



VICARIOUS EVALUATION: HOW EUROPEAN INTEGRATION CHANGES NATIONAL IDENTITIES

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Abstract

This paper explores how European integration impacts the national identities of Member States. Identity is an amorphous concept, and so this paper focuses on one dimension of it: the perception of the relative status of the nation that nationalized individuals possess. Perceptions of relative national status flow from the fact that the international system is characterized by hierarchy, competition, and concerns for relative gains and losses. A key motivation for the foreign policies of lower status nations is equality with higher status ones, and for the former, European integration is often perceived in equalizing terms. But, this perception of Europe as equalizer often does not correspond with objectively unequal power relations in Europe. This paper focuses on why, among nationalized individuals, perceptions of power differentials change, even though objectively the unequal inter-state power relations may remain unchanged. The case study is Italy entering the Economic and Monetary Union of the European Union in 1999, which was perceived by many Italians in equalizing terms, even though the unequal power relations between Italy and Europe's elite countries remained objectively the same.

Introduction

One of the principle ways in which Europeanists have investigated the relationship between national identity and European integration is the strong/weak identity framework. The idea is that strong forms of national identity—with Britain usually being the archetype—are not conducive to integration because it is felt that only the nation state can legitimately exercise sovereignty. Conversely, those countries with a “weak” identity—and here, Italy is often cited as an emblematic case—are more open to integration because it is presumed that there is a more flexible and open collectively held conception of the nation state (Berezin 2009). In this framework, the causal arrow runs from the nation to the international system; the focus is on how national identity affects foreign policies towards European integration. Yet, comparatively fewer Europeanists explore the causal dynamics that flow in the other direction, that is, how international events like European integration impact national identity. There is a large body of literature that addresses the ways in which European integration impacts national institutions and economies, but the question of how national identities are impacted does not enjoy as much attention.

One important element of identity that is influenced by European integration is the collective perception of the relative status of the nation. Perceptions of relative status flow from the fact that one of the main features of the international order is hierarchy; nations define themselves, and are defined by their place in the international pecking order. Entering Europe, for many nations, is also perceived as a shift upwards in this pecking order; but, there is often a disjuncture between the real relative status of a nation and the perceived relative status that nationalized individuals believe their country enjoys. This distinction between real and perceived national status is important because perceptions of relative international status are elements of national identity; it follows that changes in perceptions of national status are useful for exploring how identity changes.

This distinction is important for another reason relevant to this paper: often nationalized individuals hold exaggerated beliefs about the impact that “entering Europe” can have on the relative status of their nation. The case study focus of this paper—Italy, and more specifically Italy entering the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) in 1999—describes this precisely. Italians had to make many sacrifices to enter EMU, and politicians, to build support for these sacrifices, propagated narratives that did not correspond with actual policy. Even though Italy was one of the founders of the European project, and its belongingness to Europe was not predicated on whether or not it entered the first round of euro countries, adopting the euro was framed as “Entering Europe.” Perhaps more importantly, entering the Eurozone was perceived as something that would solve Italy’s marginalization in Europe. Many Italians perceived that the relegation of their country to second class status—compared to the first class status enjoyed by Germany, France, and the United Kingdom (UK)—was unjust. Adopting the euro, it was believed, would make Italy a country of “Serie A” in Italian parlance (“Serie A” refers to the premier Italian soccer league that is above the lower status league of “Serie B”). Therefore, when Italy joined the Eurozone there was a widespread sense that the country had indeed entered the league of Europe’s elite countries.

There was one problem with this perception: it was wrong. Why? Because joining the Eurozone did not fundamentally change Italy’s relative status compared to Europe’s elite countries. Becoming a member of the Eurozone was a great achievement: it modernized Italian public finances by placing constraints on the capacity of the political class to use monetary

policy for promoting political objectives such as industrial peace between labour and capital and economic growth and by compelling the country to restrain public spending; and it demonstrated that Italy, in times of crisis, is able to muster the political resources to get itself out of the morass (usually of its own making). Yet, these efforts, impressive as they are, were not sufficient to change Italy's relative status due to the fact that in Europe, a nation's relative status depends on a host of other variables including the size and quality of the economy: its degree of modernization and its levels of inequality, social mobility, and corruption. One could add to the list technological sophistication and its socio-political-bureaucratic organization. In Italy, these measures did not fundamentally change. Indeed, these kinds of changes take years, even decades, and, in terms of a nation's relative status, cannot be substituted by entering an economic and monetary union.

The perception among Italians of the shift of the country's relative status was brief; it eventually became clear that the country did not really enter the club of elite nations. It thus becomes interesting to ask why the shift in Italian perceptions did not correspond with the objective hierarchy that remained largely unchanged in Europe. This paper strives to answer this question and finds it relevant for several reasons. First, it is useful to identify the nexus between mass perceptions and international relations: how citizens perceive their nation's place in the international hierarchy matters because governments must build at least some democratic support for their foreign policies. To build this support, they often manipulate the prejudices, feelings, and beliefs of citizens, most of whom lack the information to impartially analyze the complexity of the international system. Second, the research question is relevant to the current crisis afflicting the euro. Polls from May 2012 highlight that a plurality of Italians—40 percent—want to return to the lira (*The Telegraph*, May 30 2012). One reason is that Italians were made extravagant promises that were not kept; they were told that entering the Eurozone would make Italy one of Europe's top-tier countries. Needless to say, this has not happened, and the widespread disillusionment in Italy with the euro can be explained, at least in part, on the basis of the unrealistic expectations that were not met.

The aforementioned research question can be operationalized with the following hypothesis: adopting the euro was not perceived simply as entering an economic and monetary union; it was perceived to have shifted Italy's place on the European pecking order because, for many Italians, the euro meant that Italy was now more "European" in the sense that it was up to the standards of Europe's top-tier countries. I call this phenomena "Vicarious Evaluation"—that is, the construction of the identity of the nation can change when it is perceived to have assimilated features of the "Other" (here, the "Other" refers to Europe's elite countries).

To support this hypothesis I have examined both qualitative and quantitative data to determine whether immediately after adopting the euro, there was a change among Italians' perceptions regarding the relative status of their nation vis-à-vis Europe's elite countries. Following this, I examine evidence regarding whether any change in perception was accompanied by a change in the country's objective status in Europe.

To the best of this author's knowledge, there are no polling agencies in Italy that measure changes in perceptions of national status; therefore, this paper will rely on media sources to identify these changes. Specifically, the results of a sample of 430 newspaper articles from Italy's most widely read dailies, published between 1996 and 2004 and coded to identify how perceptions of national status changed in the pre- and post-euro period, will be presented in the following pages. News clips that were aired immediately after Italy had adopted the euro will

also be presented. A small sample of news clips was obtained by the author from the archives of the RAI, Italy's public broadcaster.

Theoretical Framework

It is useful to first explore some of the ways in which scholars have theorized the social comparisons that take place between the individual and society. One of the most influential frameworks comes from sociologist Norbert Elias (1978). Elias observed that the self-evaluative aspects of the individual depend very much on the group to which he/she belongs just as much as, if not more, than his/her individual achievements. The originator of this idea may very well have been Sigmund Freud, who recognized that narcissistic tendencies are often a function not only of individual attributes, but also of the group to which the individual belongs (Freud 1991). Social psychologists have made similar observations: that the individual's self esteem or positive self-evaluations often derive from the perceived status of the group rather than from personal attributes (Billig and Tajfel 1973; Johnston and Hewstone 1990). Elias developed this idea further with the concept of "habitus," which refers to the ways in which the development of an individual's consciousness evolves and shifts co-extensively and co-relationally with the nation (Elias 1991; Elias 1996). Elias then extended this framework to a widely acclaimed study that theorized links between individual consciousness, the group, and inter-group hierarchy (Elias and Scotson 1994). In a case study that is strikingly similar to the inter-group dynamics that are observable in Europe, Elias looked at two groups in Scotland and how the individual members of each group internalized the belief that the "superior" group was more virtuous than the "inferior" group. Elias makes a distinction between the "I" images and the "We" images, and shows how the hierarchy between the groups was maintained because the "We" images consisted of a series of stereotypes that depicted the "inferior" groups as less virtuous. These "We" images then changed the "I" images that form the basis of the self-evaluative aspects of the individuals who constituted the groups, which reifies the inter-group hierarchy.

Scholars have applied Elias' framework to Europe's inter-state relations. Pablo Jáuregui (1999) explores the nexus between individual self-esteem and national identity, arguing that individual self-esteem often shifts, not on the basis of individual achievements, but because of the changing fortunes of the nation within which one belongs. He focuses on two countries—Spain and the UK—and explores how entering the European community had differential effects on these two nations: for Spain, it was associated with greater self-esteem because joining the EU represented a move towards "modernity" and a distancing from the backwardness of the Franco era, while for the UK it was associated with lowered self-esteem because it represented a further distancing of its role as a global empire.

The dynamics that were present when Spain entered the European Community are similar to the dynamics present in Italy when this country adopted the euro: it was perceived as elevating the nation's self-esteem. However, there were important differences. In Italy, the discourse was different because Italians have a different conception of their nation's place in Europe. Italy was one of the founders of the European project, and many of the greatest theorists of European unity were Italian. Moreover, in terms of territory, population, Gross Domestic Product, and even membership to prestigious clubs like the Group of 7, Italy has some of the trappings of a "great power." For these reasons, and others, many Italians perceive their nation as one of Europe's great powers, and its actual relegation to second class status in Europe is perceived to be unjust.

Thus, the widespread desire for equality with Europe's elite countries strongly influenced the character of inter-group comparisons that took place before and during the adoption of the euro. The desire to enhance the self-esteem of the group is universal, and inter-group comparisons and differentiation are one of the ways in which members of groups satisfy this desire. However, for lower status groups, the dynamic is often different (Abrams and Hogg 1990, 52). Rather than differentiation, the desire to produce positive self-distinction leads to the desire for *psychological assimilation with the higher status group* (Hogg, Terry and White 1995). That is, for low status groups, collective self-esteem depends on the possibility of the collective Self becoming enmeshed with the higher status Other.

For low status groups who aim to enhance self-esteem through assimilation, the bias is upwards towards higher status groups. It is held, by many individuals who constitute the polity, that assimilating with the higher status group will mean adopting the virtues of this group. The stereotypes (Wyer and Carlston 1979, 17) of the higher status group are crucial. Here, Europe is perceived to be associated with "modernity" and "advancement" (Heller 1992). These associations derive from the fact that Europe is, in the minds of many, indissolubly linked to the standards that are present in Europe's elite countries.

The idea that entering Europe would produce European virtues was embedded in the discourses surrounding Italy's adoption of the euro. The origins of these discourses are many, some of which are deeply embedded in the nation's culture. After World War II, inclusion in the burgeoning institutions of the European Community as an equal with the continent's great powers was the principle foreign policy objective of the nation's political class (Brogi 2002). Subsequently, in the sixties the Christian Democrats propagated the narrative that Europe would modernize Italy's backward socio-economic structures (Conti 2009, 133). Moving forward to the nineties, after the Treaty of Maastricht had been signed, Italian policy makers had to build support for the significant sacrifices that had to be made to meet the stringent public finance criteria that were required to enter the Economic and Monetary Union. They made extravagant promises on the euro, promising that "entering Europe" would produce paradise (*Corriere della Sera*, March 15 1998, 2) and green valleys (*Corriere della Sera*, Oct 30 1998, 3), or even more hyperbolically, that it would eliminate Italy's defects by creating "mature" and "modern" European citizens (*Repubblica*, Dec 28 2011, 22).

These were not the only discourses, of course. There were others that were more realistic, based on the actual substance of the policy, namely, that entering the Eurozone only represented a beginning, that much effort and work would be required to truly make Italy a "European" country. However, these other, more realistic, discourses were not dominant. Politicians shrewdly recognized that being completely honest about the common currency would not help them to build the political support that they needed to implement the painful sacrifices required to enter. Other politicians, (especially those on the left and centre-left) meanwhile, believed their own rhetoric: that the euro would make Italy "European" (Della Porta and Caiani 2007). Nonetheless, whether they believed their own rhetoric or were merely being disingenuous, politicians played a key role in constructing the dominant discourse.

Discourses that resonate with audiences need to be communicated, which is why the theoretical picture presented would not be complete without an analysis of the media. Scholars have recognized that the media constitutes social and political reality (Altheide and Snow 1974) through the use of narrative, metaphor, myth, and drama (Eason 1981) rather than reasoned dispassionate discussion of policy alternatives (Bennet 1980).

During the period of Italy's entrance to the Eurozone, Italians were bombarded with information and images about this event. Audiences obviously cannot consume all the information being produced, and so they have to be selective. This is particularly the case with issues that focus on the character of inter-state relations in Europe. Scholars who focus on the nexus between public opinion, the mass media, and international relations have discovered some interesting patterns in how audiences consume information on the international system. One of the main determinants of the actors' selection of information in the media-created political environment is the drive for cognitive consistency: the strong tendency for people to see what they expect to see and to assimilate incoming information into existing images (Jervis 1970, 118). Expectations create dispositions that lead actors to notice certain things and neglect others and that makes it difficult to consider alternatives (Bloom 1990, 4). Many experiments provide support for this theory that actors' expectations lead them to a kind of confirmation or verification bias in their consumption of information (Pelham and Swan 1994, 335; Swan, Stein-Seroussi and Giesler 1992) not only from media sources, but also from social settings—in conversations with friends, family, even acquaintances at the local bar (Davison 1958). In fact, social settings play an important part of the construction of political reality; because it is shared, the fantasy held by the group takes an aura of truth (Nimmo and Combs 1983, 11).

The expectations that lead to this highly selective and misleading consumption of information of the international environment emerge from deeply embedded currents in the culture of the community. In this case study, there was the widespread belief and desire that adopting the euro would produce equality. This belief was often unarticulated, but when it was expressed it was often framed with metaphors that the common person could relate to—for example, the belief that entering EMU would make Italy a country of “Serie A.” Most Italians were not informed about the substance of the Economic and Monetary Union, but because soccer is part of the national culture, most know that “Serie A” means “premier” and “elite.” This belief was felt to be real, in part because of the affectively charged discourses propagated by politicians, and also because of the way that information is consumed from the media and from social settings. Ultimately, however, this idea relied on the theory that entering an economic and monetary union would undo the relegation of Italy to second class status in Europe. This theory, which relied on wholly unrealistic assumptions, also produced expectations that strongly influenced how information was selectively consumed. After Italy joined the Eurozone, these expectations led to the belief—which was held only temporarily—that Italy was a top-tier country in Europe.

Evidence

Due to the lack of survey research data that explores perceptions of their nation's relative status, I undertook a media analysis, relying on the archives of the RAI (Italy's public broadcaster); I examined clips of television news shows that were aired immediately after Italy adopted the euro.¹ This data is qualitative in character but is an important source for identifying key symbols and expressions; humour, speeches, interviews by journalists of the common man on the street, can all convey those taken-for-granted beliefs that constitute a nation's identity.

Most Italians get their information from TV, but for a significant plurality, the impressions of Europe are also formed from reading newspapers.² Therefore, to identify the way that Europe

1. All the clips obtained from the archives of the RAI are available upon request.

was framed in print, I collected a sample of 430 newspaper articles that were published between 1996 and 2004 by two of Italy's most widely read newspapers: the *Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica*. The articles were selected using key search terms such as "Euro," "Europe," "Maastricht criteria," and "Italy." While the search was restricted to the nine year period between 1996 and 2004, it produced over 1000 results. Of these results, only articles that discussed the euro and its relation to Italy's position in Europe were selected for the sample. These articles were then coded with a simple coding scheme that divided them on the basis of whether they presented Italy as "inferior" to Europe's elite countries, and those that represented Italy as being at the same level with Europe's elite countries.

In the discourses through which the euro was interpreted, the euro was associated with the concept "equality" and/or "equalizer." Writing in *Repubblica* (January 1, 2002) on the regional differences in Italy, Mario Centorrino quotes a Sicilian who says, "let's be frank: the entire country has the euro and *it is an enormous pleasure to feel equality between Lombardy and Sicily* [emphasis mine]." In Italy, the region of Lombardy is associated with "modernity" and "advancement" because it is the country's wealthiest and most powerful; meanwhile, Sicily is associated with "backwardness" because it is part of the South and it also has notoriously high levels of corruption and criminality. That the euro created a feeling of equality between these regions makes sense in light of the meanings associated with the euro within Italian discourse, i.e., as an "equalizer." But, objectively speaking, the euro could not and did not create equality between Lombardy and Sicily.

Now let us look at how the "euro as equalizer" was applied to Italy's external relations. In January 1999, right after Italy entered the Eurozone, journalists from the RAI interviewed citizens, asking them about their views on the new currency:

Journalist: the Euro creates a unity and makes us [Europeans] feel like a common people...

Respondent: yes...using the same currency means also feeling that we [Europeans] are equal. (Entrando nel Euro, RAI DUE, aired on Jan 9 2001)

The key idea here is that the euro produced feelings of equality among European nations. But other evidence shows that the association of "equality" with the euro helped to create exaggerated beliefs about the euro: that it would positively impact Italy's relative status. Following Italy's adoption of the euro, Prime Minister Prodi went on the air to give a congratulatory speech to the nation where he presented the event in the following way:

Italy enters Europe [note the conflation of EMU with Europe] with all its history and culture without which Europe would be poorer and less present in the world...we must look towards the South...the relationship between the Christian world and the Muslim world, and here, Italy has the obligation to promote peace, and if we were not in Europe, we would not be able to carry out this obligation. (Dichiarazione di Prodi, RAI DUE, aired on May 2 1998)

The meanings associated with the euro in this speech are "strength" and "influence" (these associations are also embedded in the popular Italian expression that is often used to express support for European unity: "l'unione fa la forza," which means: "together we are stronger"). This sense of new strength and influence was extended to the belief that entering "Europe" for

Italy meant it would be a harbinger of geo-political change that would help to bridge the differences between Europe and the Muslim world. Needless to say, the euro has had no such effect, nor could it, because Italy's capacity to bridge the differences between the Muslim world and Europe did not rest on its capacity to enter the first round of euro countries. Nevertheless, this belief was held because of the extra-monetary meanings that were associated with the euro. It was believed that adopting the euro would increase the country's relative status and influence in the unequal inter-state pecking order.

The role of humour that only national audiences can understand is also a good source of the symbols that pertain to the intersubjective universe of the nation. Humour also often reveals uncomfortable truths that are made palatable because they are expressed in jests. They often penetrate the psychological defences that prevent people from saying things that many believe but that few would openly express. One such joke was presented on a show called "Mister Euro," moderated by Alan Friedman that was aired on January 8 2002. The show featured a panel of politicians, union and business leaders, and prominent figures who were interviewed by Friedman and who debated one another on serious matters surrounding the euro. The show aimed to inject humour through one of the characters, the well-known Italian actress/comedian Syusy Blady. In one of her comedic skits Blady says, "*for once we are like the Germans, with the same currency!*" The euro here meant more than just a new currency with which to go shopping; it was another way of saying, "for once Italy is up to the standards of Germany." This allusion to Germany is not a coincidence: it is the country that is the ideal for most Italians when they engage in the social comparisons that reify the perceived defects of the Italian nation state. It also highlights the upward bias of inter-group comparison: for lower status groups, it is important to feel equality with higher status groups.

As mentioned above, a sample of newspaper articles were collected from Italy's major newspapers to provide a quantitative idea of how perceptions of Italy's relative status changed after adopting the euro. The articles were coded with a simple scheme that divided them on the basis of whether they presented Italy as being at the "same level" as Europe's elite countries, or whether they presented Italy as "inferior" to them in some way. Regarding the latter, many articles represented Italy as a member of the "Club Med" countries, a derogatory term that implies the division between the virtuous Northern European countries and the non-virtuous nations of Southern Europe. Articles that represented Italy in terms of its specific problems that other nations presumably do not have were also coded as "inferior." Conversely, articles that presented Italy as a *grande paese* of Europe (which roughly translates to "great power") were coded as "same level." Other articles that were coded in the "same level" category represented Italy as sharing the same position in Europe as Germany and France, rather than, say, Spain or Portugal. The coded articles were plotted in Figure A and were published in the time period between 1996 and 2004.

The blue line shows the total number of articles in the sample that discussed the euro or the Maastricht criteria in the context of Italy's place in Europe. There is a huge spike between late 1996 and late 1997, and then again between late 1997 and 1998. There was a flurry of articles published in these periods because, at the time, Italy's adoption of the euro was very much in doubt as a result of comments from Dutch and German officials who raised serious questions about Italy's ability to make the first round; many of the articles are attempts to interpret comments about Italy made by these officials. The pink line represents the articles that depicted Italy as one of Europe's "great powers" or that expressed the notion that Italy was at the same level as Europe's elite countries. The yellow line depicts the articles that represent Italy as

inferior to Europe's elite countries. The graph shows a shift that begins when it became official that Italy would enter the Eurozone. By around the middle of 2000, there are slightly more articles that represent Italy as a great power at the same level as Europe's elite countries. The shift back to "inferior" starts to happen in 2004.

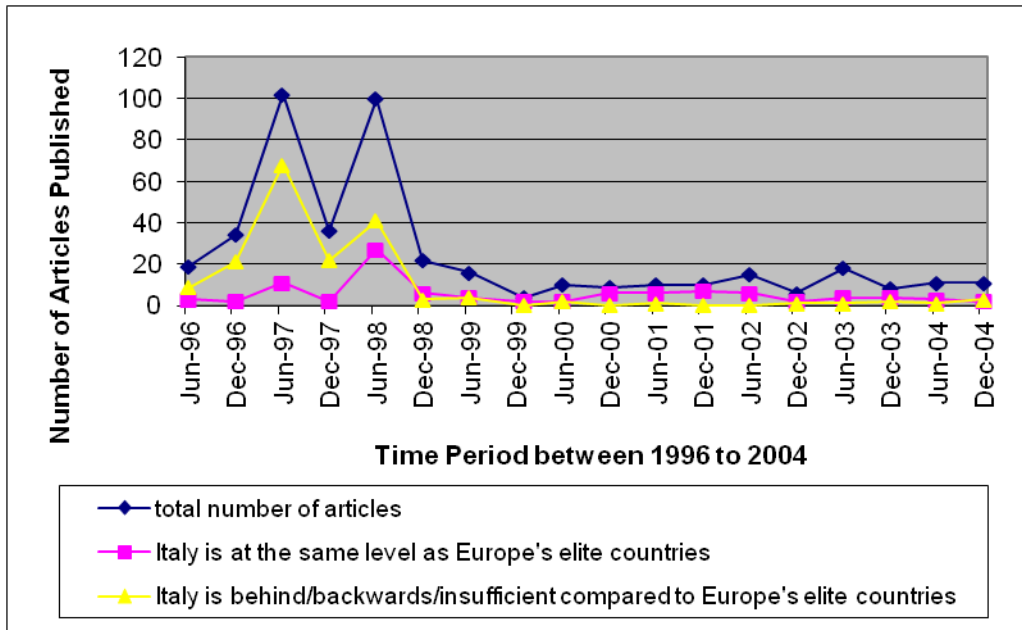


Figure A. Perceptions of Italy's status relative to other European countries after entering the euro. The data is based on newspaper articles in *La Repubblica* (209) and *Corriere della Sera* (221) from the period between 1996 to 2004. The coding scheme is available upon request.

It is important to point out that these data are not representative of the population in the scientific sense. They tend to reflect the views of mainstream elites, as columnists in national dailies tend to be. Therefore, it cannot be inferred that X percent of Italians perceived these shifts; to make that sort of inference would require polling data based on representative samples. However, as previously mentioned, I was not able to find polling agencies that measure perceptions of Italy's relative status. The newspaper and television clips are nonetheless valuable sources for inferring how discourses shifted following Italy's adoption of the euro. Although these sources represent the views of elites, national identities are mostly elite constructions. These constructions permeate the subjective universe of non-elites through the media, and hence it can be inferred that elite discourses expressed in national dailies and on television news programs do filter, at least in part, to non-elites.

Perception and Reality

Status is an inter-subjective phenomenon. To measure it, one must rely on proxy indicators. One indicator, I argue, is *exclusion* from the major decisions and meetings that are attended by Europe's top-tier nations. Thus Italy's exclusion from the major decisions made by Europe's "great powers" is a plausible source of empirical evidence that could be adduced to demonstrate that Italy did not become a top-tier country in Europe after it joined the Eurozone.

First, there is the basic fact that Europe is still being led by Germany and France. The current crisis in the Eurozone has only accentuated this. For example, the Fiscal Pact that was signed in March 2012 was essentially established by France and Germany and then presented to the other members, including Italy, as a *fait accompli*. Italy's relative marginalization can be seen elsewhere in the region's politics. The Italian language is not used in Europe's patent system despite vociferous Italian opposition (patents are only published in three languages: English, German, and French). What is more, Italy was excluded from important meetings and conference calls during the recent conflict in Libya, despite the fact that Italy played a strategically crucial role in the military operations. Finally, Italy is not included in "E-3", which is the forum of three European nations—Germany, France, and the UK—actively working with the United States and Russia to dissuade Iran from building nuclear weapons, despite the fact that Italy is one of Iran's most important European trading partners.

The reason Italy still suffers these types of exclusion may be related to a host of variables, and entering a prestigious economic and monetary union is probably one of the least important ones. One variable that affects national status is the absolute size of the economy (Kennedy 1987). Italy has a Gross Domestic Product, in absolute and in pro-capita terms that is comparable to France. But this is only one factor; just as important in determining hierarchy in Europe, I argue, *are the qualitative aspects of the economy*, such as inequality and the perceptions of corruption. High levels on these measures are associated with social injustice and third-worldism in Europe's intersubjective universe. In this sense, the degree of external equality between European nations depends, in part, on the levels of internal equality within nations.

Other determinants of Europe's pecking order are cultural, but not in the sense of the cultural treasures of the nation. In determining hierarchy, culture is important in a different sense: the beliefs and practices of its citizens which are understood to be proxies for their perceived honesty and sense of civic responsibility. The reason is that for large numbers of Europeans, the quality of a nation's socio-political and bureaucratic organization very much depends on its national culture. This is observable in the moralistic language that is often used to describe a nation's relative status. Those countries with efficient bureaucracies and credible political classes are often described as "virtuous," while those on the other end of the spectrum are often described as "lazy," "dishonest," and "irresponsible." Although in Europe, in 1999, Italy began to be characterized as one of the "virtuous" nations because it met the stringent Maastricht criteria, this change evaporated after the election of Silvio Berlusconi in 2001, which signalled to its partners that the country had not truly become one of Europe's "virtuous" nations (Chevallard 2008, 50)

The following graphs highlight that on indicators of corruption and inequality, Italy did not improve after it entered EMU. Figure B displays data collected from Transparency International, which ascribes a "score" from 0 (least corrupt) to 10 (most corrupt) to countries. The first line in Figure B shows that Italy's score has been about 5 for the past nine years, which places it well below its peers in Europe. Its low position in the ranking of European countries can also be seen in Figure B. There was a slight improvement between 1999 and 2001, which coincided with a small improvement in its score in the same period from 4.8 to 5.1. But this was short lived, and shortly after this period its score and ranking began to worsen again. Finally, Figure C shows that inequality, as measured by the share of national income going to the top 1 percent, has remained flat since roughly 1997.

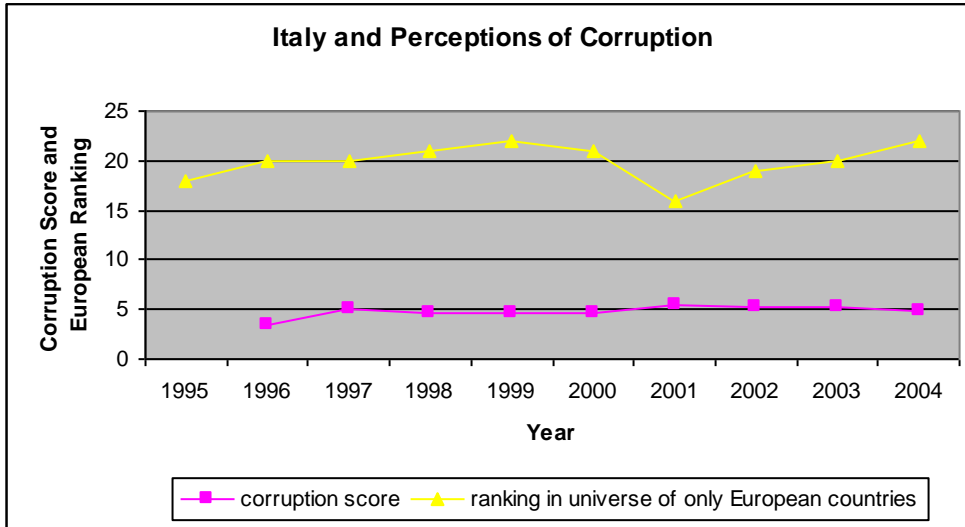


Figure B: Corruptions Perceptions Index survey of Italy. Score of 10 refers to least corrupt, score of 0 refers to most corrupt. **Source:** TransparencyInternationalArchives. Available at http://archive.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi

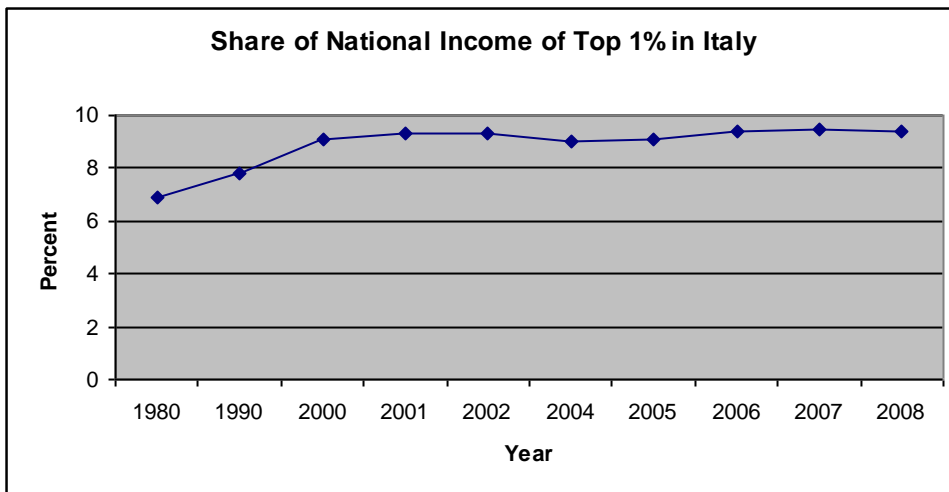


Figure C: Income Inequality in Italy. **Source:** OECD. Available at <http://www.oecd.org/italy/49177743.pdf>

Table 1 shows that Italy is perceived by Europe’s mass publics to have higher levels of corruption than other nations with comparably-sized economies. The data in Table 1 dovetails with Figure B. The latter presents data collected by Transparency International, which relies on a sample of investors in Italy who must deal with the Italian bureaucracy to conduct their affairs. The data from Table 1 relies on a representative sample of the citizens of those countries. The fact that both data sets arrive at similar conclusions gives weight to the observation that Italy is and was perceived to be a very corrupt and that entering the Eurozone did not fundamentally change these perceptions of the country, which is one of the reasons that it continues to be relegated to second-rate status in Europe

Which is the Most Corrupt Country in Europe?

According to citizens in:	The most corrupt European country is:
Britain	Italy
France	Italy
Germany	Italy
Spain	Spain/Italy
Italy	Italy
Greece	Greece

Table 1: Stereotypes in Europe. Adapted from: Pew Research Centre, Economist May 30th 2012. Available at: <http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2012/05/greeks-say-they-are-hardest-working-european-nation>

Status hierarchy among countries in Europe is based on a complex interplay between material and ideational factors. The material factors are mostly economic and are rooted in the fact that Europe, despite significant progress in integration, has not completely transcended the dynamics that other states are subject to: competition, and concerns with relative gains and losses in zero-sum terms. The ideational elements derive from the values that have a high priority in Europe: levels of internal inequality, and efficient and socially just bureaucracies, which are accurately perceived to reflect a nation's culture. On both scores, Italy's relative position did not fundamentally change after admission to the Eurozone, despite expectations created by politicians. It is partly for this reason that the very real improvements in public finance, the meeting of the Maastricht criteria, and belonging to a prestigious economic and monetary union did not fundamentally change the nations' place in the European inter-state hierarchy.

Conclusion

Much of the work on the role of identity in Europe is based on the "strong" versus "weak" identity and how these different identities correlate with different national approaches towards Europe. This paper focuses on a different aspect of identity: the perception of relative status that nationalized individuals perceive their country to possess. By focusing on this narrow element of identity, scholars can more easily detect how identities are impacted by external events and by the discourses through which these events are filtered. In the case study that is the focus of this paper, the political class in Italy exploited its constituents' desire for increased national status by selling integrationist measures, such as the euro, in these terms. This impacted mass perceptions of national status, especially because most citizens do not have sufficient information to evaluate the complexity of the international system. In addition, it led to the belief that Italy was one of Europe's top-tier nations even though objectively it continued to rank in the level of second class countries. Eventually, though, the majority of citizens realized that they had been oversold the policy and that it in fact had not had the intended effect. This highlights the fact that some aspects of national identity are not static; they are malleable in accordance with the shifting discourses which are propagated by the elite.

The findings of this paper also have important political implications. There is widespread disillusionment with the euro in Italy. Political parties that explicitly reject the euro, like the comedian Beppe Grillo's 5 Star Party, are surging in the polls, running in second place after the Democratic Party led by Pier Luigi Bersani. Even mainstream parties, such as Silvio Berlusconi's People of Freedom Party, are starting to muse openly about leaving the euro, which

would have been unthinkable only a year ago. One of the reasons for this increased anti-euro feeling is that the political class made extravagant promises that were not met, namely, that the entering the euro would make Italy one of Europe's top-tier nations. Now, some sections of the political class are trying to capitalize on the widespread disillusionment with the euro by telling the electorate that the return of the Lira is possible. This messy situation should be a lesson to Italy's political class: when selling an integrationist policy to a largely uninformed electorate, they should be intellectually honest about the real ramifications of the policy, even if it comes at the expense of lower public support for it.

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