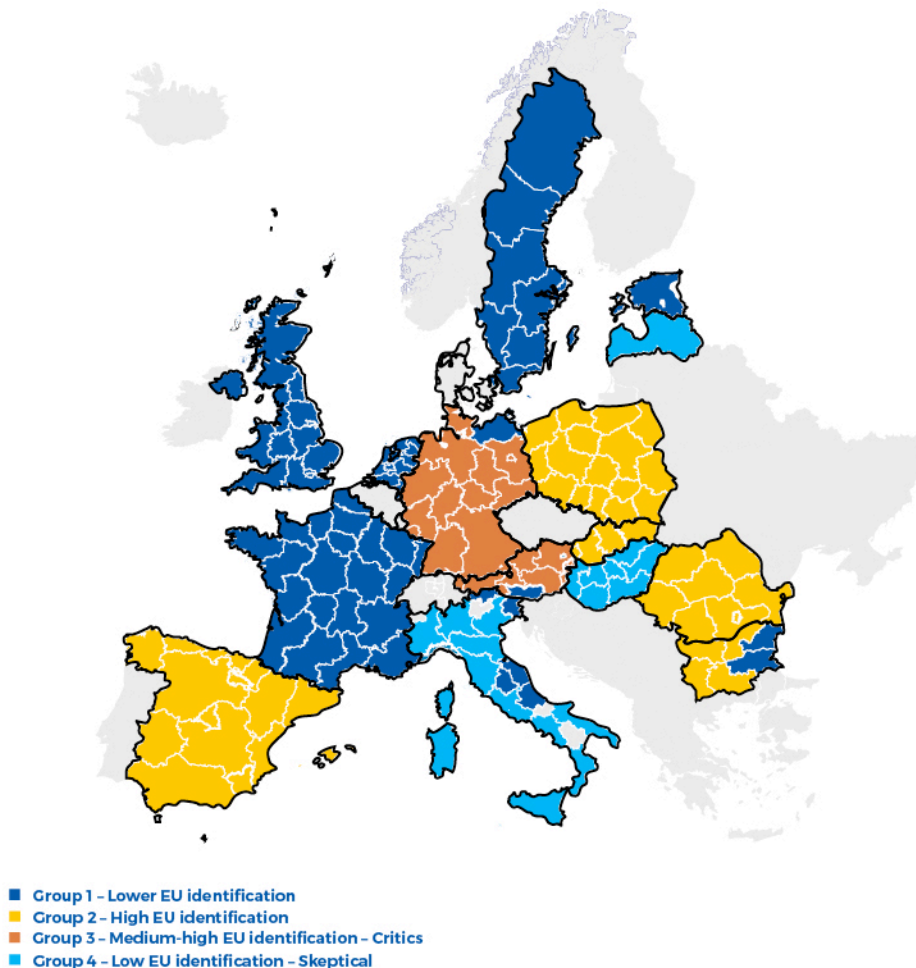

## Mapping the identification of the European regions

Finally, we obtain a classification of the EU regions (NUTS2) assigning each region to the group with the highest membership probability conditional on the regional context characteristics and the response pattern of its citizens to the survey questions.

Figure 1 shows the assignment of the regions to the different groups. We see that **all the UK regions and the North Ireland**, **all the French regions, the Netherlands, Sweden and Estonia** are classified in Group 1, which together with regions in Group 4 are characterized by **a lower level of identification and the most critics against EU institutions**. Most of the regions from **Germany and Austria** are classified in Group 3, which is a group that **identifies with EU even if they are critics about some aspects**. In contrasts, most of the regions from the countries of **Eastern Europe**, except Hungary, are classified in Group 2: they show the **highest level of identification with Europe and trust the EU** as regards effectiveness and corruption. In this group are **all the Spanish regions** too. Group 4 comprises almost all the Italian regions and all the regions from Hungary, Latvia and Corsica.

**Figure 1.** Regions classification

# Degree of identification with the EU



- ■ Group 1 – Lower EU identification
- ■ Group 2 – High EU identification
- ■ Group 3 – Medium-high EU identification – Critics
- ■ Group 4 – Low EU identification – Skeptical

## The influence of individual and context socio-economic characteristics

The membership classification into individual clusters may be influenced by individual demographic socio-economic characteristics. In general:

- **Age and gender** have a very **weak influence**;
- People with **high education and income** are more likely allocated in clusters showing a **high level of identification and positive attitude** toward **EU** institutions. At the opposite, citizens with the lowest level of education and low income are overrepresented in Cluster 2 (**EU Deniers**), which are individuals that weakly identify with Europe and most critics against the EU;

- Unemployed and people unsatisfied with the economic situation at the time of the survey are over-represented in Cluster 2 and under-represented in Cluster 3, 4 and 1.

Still, we **cannot distinguish a clear-cut dependence of identification on demographic or socio-economic characteristics** of individuals. As far as regional context characteristics are concerned, we note that:

- Richer regions are overrepresented in groups **"1 - Lower level of identification"** and **"3 – Medium-High identification – Critics"**, while poorest regions are more likely to be classified in Group **"2 - High EU identification"**; the regions with a level of GDP below 50-60% of the EU average are more likely classified in Group **"4 - Skeptical"**.
- Regions receiving **more financial funding** from the EU are most likely classified in Group 2 and Group 4, which also show a small value of financial absorption rate (a proxy for efficiency in implementing the Cohesion policy), although the two groups have very different patterns of identification and trust toward the EU. In contrast, the regions receiving **less funding** from EU are more likely classified in Group 1 and Group 3, which show medium-high values of the financial absorption rate.
- Group 1 and Group 3 are composed more likely by regions with **high level of institutional quality** (measured by the EQI indicator), whereas the regions with lower levels of the EQI index are more likely included in Group 2 and Group 4.

# Summary remarks

The results help to shed light on the **patterns of EU individual and regional identification** with the European project, as well as their drivers. The pattern identified are heterogeneous with regard to national vs. EU identification, the evaluation of the EU membership and its effectiveness, the level of citizens' awareness of the existence of the Cohesion Policy and the agreement with its solidarity value, the trust in EU institutions and the perceived level of corruption.

Our results are **consistent with the latest tendencies emerged in the EU**, i.e. the growing **Euro-Skepticism** that boomed with the Brexit referendum in the UK and the results of the recent elections in France, Hungary, Italy. The **variables that mostly affect** citizens and regions' identification with the European project are those **currently driving the discussion on the challenges for reforming the EU**, i.e. **trust** in the EU institutions, the effectiveness of EU **Cohesion Policy** and spending, and the level of **corruption**. These issues are relevant at the light of three main **challenges that affected the EU socio-economic development** path in the last decade, i.e. the 2008 financial crisis, the globalization process, and Brexit, which might have had some effect on the perception and the identification with the European project.

It emerges that the **most hostile regions** to the EU project are somehow the **richest ones**, which perceive less effectiveness and more corruption in EU in comparison to their countries. On the other hand, we find a **high level of trust in EU institutions**, in its transparency and

effectiveness in **Central and Eastern European countries** (Hungary excluded), which instead perceive a high internal level of corruption. Regional socio-economic context influences to some extent the pattern of identification, however, similar regions may have different patterns of identification with the EU project and perception of Cohesion Policy. This leaves some room for the influence of other factors on the formation of identification with the EU project and the perceptions of Cohesion Policy, for example, the political discourse, **the representation of the European issues by the media**, and the communication strategy of the Cohesion Policy. These aspects are analyzed in other work packages within the project.

# Methodological notes

We make use of Latent Class (LC) analysis and multilevel modelling (Hagenaars and McCutcheon, 2002; Vermunt, 2003; Skrondal and Rabe-Hesketh, 2004) to develop a probabilistic model for the classification of citizens and regions according to the level of identification with EU.

Starting from a set of K interrelated categorically observed measures (the response to item *k* of person *i* coming from region *j*), the model identifies T classes of a latent variable that describes an unobservable construct (identification with EU) and provides a classification of individuals based on the response patterns to the K indicators. The latent classes *t*=1,…,T (clusters) represent the latent level of identification; each latent class is described by the pattern of the K individual responses with the highest probability in that class (Standard LC Model).

Moreover, the model exploits the nested structure of the data considering individuals (first-level units) nested into regions (second-levels units). This hierarchical model accounts for unobserved (latent) regional effects specified as a discrete latent variable that describes latent types (groups) of regions for which the parameters in the model differs. It allows to cluster the regions into a small number of latent classes, *m*=1,…,M.

Hence, in this model, identification with the EU project is described by a discrete latent variable at two different levels, individual and regional. The model also accounts for the effect of individual and regional characteristics on the probabilities of class membership.
The estimation of the model produces three types of probabilities:
- The latent class probability at regional level: is the probability that region *j* belongs to the class *m* of the second-level (regional) latent variable, given the regional covariates. It delivers information about the distribution of the population among the regional classes.
- The latent class probability at individual level: is the probability that the respondent *i* of the *j*-th region belongs to the class *t* of the first level (individual) latent variable, given regional latent class membership and the individual covariates. It delivers information about the distribution of the population among the individual classes.
- The conditional probability of individual response pattern: is the probability that the *i*-th respondent shows a specific pattern of responses to the K indicators, given individual and regional latent class membership. It delivers information for describing the latent classes.

The results will be used to rank the regions according to the level of citizens' identification with the EU project.

**Sources**

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