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# Does European Citizenship Increase Tolerance in Young People?

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## ABSTRACT

While Europe is celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Rome Treaty, there is much doubt about the extent of citizens' emotional attachment to Europe. In this article we examine whether young Belgians show a sense of European citizenship, using a range of questions about the European Union (EU) from a survey administered to more than 6000 secondary school students. We show that a genuine identification with Europe – one that is not purely based on a positive evaluation of the EU from a utilitarian point of view – is related to higher levels of tolerance towards ethnic minorities, Muslims and immigrants. In addition, we will provide an overview of the literature on European citizenship and its potential connection to a higher degree of tolerance towards different cultures.

## KEY WORDS

- ethnocentrism
- European citizenship
- tolerance
- young people

## Introduction

The idea of European citizenship has been at the centre of an intense normative debate. Questions have been raised about whether or not we should aim to achieve a common European identity and about who is eligible to take part in it and who should be excluded. Moreover, intense academic discussion is taking place regarding the existence of a common fertile ground to develop a European identity. Others point to an appreciation of these differences as a possible hallmark of a common European identity (Habermas and Derrida, 2003). Already in the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, the European Union (EU) defined and pledged to promote the feeling of European citizenship (Jamieson, 2002). However, when the Union tried to compose a fully fledged European Constitution in 2005, it did not succeed in convincing its members; in fact, voters in France and the Netherlands disagreed with the definition of Europe that was proposed to them or even with the idea of Europe altogether. In this article, we want to build on the existing research by testing the relationship between European identification and tolerance towards ethnic minorities and immigrants among a large and representative sample of 16-year-old Belgian secondary school students.

So far, little is known about the relation between European citizenship and tolerance because the debate has been conducted largely on theoretical and ideological grounds. Authors such as Soysal (1994) and Benhabib (2004), for example, argue that, from a normative point of view, the development of a European identity is an important step forward. Citizens transcend the boundaries of their nation-state and develop a more encompassing sense of solidarity with broader groups (see also Habermas, 1999). As such, the notion of European citizenship might even be considered as a first step toward the development of a truly global sense of 'post-national' membership or belonging (Soysal, 1994). Other authors, however, are much more sceptical. Following the 'clash of civilizations' thesis, they assume that a strong European identity will inevitably lead to a more antagonistic attitude towards non-Europeans, especially if they originate from Islamic or Mediterranean countries (Huntington, 1996). Moreover, some authors claim that the explicit limitation of European citizenship in the Maastricht Treaty to country nationals while excluding inhabitants who are non-EU nationals is a warning signal and shows that the EU does not consider these inhabitants to be European citizens (Welsh, 1993; Closa, 1998).

The few available empirical studies on this subject seem to point to a positive relation between tolerance and European identification (Dell'Olio, 2005; Weldon, 2006). In this article, we want to examine this relationship in depth using a sample of over 6000 secondary school students in Belgium

surveyed in 2006. Belgium is an interesting country in which to examine the prevalence of a sense of European citizenship, because it was one of the Union's founding members half a century ago and currently hosts the largest number of European institutions. Thus, Belgians could be expected to have special ties to Europe. On the other hand, Belgium actually proved to be the least tolerant of the EU countries before the recent enlargement (Weldon, 2006), so studying (in)tolerance amongst its youngsters might yield interesting clues to the origin of these attitudes.

In this article we will first review the theories concerning European citizenship and tolerance, before looking at young people's opinions and feelings towards Europe and whether they show a sense of being 'European citizens'. Then we will examine whether young Belgians are tolerant towards immigrants and ethnic minorities. Finally, we will bring these two elements together to examine whether there is a correlation between feelings of tolerance and a sense of European citizenship and how differences in tolerance can be explained. If European identity can be seen as a step towards the development of a wider sense of solidarity, we should expect a positive relationship between European citizenship and ethnic tolerance towards outsider groups. If this is not the case, we assume this relationship is either non-existent or even negative.

## **The normative and theoretical study of European citizenship**

When the European Economic Community was founded in 1957, the Treaty of Rome mentioned 'the peoples of Europe'. This suggests that developing a supranational idea of citizenship was not an official objective at that point (Welsh, 1993). It was only with the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992, when 'Economic' was dropped from the title of the organization and the Community was transformed into a Union, that the EU institutionalized legal grounds for European citizenship (Painter, 1998). This means that, for the first time, there was provision for a formal Euro-citizenship, to some extent approaching the concept of citizenship as defined by Marshall in his classic seminar in 1946: 'a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed' (see Marshall, 1964: 84). This legal Euro-citizenship is highly formalistic and there is a clear absence of a participatory or affective dimension, which a 'thick' concept of citizenship would need (Painter, 1998; Delanty, 2000). In a further step towards developing a sense of European identity, the European Union tried to codify shared

values and cultural norms in a European Constitution in 2005. Although the European Union has recently become an important regulator of people's lives, people still tend to distance themselves from it and refuse to identify with it fully (Hooghe and Marks, 2006).

Some 15 years after Maastricht, most so-called formal citizenship rights in the European Union are still limited to the few rules laid down in the Maastricht Treaty.<sup>1</sup> Although the European Court of Justice has broadened the concept of European citizenship, for example by entitling a European citizen's family members who do not have EU citizenship themselves to some of the rights laid down in EU law, we see, for example, that many of the old member states, including Belgium, have made provisions that limit the freedom of movement and employment for citizens of the new EU countries until 2009, and in some cases until 2011. So, recent developments risk increasing the gap between EU citizens and third-country nationals by creating multiple boundaries, instead of helping to bridge them (Oger, 2007).

As in any other form of citizenship, however, one must also distinguish between the empirical and normative aspects of European citizenship (Kymlicka and Norman, 1994; Closa, 1998). Although, from a legal point of view, citizenship of the Union has hardly progressed in more than a decade, in the meantime there has been an intense debate among theorists in the fields of law, philosophy and social sciences about the possibility of a 'European citizenship' and the creation of a European identity. A European identity will in any case be combined with national identities: one can be simultaneously Flemish, Belgian and European, but not solely European (Brubaker, 1989; Painter, 1998). Painter (1998) and Delanty (2000) both describe the concept of multi-level or multi-identification membership: people are simultaneously a member of the European Union and a member of their national state (and of lower governance levels). We can see this for example in the 2004 Eurobarometer, where only 2% of the Dutch referred to themselves as 'only European' and nearly 7% said that being European took precedence over being Dutch. On the other hand, 58% said that they were Dutch first and European second (Wennekers, 2005). Carrington and Short (1995) show that even children as young as eight years old with a mixed background easily identify with plural 'national' identities. Arnett (2002) argues that, owing to globalization, people develop a bicultural identity: in addition to their local identity, young people also adopt a more global identity. However, he adds that this multi-level identity does not always have only positive implications, because it can create a great deal of confusion, which can lead to the individual denying one of his or her identities. In our more political conception of identity, this might mean that young people show a lack of interest in the higher-level identity, namely the European Union. Isin (2002) stresses a

similar point by saying that post-modernity has allowed groups that were previously excluded and marginalized, such as migrants in Europe, to gain recognition, but that this phenomenon has conversely put further pressure on the limits of citizenship and might eventually cause animosity between certain groups. In effect, we should not immediately equate globalization and post-modernity with tolerance.

For many authors, the problem with European citizenship is that it lacks many of the qualities that tie people to the nation-state. Delanty (2000: 114) for example states that Europe lacks 'core components of a national culture: language, a shared history, religion, an educational system and press or media'. Many authors are looking for the European equivalent of the equation that came into existence in the 19th century and is now almost seen as a dogma: 'state = nation = people' (Hobsbawm, 1997: 23). The search for a specific characteristic of Europe could prove fruitless, because, as Closa (1998) states, the Union lacks almost all sociopolitical traits that are usually associated with nationality and a communitarian understanding of citizenship. Dell'Olio (2005) claims that, when using common denominators to determine national identity, Europeans differ as much among themselves as they do from non-Europeans. This is, in the view of Hainsworth (2006), Fuss (2003) and many others, a main cause of both the democratic deficit and Europeans' scepticism towards the integration project. According to Delanty (2000: 112), 'the more expansive citizenship becomes, the more formalized it is and the less substantive it can be'. This is why for many authors, instead of focusing on what we do not have in common, it is diversity in itself that is the best starting point for a European citizenship (Kostakopoulou, 1998; Habermas, 2002; Habermas and Derrida 2003; Delanty, 2005). Dahrendorf (1994) actually argues that citizenship adds an extra dimension to political life only in a heterogeneous state, because there would hardly be any difference between citizenship and membership of a 'tribe' if it worked only in a culturally homogeneous environment. This leads him to say that 'the true test of citizenship is heterogeneity' (Dahrendorf, 1994: 17). Dahrendorf's view would lead us to see European citizenship as similar to Walzer's definition of what it is to be an 'American': 'a citizenship that allows for the flourishing of the manyness' (Walzer, 2004: 633).

From a theoretical point of view, 'citizenship' refers to either a formal status based on rights and duties, or a belonging to a cultural identity or public participation (Painter 1998; Delanty, 2000; Wallace et al., 2005). Citizenship in a formal sense refers to a state (liberal perspective) or to a nation (communitarian perspective) (Delanty, 2000). In a globalized world, nation-states as institutions of governance are eroding (Painter, 1998). Tambini states that through post-national citizenship 'nationalism itself will not disappear,

but the model of national citizenship will be transformed' (2001: 212). If we look at the available European data concerning young people, Europe is considered a space of opportunities rather than a focal point of identification; this viewpoint implies that it enables people to go where they want to go and offers them economic gains as well as diversified job opportunities. Young people therefore largely perceive European citizenship as the right to study, work or move permanently to any other country in the European Union (Eurobarometer, 1997; 2001). It is important to distinguish between this vision of Europe as a useful 'instrument' and true identification with Europe. Dell'Olio (2005) shows that respondents who say that they feel positive towards EU institutions can nevertheless identify themselves as 'only Italian' and not as 'also European'.

This article will define European citizenship as the feeling of 'belonging' to Europe and the European institutions. This scale will not measure an 'instrumental' attachment to the EU institutions; it will use items that capture identification with Europe. The frequently found negative view of European citizenship might cast doubt on the validity of the concept. Do European citizens really have a European identity or should this be seen as a purely legal and/or theoretical concept without any wider resonance? And, if there is indeed such an identity, we might ask ourselves if it results in more tolerance among individuals. Tolerance will be an indispensable prerequisite if we want a European citizenship that is not equivalent with the idea of a mental 'fortress Europe' but rather an expression of diversity. These issues all point to the importance of researching the connection between the identification with Europe and tolerance.

### **Contribution to the concept of tolerance**

Tolerance towards other groups is an essential element of democratic culture (Almond and Verba, 1963; Dahl, 1998) and European citizenship (Delanty, 1995). Gibson puts it in very simple terms: 'if political tolerance increases, the likelihood of successful democracy increases' (2006: 23). According to different authors, now that Europe is trying to develop a new encompassing form of belonging and citizenship, transcending the nation-state, tolerance should increase and this should create a sense of group trust (Smith, 1992; Soysal, 1994; Painter, 1998). Since the Second World War, three broad theories have been advanced that give a causal explanation of tolerance: the authoritarian personality thesis by Adorno et al. (1950), the contact hypothesis by Allport (1958) and the social identity thesis mainly developed by Tajfel and Turner (Tajfel, 1982; Reynolds and Turner, 2002). Only the last two theories are important for our research and will be briefly described here.

Because much of the initial research on tolerance was driven by social psychologists, most studies have focused on individual-level variables. The contact hypothesis developed by Allport (1958) states that, in specific circumstances, contact with persons of 'out-groups' increases tolerance towards people of these groups. One of the factors leading to increased tolerance is the positive evaluation of this contact by institutions – schools or companies – or by a government (Fritzsche, 2006). This means that the European Union could stimulate tolerance by defining European citizenship as a concept that is clearly an appreciation of diversity and thus yields a positive evaluation of contact with people from diverse groups. Weldon (2006) points to the possible influence of institutions on tolerance in saying that, even after controlling for a large number of individual-level variables, there are still substantial differences between the people of West European nations concerning tolerance. Similarly to Allport, Mutz (2002) has shown that cross-cultural exposure to conflicting ideas makes people more tolerant. He expects that in the larger European Union people will potentially have more contact with other people and ideas and thus possibly develop an increasingly positive attitude toward other cultural groups and/or religions. However, contact can also create tension between different groups, as was apparent in the debate about the 'Polish plumber' during the discussions in France over the EU Constitution.

Although Allport's thesis provides a good insight into the mechanisms of (in)tolerance, many questions remain. Because the positive effects of contact were restricted to certain conditions, social psychologists tried to uncover the cognitive underpinnings of these notions. This enquiry led to the development of the social identity theory, social identity being defined as 'that part of the individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership' (Tajfel, 1982: 24). Further, this leads to a worldview that categorizes people as belonging to either in-group(s) or out-group(s). Because people look for positive self-evaluation, they might emphasize the positive aspects of their in-groups and, albeit not in all cases, the negative aspects of the out-groups (Reynolds et al., 2000). This is even said to happen when there is no conflict between the groups (Tajfel, 1982). Experimental research has been able to produce this in-group/out-group dynamic even in settings where the participants did not know each other and the difference between the groups was minimized as much as possible (for example, by dividing them by tossing a coin), thus bolstering the claim that this is a very powerful dynamic in human relations (Tajfel, 1982). Of course, the degree to which the differences between the groups will be emphasized by any individual is functionally dependent on many variables, for example the importance of group identification to the self-concept,



the salience of the out-group for comparison and the functionality of the comparative dimension (Reynolds et al., 2000).

The way these factors work in forming social identity has been the subject of a great deal of research concerning ethnocentrism and racism, sometimes leading to surprising results. Sniderman et al. (2004) show that, under experimental survey manipulation of Dutch subjects, negative views towards immigrant out-groups by the native in-group are more pronounced under a perceived threat to the national culture than under economic or safety threats. Because a person's social identity is not fixed but is made up of his or her identification with several groups, it can change in differing circumstances. Researchers wondered if it was possible to rearrange these identities in such a way as to be more inclusive by stimulating an identity that encapsulates the former separate group identities; these authors call this a 'superordinate' identity (Kramer and Brewer, 1984). Positive results from stimulating a superordinate identification on ethnocentrism have, among others, been found between Caucasian-American and African-American groups in experimental research (Gaertner and Dovidio, 2005) and survey experiments (Transue, 2007) and between native Dutch and immigrants in survey experiments (Sniderman et al., 2004).

From the point of view of social identity theory, the influence of a European identity can have opposing effects on its young people, depending on the way it is perceived. If it is an affirmation of a mainly West European, Christian identity, then it is actually a confirmation of the national in-group status at a higher level. However, if it is the identification with people from other countries who do not share their language and faith, then it is a superordinate identity including former out-groups, as intended in the theory above. De Vreese and Boomgaardens' research (2005) on European integration points in the latter direction: people with anti-immigrant feelings are more unenthusiastic about European integration and vice versa; this has partly been related to a feeling of 'cultural threat' (McLaren, 2002). The difference with the current research question is that in existing studies the superordinate identity always includes the former out-group, which is not necessarily the case with European identity and immigrants who, for the most part, come from countries outside the EU. This means that we expect the possible positive influence of a superordinate identification to be 'contagious' to subgroups who remain outside this new identity. This kind of survey research might have less internal validity than the experiments of social psychologists with their very strict settings, but one has to keep in mind that one of the biggest problems in social identity theory is that most of its findings come from very artificial experimental settings that are therefore not always transposable to a more realistic environment, where different identities (and

their consequences) might overlap and interact (see Huddy, 2001). This article, therefore, aims at taking real influences into account.

Following Weldon (2006), it is important to differentiate between 'ethnic' social and political tolerance. People are *politically* tolerant if they are willing to allow full 'liberal democratic and political' rights to all others, for example the right of third-country nationals to demonstrate (Mondak and Sanders, 2003; Gibson, 2006). This kind of tolerance is often exemplified by the famous words erroneously ascribed to Voltaire: 'I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it' (cited in Finkel et al., 1999: 205). *Social* tolerance is more related to the evaluation of direct contact with people from another group, for example having a boss from a different ethnic group or allowing one's child to date somebody from another ethnic group. Weldon's (2006) examination of the Eurobarometer data shows that Europeans are much more willing to be politically tolerant towards third-nation foreigners than to mix socially. Therefore, the items comprising our tolerance scale relate to social tolerance, as we try to measure a more direct and deeper tolerance, especially in 16-year-olds for whom the 'hypothetical' granting of political rights might not adequately capture their feelings towards foreign people.

Apart from the theories mentioned, there are some factors that seem to influence tolerance in most settings. We will, therefore, include them as control variables in our analysis. First, many investigations have established a connection between education and tolerance (Weldon, 2006). Separate studies have shown that this relation is not just owing to a better understanding of the social desirability of tolerance among the more highly educated (Wagner and Zick, 1995). Among young people, girls have been found to be more tolerant than boys (Fritzsche, 2006). We will investigate whether an increased feeling of European citizenship leads to greater tolerance.

## Data, methods and the Belgian context

Belgium offers an ideal setting for the study of citizenship, being a society with two large language groups that live in different parts of the country. About 60% of Belgians are Dutch speakers and 40% are French speakers; there is also a small German-speaking minority, who are not included in our research. Belgian federalism has developed a system in which the federal government gives policy-making power to 'communities' (mainly for culture, education, welfare and language policy) and 'regions' (responsible for more economic and employment-related topics), which to a large extent overlap – Brussels being the exception. Belgium is a society with multiple government

levels, making it a linguistically divided country (e.g. the two language groups have a separate labour market and educational system (Billiet et al., 2006).

The cultural divide between the language groups in Belgium has already often been addressed (Billiet et al., 2006). The two regions have different identities. The Flemish/Dutch-speaking identity 'appears to be associated with the protection of the Flemish cultural heritage – in particular the Dutch language – and hence with a more defensive attitude toward other cultures' (Billiet et al., 2003: 243). The Walloon/French-speaking identity, on the other hand, is more 'associated with the socio-economic emancipation of the Walloon region and also with openness toward other cultures and anti-racism' (Billiet et al., 2003: 243). This leads us to the expectation that Dutch-speaking respondents are less tolerant, even if other research indicates that there is no significant difference between the Dutch- and the French-speaking parts with regard to the acceptance of immigrants (De Witte, 1999).

The relationship between European citizenship and tolerance will be tested using the results of the Belgian Youth Survey 2006 (BYS 2006), which was conducted among 6330 16-year-olds in Belgium. The respondents were sampled in the two major language groups, French and Dutch. Dutch respondents were sampled in the region of Flanders and in the bilingual region of the capital, Brussels ( $n = 3453$ ). French-speaking respondents were sampled in the region of Wallonia and again in Brussels ( $n = 2877$ ). To avoid confusion, we will refer to Flemish respondents and Dutch-speaking respondents from Brussels as 'Dutch-speaking' youngsters and to Walloon and Brussels francophone respondents as 'French-speaking' youngsters. The survey contained various questions on notions of citizenship, ethnocentrism, tolerance and other related political attitudes. The data were collected through written surveys in schools. Several researchers visited 112 schools in order to conduct the survey. The schools were selected by place of residence and school system and controlled for the offered tracks (general, technical and vocational) and number of pupils (Hooghe et al., 2006).

In our analysis we control for language groups because, in line with previous research, we expect significant differences. We also take the effect of the socioeconomic background of the family into account, because the more highly educated tend to be more positive towards foreigners (Billiet et al., 1990; Pettigrew et al., 1998; De Witte, 1999). We asked the respondents to state their educational goals in life. This serves as a good indicator of their educational situation; non-reported findings also suggest that it is a good proxy for the educational attainment of the parents and thus the socioeconomic status of the subject.<sup>2</sup> Further, gender might also be an important control variable. Because we intended to measure tolerance towards ethnic minorities, Muslims

and immigrants, we decided to exclude from the analysis all respondents who were not born in Belgium or whose parents were not born in Belgium ( $n = 1887$ ) to avoid making a Type II error (i.e. saying that there is no relationship when there actually is one).

## Main hypothesis and results

In this paper we want to explore the relationship between identification with Europe and tolerance, for example towards ethnic minorities, Muslims or other groups. More specifically, we want to address the question of whether European citizenship promotes or inhibits positive feelings towards outsider groups. Diversity is one of the main characteristics of a new, modern Europe in a globalizing world. We expect that people who identify themselves as 'European citizens' are more tolerant than those predominantly attached to the national or regional level.

Research has shown that the nation-state is the easiest level for people to identify with. One of the key advantages of nation-states is the presence of symbols that allow citizens to express their feelings of belonging (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). The adherence to the nation-state can vary; Carey (2002) shows that people who display stronger feelings of national identity display lower levels of support for the European Union; even if some of them acknowledge the practical aspects of the Union, they certainly do not see it as an object of identification (Dell'Olio, 2005). A first step, therefore, is to see which policy level young people prefer: Europe, Belgium or a lower policy level?

Looking at the results in Table 1, we find that, after Belgium, the local level is very important to youngsters. Although Fuss (2003) finds that Europe constitutes a significant source of political identity for young people, we cannot find such an attachment. Young Belgians feel most attracted to Belgium as a nation-state and to the city level (Table 1). We find significant differences between the language groups, with French-speaking youngsters showing a higher preference than Dutch speakers for the supranational and the global levels (European and world citizen).

Despite the fact that young people see themselves as Belgians in the first place and not as 'Europeans', they do not consider the decisions of the European Union to be of less importance in their daily lives than those of the Belgian or regional governments (Table 1). Whereas for Dutch-speaking youngsters the three policy levels receive about the same score, for French speakers the European Union is the most important policy-level influence. The fact that limited 'affective support' for the EU does not exclude 'utilitarian

Table 1

|   | <i>Dutch-speaking</i> | <i>French-speaking</i> | <i>Mean difference</i> | <i>Significance t-value</i> |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>a. 'In the first place I think of myself as . . . ' (range: 0–5)</b>               |                       |                        |                        |                             |
| a citizen of my town  | 3.74 (1.26)           | 3.52 (1.48)            | 0.229                  | 5.218***                    |
| a citizen of my province  | 3.37 (1.28)           | 3.04 (1.38)            | 0.339                  | 7.968***                    |
| Flemish/Walloon/Bruxellois  | 3.50 (1.41)           | 3.06 (1.51)            | 0.438                  | 9.368***                    |
| Belgian   | 4.05 (1.18)           | 4.17 (1.20)            | -0.112                 | -3.006**                    |
| European  | 3.04 (1.40)           | 3.41 (1.44)            | -0.370                 | -8.255***                   |
| World-citizen   | 2.48 (1.63)           | 3.09 (1.78)            | -0.606                 | -11.305***                  |
| <b>b. 'How important are the decisions of . . . in your daily life?' (range 0–10)</b> |                       |                        |                        |                             |
| Parents   | 7.87 (1.90)           | 7.80 (2.00)            | 0.065                  | 1.058 (n.s.)                |
| Friends   | 7.83 (1.79)           | 7.39 (2.04)            | 0.440                  | 7.210***                    |
| Teachers  | 5.27 (2.34)           | 5.55 (2.42)            | -0.279                 | -3.742***                   |
| European Union  | 3.79 (2.67)           | 3.57 (2.79)            | 0.228                  | 2.621**                     |
| Belgian government  | 3.75 (2.58)           | 3.39 (2.67)            | 0.358                  | 4.311***                    |
| Regional government   | 3.80 (2.57)           | 3.30 (2.59)            | 0.493                  | 6.041***                    |
| <b>c. 'How much trust do you have in the following institutions?' (range: 0–10)</b>   |                       |                        |                        |                             |
| European Parliament   | 5.42 (2.50)           | 5.32 (2.52)            | 0.099                  | 1.246 (n.s.)                |
| Regional parliament   | 5.04 (2.43)           | 4.96 (2.52)            | 0.074                  | 0.935 (n.s.)                |
| Belgian parliament  | 4.80 (2.36)           | 4.68 (2.38)            | 0.113                  | 1.497 (n.s.)                |

Data: BYS 2006;  $N = 4,443$ .

Entries are mean scores; standard deviation between brackets.

Significance:  $p < 0.001 = ***$ ;  $p < 0.01 = **$ ;  $p < 0.05 = *$

support' has already been found in adult samples (Dell'Olio, 2005). These results should also be put in perspective: as we can see in Table 1, politics are less important for young people than persons who are relatively close to them, such as their parents and friends.

Young people do not just believe that the European Union takes important decisions; they also have a certain degree of trust in the European Parliament, more than in the Belgian or regional parliament (Table 1). The Dutch-speaking youngsters tend to have more trust in parliaments in general, but the differences between the language groups are not significant.

In interpreting these results, the respondents' actual knowledge about the European Union must be taken into account. At the time of the survey, only 16% of the respondents knew for example that José Manuel Barosso was the President of the European Commission; 23% knew who the Belgian Minister of Justice was and 42% to which party Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt belonged. According to Wallace et al. (2005), emotional attachment to Europe

indicates a certain interest in European developments. Hence, considering the fact that the young people in the sample have a rather low sense of belonging to the European Union as well as a low level of European knowledge, we might expect them to show little interest in Europe.<sup>3</sup>

A number of questions were asked with the aim of measuring the attitudes of young people towards the (dis)advantages of the European Union. As we can see in Table 2, for young people Europe means a better future, more job opportunities and the opportunity to travel around freely, as well as a guarantee for peace. Whereas many adults consider the European Union to be a bureaucratic institution, this is not the case for the young people in this sample. Nor do they perceive the European Union as a destroyer of national cultural identity. However, the European Union only half-heartedly succeeds in the creation of a European identity, because young Belgians do not feel that the EU makes them into European citizens. However, there is a difference of 14 percentage points between Dutch-speaking (majority disagreeing) and French-speaking (majority agreeing) respondents to this item. In Table 2 we see that the more utilitarian aspects, such as travelling and jobs, prevail over the affective or identity aspect of Europe.

We find different feelings towards Europe and the European Union that might conflate to something approximating ‘European citizenship’. Especially among the French-speaking youngsters, we find a reasonable indication of a belonging to Europe in Tables 1 and 2. These young people

**Table 2** Attitudes towards the European Union (EU): percentages that ‘strongly agree’ and ‘somewhat agree’

|   | <i>Dutch-speaking</i> | <i>French-speaking</i> |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------|
| The EU offers me the opportunity to travel freely on the European continent | 78.8                  | 83.7                   |
| The EU creates a better future and more job opportunities for young people  | 56.9                  | 58.7                   |
| The EU is a guarantee for peace in Europe                                   | 56.2                  | 67.1                   |
| Through the EU I feel a full citizen of Europe                              | 43.1                  | 57.3                   |
| The EU represents a lot of bureaucracy and a waste of money and energy      | 32.1                  | 46.5                   |
| The EU destroys the cultural identity of each country                       | 25.8                  | 38.7                   |
| Number of cases   | 2,695                 | 1,503                  |

Data: BYS 2006; N = 4,443. Entries are frequencies. Range of all questions (1–4), from strongly agreeing, somewhat agreeing, somewhat disagreeing and strongly disagreeing.

certainly appreciate a number of benefits in the European Union and do not especially adhere to scepticism about a Brussels-based bureaucratic monster demolishing national cultures, an image often portrayed during the debate about the EU Constitution. Contrary to the findings of Wallace et al. (2005), the European Union does not carry the lowest priority for young people: it even outperforms Belgian and community institutions in terms of trust and importance. Young people do not feel close to one specific policy level; they feel a little close to all of them.

Out of the questions presented above, we created a 'European citizenship' scale expressing a feeling of really belonging to the European Union. This scale is composed of four items: trust in the European Parliament, the importance attributed to the European Union, the feeling of being a European citizen through the European Union and the feeling of being in the first place European. These are items that capture a sense of belonging to or identification with Europe, which is important for the subsequent use of this scale, because the relationship predicted by authors between tolerance and European citizenship concerns the benefits of supranational identification; it has less to do with a utilitarian vision on travel inside Europe, even if the latter has more adherents in the survey (see the Appendix at the end of this article). The rather moderate Cronbach's alpha (0.56) shows that it is a scale with a low internal consistency, but if we know the theoretical validity of the items we can nevertheless use it (Schmitt, 1996). The fact that our sample consists of young people from all educational levels and the scale is made up of items derived from different question batteries probably further explains the modest performance of this scale (Alwin and Krosnick, 1991; Jennings, 2007).<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, because these are the best items we have at our disposal to measure European citizenship – a concept that in general lacks good empirical measures – we also have to rely on face validity to measure it (Jenson, 2007).

In the second phase of the analysis we will look at the attitudes of young Belgians towards different ethnic groups. First, we offered the subjects a list of statements concerning immigrants or the need for cultural homogeneity. In Table 3 we see that, on almost every item, half of the population shows support for the negative statement towards immigrants. They have difficulties accepting the immigrants' customs, the presence of the immigrants in terms of job security, and so on. Almost four out of ten in the Dutch-speaking group indicate that they do not trust people from other ethnic groups. These rather intolerant attitudes are not a new finding: Eurobarometer surveys (1997, 2001 and 2006, for the general population; Billiet et al., 2006) have already shown that young Belgians are fairly intolerant compared with other European countries. In general, we see that the French-speaking youngsters are more

**Table 3** Attitudes towards immigrants: percentages that ‘agree’ or ‘completely agree’ on the following statements

|   | <i>Dutch-speaking</i> | <i>French-speaking</i> |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------|
| It is better for a country if almost everyone shares the same customs and traditions  | 46.6                  | 37.6                   |
| If a country wants to reduce tensions, it should stop immigration                     | 51.6                  | 48.1                   |
| The presence of too many immigrants is a threat to our way of life                    | 59.7                  | 56.0                   |
| The arrival of new immigrants will make it harder for me to get a decent job later on | 59.1                  | 63.9                   |
| I do not trust people of other ethnic groups  | 38.5                  | 21.1                   |
| Number of cases   | 2,792                 | 1,650                  |

Data: BYS 2006; *N* = 4,443.  
 Range of all questions (1–4), from strongly agreeing, somewhat agreeing, somewhat disagreeing and strongly disagreeing.

tolerant. The only tolerance item where French speakers are less tolerant than Dutch speakers is the job security item; this may be related to the fact that the economic situation is precarious in large parts of the French-speaking region.

Besides general statements about immigrants, tolerance towards specific groups was also measured (Table 4). We asked how close young Dutch/French speakers felt to French/Dutch speakers, Muslims, immigrants, Africans and Caucasian people. Young Belgians feel most closely connected to Caucasians (mean = 7.88; std.dev. = 2.33). As regards the feeling of closeness towards the other language group, we see that even the positive feeling towards ‘Caucasians’ is limited to one’s own language group, lending support to the notion that intolerance constitutes a general personality trait. Young people feel least connected to immigrants, Muslims and African people. For all the items, we find significant differences between the language groups, with the French-speaking youngsters being significantly more tolerant towards the other groups, although they also stay below the mean score for all these tolerance items. Only the feeling of closeness towards ‘Caucasians’ is not significantly different on the two sides of the language barrier.

The respondents were also asked if they could see themselves dating somebody from another cultural or ethnic group one day. In this way, we tried to evoke a real situation and capture the feelings involved. We found a similar pattern, in that once again the respondents trust Caucasian people:



**Table 4** Mean scores for the sense of closeness to members of other groups

|                        | <i>Dutch-speaking</i> | <i>French-speaking</i> | <i>Significance t-value</i> |
|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| French-speaking people | 3.10 (2.82)           | n.a.                   | -5.101***                   |
| Dutch-speaking people  | n.a.                  | 3.59 (2.93)            |                             |
| Muslims                | 2.02 (2.44)           | 3.11 (2.71)            | -12.598***                  |
| Immigrants             | 2.06 (2.40)           | 3.00 (2.71)            | -10.922***                  |
| African people         | 2.81 (2.74)           | 4.08 (2.91)            | -13.489***                  |
| Caucasian people       | 7.91 (2.73)           | 7.83 (2.25)            | 1.103 (n.s.)                |
| Number of cases        | 2,650                 | 1,415                  |                             |

Data: BYS 2006;  $N = 4,443$ .

Entries are mean scores and standard deviation between brackets.

Significance:  $p < 0.001 = ***$ ;  $p < 0.01 = **$ ;  $p < 0.05 = *$

Question: How close do you feel to the following groups? (range: 0–10)

80% think it is possible that they might ever date a Caucasian girl/boy. By contrast, the subjects are quite sure that they will never date an immigrant or a Muslim (70%) and are also fairly sure that they will never date an African. When it comes to a real situation, we again find significant differences for every item at the  $p < .001$  level, except in the case of 'Caucasians'. Additionally, the French-speaking youngsters are more open than the Dutch speakers to the other groups.

We have created a scale for tolerance using the replies to the above questions on tolerance. It is composed of the battery of questions concerning 'dating' and 'feeling close', though including only the attitude questions towards Muslims, immigrants and African people. This is a strong and reliable scale, suitable to be the dependent variable in a regression analysis (see the Appendix).

In a final analysis we will now bring the different elements of our examination together to see whether people who consider themselves real European citizens are more tolerant towards different groups of people and if they have a more tolerant attitude in general. We use an ordinary least squares regression (OLS), with the tolerance scale as the dependent variable (see the Appendix). We opted for the most parsimonious model that is related to the theory instead of adding as many variables as possible in the regression to inflate the explained variance. The analysis consists of two steps: the first model (Model 1) does not control for contact with people of different ethnic groups; in a second model we add this variable to see whether the influence of European citizenship still holds when controlling for Allport's

**Table 5** Mean scores for dating members of other groups (0–5)

|                        | <i>Dutch-speaking</i> | <i>French-speaking</i> | <i>Significance t-value</i> |
|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| French speaking people | 2.40 (1.03)           | n.a.                   | 13.068***                   |
| Dutch speaking people  | n.a.                  | 2.85 (1.07)            |                             |
| Muslims                | 1.76 (0.85)           | 2.39 (1.08)            | -18.870***                  |
| Immigrants             | 1.88 (0.91)           | 2.44 (1.06)            | -16.972***                  |
| African people         | 2.03 (0.96)           | 2.58 (1.10)            | -15.456***                  |
| Caucasian people       | 4.45 (0.77)           | 4.40 (0.83)            | 1.592 (n.s.)                |
| Number of cases        | 2,635                 | 1,394                  |                             |

Data: BYS 2006; *N* = 4,443.

Entries are mean scores; standard deviation between brackets.

Significance: *p* < 0.001 = \*\*\*; *p* < 0.01 = \*\*; *p* < 0.05 = \*

Question: Would you consider dating someone from the following groups? (range: 1–5)

hypothesis (1958). In the first model we can see that the standard control variables of ‘Gender’ and ‘Education’ are completely in line with our theoretical expectations. Girls are more tolerant than boys, and having higher educational aspirations also has a benign effect on attitudes towards other ethnic groups. The strongest parameter among the variables is the linguistic region in which the young people live. Our results show that the regions are already very clearly delimited on this topic at the age of 16. This supports Weldon’s claim that ‘there is a strong relationship between citizen tolerance for ethnic minorities and the degree to which the dominant ethnic tradition is institutionalized in laws, rules, norms of a nation-state’ (Weldon, 2006: 332).

Finally, as we predicted from theory, we find that European citizenship has an effect on tolerance, even after the effects of gender, language group and education are taken into account. This impact is in the same range as that of gender and educational goal. Our theoretical section referred to research showing that tolerance is (in certain circumstances) influenced by the amount of contact people have with members of out-groups. To test this claim, we add a contact variable to see if our results from Model 1 still hold. If we look at the change in explained variance between the models, we see that the contact variable has considerable explanatory power and that it also becomes the largest parameter in our model. Nevertheless, it is clear from the table that, although there is a small decrease in the parameter for European citizenship in this second model, it still stands independently as an explanatory variable for tolerance among the young respondents.

These findings contradict other research that found a relationship between European identification and intolerance towards immigrants. This

**Table 6** Determinants of Tolerance

|  | <i>Model 1</i> | <i>Model 2</i> |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| Gender (0: boy)                        | 0.124***       | 0.109***       |
| Educational goal                       | 0.144***       | 0.141***       |
| Language<br>(0: Dutch-speaking region) | 0.271***       | 0.213***       |
| European citizenship                   | 0.120***       | 0.112***       |
| Contact with diverse people            |                | 0.282***       |
| Explained variance                     | 0.146          | 0.221          |
| Number of cases                        | 3,542          | 3,512          |

Data: BYS 2006.  $N = 4,443$ . Entries are standardized coefficients from OLS-Regression.

Significance:  $p < 0.001 = ***$ ;  $p < 0.01 = **$ ;  $p < 0.05 = *$

Contact with diverse people is a 0–10 scale which measures the ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity of the young peoples' network of friends.

research relied on a very small sample and was – unlike this study – not representative of the Belgian population, as the authors themselves indicate (Licata and Klein, 2002). Our results show that tolerance is a multifaceted phenomenon, and that there are several variables forming tolerant attitudes. This implies that tolerance is a desirable good in a democracy. Moreover, our results stress the importance of educating young people in being European, and thus tolerant, citizens.

## Conclusion

This article has tried to add an empirical part to the normative and theoretical discussion about the consequences of European citizenship. In the bivariate analysis our results show that, although Europe is not on a par with the national Belgian level as a focal point of identification, its score is very similar to that of the lower policy levels. When we ask young people about the importance of decisions at different policy levels, the European Union equals (among Dutch speakers) or surpasses (among French speakers) the different Belgian levels. The European Parliament is also the assembly that instils the most confidence in Belgian youth. This shows that, although Europe may not be their first priority, they do not dismiss its value in policy terms. Concerning tolerance, Belgian youth sadly live up to the expectation gained from previous research on adults (Weldon, 2006): half of them see immigration as a source of tension; four out of ten think everybody should

share the same customs and traditions; and one-third state that they do not trust people who are not from their ethnic group. In addition, many respondents cannot imagine dating someone from another ethnic group one day. There is, nevertheless, a marked difference between the language groups, with Dutch speakers being more ethnocentric than French speakers.

Bringing both elements together, we were able to demonstrate that adherence to a European identity leads to more tolerance, just as some proponents of supranational or superordinate identity have predicted. Young Belgians who see themselves as being European citizens are more tolerant towards ethnic minorities and immigrants, controlling for level of education, origin and gender. This means that identification with Europe can be viewed as a positive choice accompanied by tolerance and openness. The results of the analysis, therefore, do not support fears concerning the rise of a ‘fortress Europe’, possibly with a corresponding antagonistic European identity. Rather, all our findings support Soysal’s (1994) argument that Europe is the first step towards post-national citizenship and solidarity.

Carrington and Short (1995) found in their research that eight-year-old children hardly make any reference to ‘race’ when asked what it means to be ‘British’; it is only at a later stage that this terminology appears in their language (see also Nesdale, 2002). This means that there is no innate sense of an ‘ethnic’ definition of a community. If young people could learn to feel a sense of connection to a European community that already defines itself as a ‘unity in diversity’, this might greatly diminish ethnic intolerance in Europe. This is definitely an interesting challenge for a Union that has been doing much soul-searching following the failure of the European Constitution.

## Appendix

### ‘European Citizenship’-scale (0–10)

|  | <i>Extraction</i> | <i>Component</i> |
|--|-------------------|------------------|
| How much trust do you have in the European Parliament?                                     | 0.538             | 0.733            |
| How far-reaching or important are the decisions of the European Union for your daily life? | 0.512             | 0.716            |
| I consider myself in the first place a European citizen.                                   | 0.396             | 0.629            |
| Thanks to the European Union I feel myself a full citizen of Europe.                       | 0.382             | 0.618            |

Data: BYS 2006; *N* = 4,443. All variables were recoded 0–10. Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.563 (4 items); 45.7% of the variance explained; scale 0–10. Principal Components Analysis.

## Appendix continued

### Tolerance scale (0–10)

|   | Extraction | Component |
|---|------------|-----------|
| Would you consider dating a Muslim?   | 0.813      | 0.797     |
| Would you consider dating an immigrant?                                       | 0.831      | 0.786     |
| Would you consider dating an African person?                                  | 0.789      | 0.776     |
| How close do you feel to the interests, feelings and ideas of Muslims?        | 0.822      | 0.784     |
| How close do you feel to the interests, feelings and ideas of immigrants?     | 0.846      | 0.810     |
| How close do you feel to the interests, feelings and ideas of African people? | 0.756      | 0.757     |

Data: BYS 2006;  $N = 4,443$ . All variables were recoded 0–10. Cronbach's Alpha = 0.831 (6 items); 61.64% of the variance explained; scale 0–10. Principal Components Analysis.

## Notes

- 1 It states that every person holding the nationality of a member state shall be a citizen of the Union and that citizens of the Union shall enjoy the rights conferred by the Treaty and shall be subject to the duties imposed by it. Those rights as an EU citizen are the right to move and reside freely within the territory of the member states; the right to vote and to stand as a candidate at municipal elections in the member state in which one resides; the right to be entitled to protection by the diplomatic or consular authorities of any member state; and the right to petition the European Parliament (Hottinger, 1997).
- 2 The correlation coefficient between educational goal and a composite index of the educational attainment of the parents in our survey is .380 (as a comparison, two similar trust items asked contiguously have a correlation coefficient of .450 in our sample). The parents' educational attainment question produced significantly more missing data because students used the 'other diploma' category more than expected, and very often their description was too unclear to fit into the strict coding scheme.
- 3 However, growing knowledge about the European Union increases trust, and vice versa (Eurobarometer, 2006).
- 4 We also tested whether the scale yielded similar results to those gained from other items (for example, 'Thanks to the European Union I feel myself a full citizen of Europe'), and this is indeed the case. As far as we know, this is also one of the first attempts to construct a scale of European identity.

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