

The European Union and International Governance: Still on the Path to a Global Power?

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Abstract. *The European Union represents an artificial construct built on the same pattern of formation of the nation states, being defined as „the imaginary political community of Europe (McNamara, 2011). The dynamic evolution of the European Union from an economic entity to a supranational political entity continues to draw a series of critics due to the fact that it represents „an unusual entity, whose principles and constitutional status are ambiguous and incomplete (Ericksen and Fossum, 2004, p.436). This article investigates: on the one hand, the way in which the process of globalisation and the emergence of the European project have changed the relationship between the nation-state and its citizens; and, on the other hand, the EU’s relationship with its most important stakeholders and supporters: young Europeans. This article seeks to offer, from the perspective of young Romanians, a complex approach concerning the EU’s role in global governance on an economic, social, political and security level.*

Keywords: *EU attitudes, multilevel governance, globalisation, europeanization, eurozone, Romania.*

Introduction

“Globalization has changed the relationship between state, market and society” (Wang, 2005, p.24). In the European context, this coincides with the loss of legitimacy of the nation states before their own citizens, which is detrimental to the European Union, a political and economic construct designed to ensure economic convergence and welfare of the society in order to obtain competitive advantage on the global markets. In the context of globalization and the aftermath of the economic crisis the pillars on which the EU stands no longer satisfy the demands and necessities of the European citizens (Van Ham, 2005; Habermas, 2012).

The major challenge for the European Union is the level of confidence amongst young people. They are portrayed as “Europe’s societal and economic foundations” (Huber, 2013) and as the future of the European project. This represents a major concern for the EU, since recent polls (Gallup, 2013; Pew Research Center, May 2013) present a dramatic rise in pessimism among Europe’s young people that have been labeled as “the Lost Generation” (European Commission, 2012). Their main concerns are: the high degree of unemployment and the lack of opportunities in the current economic context.

The aim of this article is to explore the level of interest of young Romanians concerning the democratic decision making processes and the way that they perceive their future as European citizens and also the future of the European project as a global power. It first creates an overview over the europeanization and globalisation processes and the EU system of multilevel governance.

Furthermore, it presents the attitudes of young Europeans concerning the EU, in relation to the topic of self-interest. In this sense, a qualitative approach was preferred, by conducting a series of focus-groups with young Romanians aged between 19-30 years old. The main focus of this research is to discover if young people in Romania are still optimistic about the EU and eager to endorse this political and economic project or if they question its feasibility.

The EU and Multilevel Governance

The European project as we know it today has undergone through a series of changes that have shaped the initial roles, objectives and purposes that represented the basis on which the European Community was founded in 1950's. At present, The European Union, unlike the European Community, implies free movement of capital, goods and labour; the existence of political mechanisms that European institutions employ to exercise their influence over the members states on a political and socio-economic level; but, most importantly, implies the existence of an economic and monetary union (Spiering, 2002).

The process of European integration has been greatly influenced and driven by globalization, which has become a key concept in relation to the global convergence of markets. In general, globalization refers to the development of economic relationships and the development of technology and information (Hay & Rosamond, 2002; Sava, 2004; Dobrescu, 2012, 2013). Economic globalization is a complex phenomenon with important consequences not only on a socio-economic level, but also on a political, identity-based and cultural level also (Drăgan, 2005; Dobrescu, 2010). Globalization is defined as „a mark of modernity (Sava, 2004, p.221) and the link between global and national economy is represented by the Union, which implies the regional integration of national economies through the European Social Market. It is clear that globalization has become nowadays a reference point within the contemporary political discourse and a framework by which the political and economic reality is defined (Hay & Rosamond, 2002). Some authors argue that Europeanization represents a distinct form of globalization that generates on the one hand, economic convergence and, on the other hand, competitiveness across markets and societies (Hay & Rosamond, 2002; Delanty & Rumford, 2005). Hence, europeanization represents an irreversible process of assimilation that has created a polarization of the economic and political spheres of influence and has divided Europe between the winners and losers of the integration process.

Johan Olsen (2002) defines *Europeanization* as a fashionable term used to describe a series of processes of institutional and economic change. The *Europeanization* process comprises different facets: „1) *Europeanization as changes in external territorial boundaries*: through the enlargement of the Union, Europe becomes a single political community; 2) *Europeanization as the development of institutions of governance at the European level*: the political coordination and coherence is ensured through formal-legal institutions and a normative order based on constitutive principles, structures and practices; 3) *Europeanization as central penetration of national and sub-national systems of governance*: implies adapting national and sub-national systems of governance to a European political center and European-wide norms; 4) *Europeanization as exporting forms of political organization and governance that are typical and distinct for Europe beyond the European territory*: the European model for democracy and mechanisms of political participation represents a reference point in international fora; 5) *Europeanization as a political project aiming at a unified and politically stronger Europe*: European Union as a political entity implies the alignment of religious, cultural and ethnic differences into a melted pot with the purpose of generating attachment and loyalty from the part of the citizens of the member states towards the European community (Olson, 2002, pp.3-4).

The literature in the field defines the EU as a multilevel governance structure (Marks, Hooghe & Blank, 1996; Marks & Hooghe, 2003; Hooghe & Marks, 2001). The basis of this framework has its roots in the neo-functionalism theory of integration of Haas (1958), but multilevel governance assumes the existence of new forms and mechanisms of decision making and policy development within the Union. Although the member states do not hold the monopoly in terms of policy making at EU level, the nation state and its leaders represent an essential component of the European project. Multilevel governance is defined as a system of continuous negotiation between governments on several territorial levels --supranational, national, regional and local- and, at the same time, a distinctive system of the structural policy of the EU (Marks, Hooghe & Blank, 1996). Firstly, multilevel governance implies that supranational institutions such as the European Commission and European Parliament have an independent influence in the process of decision making, influence that is not derived from their role of state leaders. State leaders represent a distinctive category of players in this game, because multilevel governance involves also other stakeholders and social actors that have a significant influence in the process of policy making. Secondly, collective decision making diminishes significantly the individual control of state leaders over economy, policy making and international relations (Marks, 1999). Essentially, multilevel governance is characterized by the following features: 1) the power of decision-making is not owned exclusively by the nation state, but it is shared between different actors across multiple vertical levels; 2) collective decision-making implies the loss of national sovereignty; 3) national actors (both public and private ones) represent transnational associations that are involved in the decision-making process (Weltz, 2008).

The political framework of the EU in terms of co-existence and overlapping political actions offers the stakeholders a relative mobility between different levels of governance (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). Through the MGM model, integration is perceived as a general phenomena and regionalisation only a dimension of this process by which the authority is established at a continental level. This implies a link between national groups and european actors, indicating that the sovereign state does no longer act as the voice of the people, of its citizens. Schmitter (2003) indicates that multilevel governance represents an agreement between interdependent and independent/subnational actors also in regard to taking crucial decisions concerning the European policy making. These actors are present at different levels of territorial agregation with varying degrees of negotiation/ deliberation/ implementation that do not ascribe exclusive competencies in policy making or a stable hierarchy of political authority. Hence, the sovereign state does no longer represent the link between national policies and international relations and does not represent anymore the main authoritative decision-maker. Multilevel governance is also characterized by competing institutions, political and public agenda always under the forces of change and prevalence of technical expertise as the dominant style of policy making at EU level (Marks et al., 1996). Thus, it is unlikely to provide a constant balance because of the lack of the legitimate constitutional framework, the absence of a European Constitution being the cause of the minimal consensus on the integration goals.

At this point, the dispersion of authority through multilevel governance has caused the raise of democratic deficit at the European level and a gap between the EU and its citizens: the individuals attitudes towards the European project can be translated through low interest in European elections, due to the limited executive power of the European Parliament in relation to national governments; the supranational political structure of the EU in relation to traditional democratic institutions is not supported and accepted by the majority of the citizens of the member states, due to the fact that it would undermine the decision making capacity of national political institutions; public policies are adopted according to the political interests of the majority, because of the lack of relevant democratic processes of deliberation and contestation, by which the citizens could express their preferences or consent (Follesdal & Hix, 2006, pp.534-537).

Dimitris Chrysochoou (2009, p.382) formulates the imperatives that should act as pillars for developing a European transnational demos, as a solution for the transfer of sovereignty from the nation states towards the European institutions: „democratic self-consciousness of citizens; adoption of democratic values; public awareness of the fundamentals that act as basis for the the emerging supranational entity; the desire to shape a democratic future for the European Union, by accepting pluralism and diversity at a cultural level and also in relation to the political system that represent distinct features of the member states. The necessity of developing a European demos comes as a result of the evolution of the EU from an economic partnership whose primary purpose was to ensure the welfare and economic prosperity throughout the European space towards a political entity, through the process of integration. Due to the fact that the political foundations that act as basis for the emerging suprate remain unclear, the political legitimacy of the European institutions on behalf of its citizens is made only through consensus and compromise. Consequently, „the issue concerning the legitimacy of the European institutions remains open and controversial and a matter of political and cultural struggle between nation, political parties, ideologies and interest groups (Cerutti, 2008, p.14).

Young Europeans: pragmatic optimists?

“Young people are the most important capital the European Union has. They are Europe’s societal and economic foundations for the future” (Huber, 2013). As the future driving force in society, the youth represents an important concern for the EU, and it is important to understand if young Europeans are rather supporters or detractors of the European project. On both sides, there would be grounds for these attitudes. For the EU-support “team, a rich culture, educational access or mobility opportunities represent unbeatable arguments”. For the opposers, hostility towards the EU can be justified by the economic situation that has affected young people and has left them wondering about the promised financial growth, when all they experience is a lack thereof.

Under forces such as globalization and digitalization, young people are becoming more similar in attitudes, norms and behaviors, although the terminology employed by researchers can be different, due to the emphasis on diverse aspects and to local specificity: “NetGeners” (Tapscott, 2009), “Generation Me” (Twenge, 2009), “Generation Ku” (Moore, 2005). Tapscott (2009, p.23) presents a view of a flattening world that allows for such a phenomenon: “a true global generation of youth is emerging”. Nevertheless, there is a certain reluctance that authors display when referring to Generation Y in Europe, due to the scarcity of academic resources on this topic. A preferred terminological substitute is that of “young Europeans”, which does not allow for correlations with the characteristics of this generation in trying to obtain a more in-depth analysis. Our literature review of the subject will present findings of several studies that have targeted this demographic, but do not specifically employ the “Generation Y” label. Even so, if these studies center on young people roughly situated between the ages of 18 and 30, we consider it pertinent to include them in the Millennial cohort.

As Edmunds and Turner (2005) point out, post-1960 generational cohorts should be considered global, as they have experienced events that transcend national boundaries, thus creating a global generational awareness. In the case of the United States, Generation Y members are portrayed as “digitally native” (Sutherland & Thompson, 2003; Huntley, 2006; Tapscott, 2009), “a powerful political and social force. They are smart, well educated, open-minded and independent” (Greenberg & Weber, 2008, p.13). On the other hand, they are seen as narcissistic by Twenge (2009, p.399), who states that “younger generations have been taught to believe, in short, that everything is within reach, self-belief is essential for success, and other people’s opinions are rarely important”. With regard to the European members of Generation Y, research (Corvi, Bigi and Ng, 2007) shows that they present similarities with their American counterparts: they are self-confident, they trust their ability to influence the world and they consider their families to be

a building-block, a source of strength and wisdom. Compared with previous generations, both European and American members of Generation Y strive for a work-life balance (Forrester Consulting, 2006; Corvi, Bigi & Ng, 2007; Tapscott, 2009). Another common feature of these groups is their use of technology in almost every aspect of their lives (Forrester Consulting, 2006; Huntley, 2006). There are obviously some differences between European and American Millennials in terms of social and cultural norms, as they are influenced by tradition and geography. European members of Generation Y have the following characteristics: they travel extensively, they are multilingual, and they are taught to have appreciation for their rich cultures (Corvi, Bigi & Ng, 2007). Furthermore, the same research demonstrates they are more tolerant towards multiculturalism, they are more willing to accept the diversity between subcultures and to come to terms with these differences. On the one hand, the Americans seek to assimilate and accept every ethnicity and culture, whereby in Europe, the desire is to be able to find the delicate balance between such components. This is especially manifested through openness and curiosity to live and explore different subcultures, and at the same time through consideration regarding cultural sensitivities. Corvi, Bigi and Ng (2007) point out an interesting fact in regard to members of Generation Y: while in the US this group of young people has a clear notion of their generation and the factors that differentiate them from their parents' generation, in Europe this contrast is not so evident. Nevertheless, this generation has a certain group consciousness, as they have experienced "the end of the cold war with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the explosion of the internet and social networks, the digital era, reality television, non-traditional families, and the 11 September 2001 events" (Zopiatis, Krambia-Kapardis & Varnavas, 2012, p.102). Researchers state that this generation has grown up with the EU providing benefits such as mobility, a single currency, or academic programs (Huyst, 2008), it has European symbols "ingrained in its mind and takes the EU as a given" (Tsafos, 2006).

Young people have positive attitudes towards the EU especially through their personal interests and by seeing their membership towards the EU through a cost-benefits relationship. This attitude is reflected in quite a few different studies regarding this age group (Frunzaru & Corbu, 2011; European Commission, 2013; Udrea, Udrea & Țugmeanu, 2013), even though there are reasons to believe the instrumental approach is not the most viable. For example, Huyst (2008, p.294) considers that there are certain limits to the claim "that more EU benefits will automatically result in more people identifying with the EU". Nevertheless, as a European Commission report (2013, p.17) shows, "the source of young people's enthusiasm for EU citizenship seems to reside in the appreciation of the concrete advantages provided by European integration. In short, as long as they feel the benefits that derive from being part of the Union, members of Generation Y do not question its existence and do not reject the idea of a super-state". This attitude is reflected by studies both in Western democracies like Germany (Busse, Hashem-Wangler & Tholen, 2013) and in new member-states such as Romania (Frunzaru & Corbu, 2011; Crețu & Udrea, 2012). On the same note, young people from this age group from Britain have a positive attitude towards the EU by seeing the membership of their country as a means for gaining competitive advantage at a global level, in contradiction with older generations that can be characterized as eurosceptics and conceive European federalism as mean of suppressing nationalism (Heaver, 2013). But this support can easily be shattered by the current economic crisis and the lack of social measures - in the long term, they can transform European youth from the future of the EU towards a "lost generation" (European Commission, 2012). Lately we have seen an enormous palette of EU projects that focus on this demographic at various levels, therefore there is obvious there are problems that need to be solved when it comes to Europe's young generation. But the results are still pending, and the lack of concrete responses on social and political initiatives from European elites concerning young Europeans could affect the EU.

Unemployment and the lack of financial – and even social – security are the buzzwords in today's European Union (Tremmel, 2010). According to the Eurostat (2013), the most affected countries when it comes to youth unemployment are Greece (52.3%), Spain (50.7%), Portugal (35.2%), Italy

and Slovakia (34.2% each). Literature even presents views of an attitude of “job-cynicism among the Generation Y members that are preparing to enter the workforce, especially due to the impossibility of finding a safe and reliable work place” (Bauman, 2012) or because of the employers’ tendency to offer “dumping-employment and false hopes to members of Generation Y” (FutureLab Europe, 2013). One of the consequences of the Euro crisis on the “Lost Generation” is their return to their family home, as many young people cannot afford to live on their own anymore.

When addressing attitudes of support or opposition towards the EU, the utilitarian approach offers two divergent perspectives that take into consideration economic factors and identity aspects. Lauren McLaren (2006) proposes the following two theoretical models: egocentric utilitarianism, that emphasizes the fact that individuals support the European project based on the maximization of personal interests and economic benefits that directly impact the standards of living (Palmer & Gabel, 1999; Gabel, 2009) and sociotropic utilitarianism, that regards the attitudes of support/rejection towards the EU by taking into consideration the results European integration has over the national economy (Garryand Tilley, 2007). In the case of egocentric utilitarianism, the demarcation between the winners and losers of the European integration process is made through the economic costs and benefits for each European citizen, therefore those individuals that are in favor of the EU are also those who gain the most from this project: usually younger, with higher education and professional skills (McLaren, 2006, p.32). For the sociotropic utilitarianism, support or opposition attitudes towards the European project are influenced by two economic factors: on the first hand, the EU budget and the differentiated economic contribution of each member state and on the second hand, the elimination of regulations and trade barriers in order to establish free trade zones for increasing competition across markets (McLaren, 2006, p.44). Even though the European integration process had a positive effect on national economies, the current crisis has generated „economic xenophobia (Garry & Tilley, 2007, p.184) and a defensive European identity against immigrants. The attitudes of support or opposition can be grounded on emotional aspects as well as pragmatism, therefore a supra-state entity can represent a threat to the national-state, national cultures and identities (Carey, 2002; Marks & Hooghe, 2003; McLaren, 2002, 2004; Netjes, 2004; Netjes & Kersbergen, 2004). In this regard, Lauren McLaren (2002) emphasizes the fact that „antipathy toward the EU is not just about cost/benefit calculations or about cognitive mobilization ...but about fear of, or hostility toward, other cultures (p.553).

Research design

This article aims to analyze the attitudes of young Romanians towards the European project and its future as a global power. Therefore, we focused on the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the level of interest in European politics and the level of trust among young people in EU and its institutions?

RQ2: How did the economic crisis influence the attitudes of young people towards the sustainability of the Eurozone and what are their main concerns at the present?

RQ3: How do Romanian students imagine the future of the EU as a global power?

In order to address these research questions we adopted a qualitative approach. Consequently, we conducted 4 focus groups. Our sample comprised 24 students, aged between 19 to 30 years, enrolled in Bachelor degree programs at the following public learning and research institutions: College of Communication and Public Relations - National School of Political Studies and Public Administration; respectively, Faculty of International Business and Economics – Bucharest University of Economic Studies.

The grid for our analysis is twofold, consisting of the following dimensions: *the utilitarian dimension*, emphasizing the perception that young Romanians hold towards the future of the Eurozone, correlated with the costs and benefits that derive from their European citizenship; the impact of the Europeanization process on national economy; the impact of the economic crisis on the stability of the Eurozone, business markets and standards of living; and the *political dimension*, which is concerned with the way that young people choose to engage in politics, their level of trust in European institutions and politicians in relation to national politics and the future of the political European project.

Results and discussion

The utilitarian dimension

The fact that Romania is now part of the EU has not erased its economic, social or juridical problems. For young Romanians, the low levels of unemployment or those of high corruption at a national level are simply regarded as data from statistics that are unadapted to what is really happening. Young people consider that the problems in the Romanian society are the work of the current political class, but also the result of a perpetuation of an opportunistic mentality: *It does not help that Romania is in the European Union if we, as people, do not want to change, and we continue to be corrupt, politics intervenes in the judicial system. It is more our thing than EU's thing; We have been confronting corruption for such a long time. This is linked to the Romanians mentality that are a bit conservative and it is hard to change that.* The young people indicate the fact that good changes in society should not be the responsibility of the EU, that assumes the role of Romania's saviour, but of the current generation, that can choose a competent political class and one that is interested in serving its country and its citizens.

Young people emphasize the fact that the process of European integration has improved the living standards and the economic development of Romania but only at a small scale: *We don't need to wait for the EU to solve our social, political and justice problems ... but we must admit that different aspects concerning corruption, unemployment have improved, but are not so noticeable; It has helped Romania in certain ways, but Europeanization doesn't mean economic equality like in the communist period, but that's what capitalism means: competition.* The negative references concerning the Europeanization process relate to the deliberate preservation of economic disparities and competition between member states but also to the incapacity of national institutions to adapt to the new climate of change imposed at a continental level.

The major concerns of the respondents in relation to Romania's future status of becoming a member of the Euro area are economic instability, high interest rates and higher prices, based on the major differences between Eastern and Western economies: *Romania should keep its currency because it's stable. Every time a national currency is changed a series of financial problems arise; We are too poor to join the Eurozone ... Romania is not ready for this.* Other Romanian students stated that *„Euro currency itself cannot generate benefits or ruin national economy, other factors are involved, emphasizing the importance of politics on this matter.* A general opinion concerning the Euro adoption in 2019 by Romania represents an unrealistic scenario due to the lack of economic competitiveness of the country and the fragile European economy.

Although the effects of the economic crisis were felt especially by the younger generation in the EU, for Romanian students the European citizen status means a safer future, the EU being thus a guarantee of social security and economic welfare. This kind of a representation of the EU resides in young people's dissatisfaction with the current economic situation of Romania, with an absence of concrete solutions that the political elites can take to meet their needs and requirements. Mobility programmes offer them the chance to have an occidental lifestyle from the point of view of economic benefits and social status: *The Erasmus experience, for example, helps you in your personal development and you can find a job that is much better paid than in Romania. You can have*

the same benefits as the other European citizens. These results are consistent with the literature in this field stating that young Romanians exhibit positive attitudes towards the European project and they define themselves as European citizens through their personal interests and through a cost-benefits relationship (Frunzaru & Corbu, 2012; Crețu & Udrea, 2012).

Despite the fact that this young generation assimilates membership towards the EU through a cost-benefit relation, for them, being European citizens also has a symbolic value. The social status of being a European citizen doesn't provide them only material but also emotional benefits, in terms of overcoming the inferiority complex of being citizens of Eastern Europe. Therefore, Romania's accession to the European community has a symbolic connotation, being assimilated to the abandonment of the communist legacy and integration to the West but not only from a territorial perspective, but also at a civilizational level.

These young people have faith in the future of the EU and they support the acceleration of the integration process on an economic level. The continuation of the European project constitutes a necessity for them, in the current economic, social and geopolitical context. In this sense, they emphasize the necessity to create a cohesion between EU member states and to establish a convergence of economic interests in order to support the Eurozone: *Yes, I see a future of the European Union, and it is a great one. Economic unity between states will automatically determine the unity of the EU.*

Young people think that despite the current difficult economic context and the social and political tensions on the continental level, the EU will remain an important global actor and it will be competitive in relation to the US and China, both politically and economically. Consequently, in the context of the redefining of geographical and economic borders on a European level, with the appearance of the Eurasian Union and the growth in the influence of the Russian Federation over the ex-soviet states, young people indicate the fact that all member states and especially Romania need to adhere to the security and external policy of the EU: *A country on its own, without the support of other countries, that is hard, both from a geopolitical point of view and in what concerns economic interests.*

The social and economic difficulties that young people need to face determine them to express a moderate sceptic attitude towards the EU, results that are in line with other recent studies on the attitudes of young people from Romania towards the European project, as a result of the economic, political and symbolic consequences of the Euro crisis (Durach & Bârgăoanu, 2013; Mihalcea, Săvulescu & Vițelar, 2013).

The political dimension

One characteristic of Romanian young people is the effectuation of their civic duties and their obedience towards public institutions. They are deferent citizens (Martin and Taylor, 1978, p.64), that respect the laws and the rules imposed by society, not only because they are obedient, but also because they feel a moral obligation to be a good citizen. For them, the laws are not a coercitive instrument used by state institutions in order to diminish individual freedom, but an indicator of a democratic society, where they are important because they ensure social order: *We need to respect the laws, this is the only way one can guarantee individual freedom. It is like organizing chaos in some way.* Even if the laws are not in their favor, young people respect them because of their responsibility towards the country and the community they live in: *Yes, I respect the laws because I, as a Romanian citizen, consider that I have a responsibility towards my country and if we, as Romanian citizens, would not respect the laws, that would mean that we are against ourselves; This is a basic duty for every citizen of a community or of a country, because only by respecting the laws and those around us we can progress.*

Another characteristic of this group is seen in their interest for politics, which is obvious in the way they keep up to date with national and European issues in this area, as well as their participation in the democratic processes. Individuals in this group want their voices to be heard by the political elites and they expect their wants and needs to be present on the political agenda. For these Romanian students, participating in the political life constitutes a moral and civic obligation of every citizen, and they choose to express their political options through voting: *As long as you are a responsible citizen, it is necessary to be at least minimally interested in politics and to vote.* Despite the fact that they are not content with the political class, especially because of corruption and the lack of professional competencies, young Romanians consider that voting is the most efficient way to get involved in politics and bring about a certain change in society: *I have been voting since 18 years old, because a little goes a long way. I mean, if we all think we can make a change, we really can.* Contrary to the literature in the field concerning political behaviour of young people, Romanian students actively participate in politics (Dalton, 2008) and they choose the traditional forms of expression their political options through voting. Although in the context of societal changes younger generations express their preference for non-electoral participation (Norris, 2003; Diaz, 2008), Romanian students believe that the best way to make their voice heard is through voting and not through demonstrations or petitions.

Students think that the ignorance and apathy of the masses when it comes to politics are generally linked to the Romanian mentality and the lack of trust in politicians. These are the result of a difficult transition in Romania, from a communist regime to the European democracy and of a series of unsuccessful attempts to reform the public institutions. The absence of a historical tradition with regard to democracy in Romania is mostly visible in the current economic, political and social context, in the lack of trust in democratic institutions and their interest in protecting and ensuring the well-being of their citizens.

Young people are selective when it comes to giving their vote of confidence to political representatives, stating that the doctrine/ideology of the party is not relevant to them. Young people wish to live in a democratic society and in a occidental state, both from the point of view of living standards and on a civilizational level, and they expect their interests to be represented by an honest and competent political class. The respondents think they have a moral responsibility for the country and the community they live in, therefore they get involved in the political life: *After all, do something, get involved, be the change you want to see in the country.*

The Romanian students consider that European institutions should be more transparent and more democratic, because they do not communicate as expected with their citizens, who do not understand the functioning mechanisms of the EU and of European public politics: *It seems to me that they do not communicate sufficiently or they do not communicate by using the right channels. From my point of view, at least, the information about European institution politics does not reach me; We are not well informed about European politics and the European Parliament members that represent us. What can they do for me?* The main issues raised by Romanian students are the fact there should be less press releases and more public debates by which they can exercise their democratic rights. At the same time, for them the perfect democracy represents an utopia, stating that the European decisions are in favour of only a part of the European citizens, hence the superficial communication process on behalf of European institutions: *You cannot lead people by telling them at the same time, which are the rules behind the decisions you take, because that will obviously generate differences, so-called discrimination.*

The young Romanians do not share the federalist vision of the EU and are indifferent or sceptic about the possibility of its evolution towards a federation, both in the present moment, by simply relating this to the political reality, but also in the future. The federalization of the EU seems to be an unlikely scenario, together with the political, territorial and cultural uniformization, young

Romanians stating that this would mean that member states of the EU should renounce their autonomy: *(...) these cultures are too different, there is an old conflictual history and there is no common interest so that all states would give up enough of their autonomy in order to achieve a common goal.* The instauration of a federal government could not solve the internal problems of the nation states, with all their civilizational, economic and social differences and it would not generate economic and political convergence at an European level: *Yes, it would all look like a big country with common interests, while all the problems would remain inside every country; You have to take into account different economic, social factors, even if we would talk of the same country, it would be a country with many differences.*

With regard to the adoption of a European Constitution young Romanians manifest a certain reluctance, indicating that the European treaties provide the necessary legal framework for European institutions to exercise their political authority. On the one hand, Romanian students emphasize the fact that an European Constitution has no relevance because they do not perceive the concrete advantages that it would bring in their everyday life – *I don't think that is important for the EU to have a Constitution (...) I think that it won't help us that much-* and, on the other hand, they correlate it with the threat to the sovereignty of the nation state: *Every country should have its own Constitution. I agree that are certain rules that all Europeans should follow and this rules already exist.*

The young Romanian generation, as defender of peace and democracy, indicates that despite the political conflicts at the continental level, the European Union should not have an army. They emphasize the that the current political battles don't need to be carried out through violence, but with the help of diplomacy. A common European army would undermine the negotiating capacity of the nation state concerning national security policy and strategic partnerships: *Each nation state should have its own army and in case of conflict, all member states should participate in the resolution based on a strictly algorithm.* In this context, strenghtening the position of the European Union as an international political actor and guardian of peace and security and also for not revitalizing historical conflicts, this can only be achieved by respecting the security interests of the member states simultaneously pursuing a security and defense policy.

Conclusions

Romanian students are active participants in the national political life and they fulfill their civic duties, but at the same time they have some reservations concerning their implication in European politics. They wish to participate in the European democratic process and they want their needs to be included on the political agenda, but the lack of communication with European institutions and leaders determines them to manifest a low interest towards Europarliamentary elections, their opinion being similar to that of other young Europeans, according to the latest European Comission Report (2013).

Romanian students are optimistic about the future of the EU and they support the acceleration of the economic and political integration process. When it comes to the EU as a federal entity, they consider that a political, economic and social convergence is necessary, but the supranational principle should be applied with regard to the political legitimacy and the sovereignty of European institutions and national states simultaneously. At the same time, they believe that the European Union needs to expand its power and influence at a global scale, in order to counteract the major economic and political forces such as The United States or China and for Eurozone to become more competitive on the global market.

These young people are moderate or mildly Eurosceptic, in the sense that they have been influenced by the economic context, but they are still mostly favourable towards the EU – results

that are comparable to other studies (Durach & Bârgăoanu, 2013). The Romanian youth is enthusiastic about the future of the European Union, perceiving it as a guarantee for security and economic prosperity, and they are proud of Romania's membership to the European family, correlating their belonging to the European community with the opportunity to obtain a Western social status, not just at an economic level, but on a symbolic level, too.

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