

THE RESURGENCE OF NATIONALISM IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Mădălina Calance
Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași
calancemadalina@yahoo.com

Abstract: *Considering the process of integration and the enlargement of the European Union, the continent's political map changed significantly during the last decades. For most of the European nations, facing the integration is going on the path of the economic and social improvement, which also involves important aspects about the nation-state (national identity, nationalism). This paper will focus on the meanings and the dimensions of contemporary nationalism and will later look at the impact of the nationalist ideas in the EU, in times of recession. The study found out that there are many perspectives of the EU challenging national economies and the state sovereignty but, at the same time, people are aware the imminence of the European identity in their economic and cultural future.*

Keywords: nationalism, national identity, European identity, immigration, populist parties
JEL Classification: F15, F52, F59

INTRODUCTION

In the European history, the idea of nationalism has very deep roots. The nationalist ideology is a chameleon over time, being adapted to the prerogatives of a certain nation, the theoretical interpretations of a historical period or to specific political circumstances. Certainly, nationalism is one of the major phenomena of the last two centuries, whose expression is a reflection of multiplying the nation-states from a dozen (mostly in Europe) to thousands. This increase demonstrates the strength of the principle of self-determination, which proclaims the right of people and nations to establish their own course of political, economic, cultural and social development, without outside interventions.

Under the aegis of globalization, important economic and political changes are occurring throughout the world, due to the activity of multinational or transnational corporations, interstate economic organizations or supranational organizations (such as the European Union), with a major impact on the sovereignty of the national state, considered to be more powerless in solving global problems such as: monetary policy, security, the regulation of commercial activities, etc. The new shape of world politics is emerging the idea of the state losing sovereignty in favour of higher political entities. There are many aspects of the European Union challenging national sovereignty. This fact is feeding the nationalist and populist criticism and is shaping a resistance phenomenon. Therefore, we can notice an antagonistic relationship between *nationalists*, focusing on the set of

interests and aspirations of a nation and *supra nationalism*, which reveals the possibility of higher authorities to manage and enforce rules and judgments directly to the national structures.

On the other hand, by facilitating trade flows, financial and international migration, integration seems to dissipate the political borders of nation-states, not only economical, but socially as well. The national identity is now facing especially the contact with other national cultures. In both, a sociological or psychological perspective, the approach of a unified society is paradoxically emphasizing notions as "difference", "identity" or "independence". Whether individuals are single or organized in communities, they always feel the need for distinction. The European Union understood this imperative, and therefore adopted the motto "Unity in diversity" (lat. *In varietate concordia*), which supports the reinforcement of national identities.

1. THE PAST AND PRESENT OF EUROPEAN NATIONALISM

An Encyclopaedia Britannica* overview submits that nationalism is an ideology based on the premise that the individual's loyalty and devotion to the nation-state surpass other individual or group interests. Otherwise, at a global level, nationalism is a doctrine that differentiates the individuals in their nationality. This view tends to be anachronistic in the context of a galloping XXIst century globalization. Inevitably, the new political system created the dilemma of nation-state. Furthermore, the socio-cultural interconnectivity leads to the emergence of nationalist ideas that are either justified or exaggerated.

Nationalism was the most successful political force of the XIXth century. According to the English economist John A. Hobson (2005) during the nineteenth century "the struggle towards nationalism, or establishment of political union on a basis of nationality, was a dominant factor alike in dynastic movements and as an inner motive in the life of masses of population. That struggle, in external politics, sometimes took a disruptive form [...] or sometimes it was a unifying or a centralising force, enlarging the area of nationality. [...] Sometimes nationality was taken as a basis of federation of States, as in United Germany and in North America. It is true that the forces making for political union sometimes went further, making for federal union of diverse nationalities, as in the cases of Austro-Hungary, Norway and Sweden, and the Swiss Federation.

However, the general tendency was towards welding into large strong national unities the loosely related states and provinces with shifting attachments and alliances that covered large areas." (p.3)

* www.britannica.com

In middle of the XXth century the European nationalism loses its original meaning becoming more aggressive, by promoting chauvinism, racism and xenophobia, especially in countries with dictatorial (fascist) regime. The Second World War ends with the communist regimes takeover, the nationalism being transformed in empathy for the national working class and xenophobia for the capitalist side. At the end of the century, the collapse of communism and the European Union enlargement were succeeded by the removal of anti-democratic aspects.

With the European Union, the national boundaries are redrawn. The supra-national character of the Union requires that all member states should surrender a part of their sovereignty by correlating the legislation and applying the directives of the European institutions. Supranational is normative, so the EU institutions (the European Court of Justice, the European Court of Human Rights or the Commission) impose standards on states. This creates a reaction from the far-right parties, seeking to redefine the principles of states and the national identity against the supranational institutions.

Many voices, from the academic or the political field, are putting into question the power of the nation state, the nationalist ideas and the future of national economies, as well. According to Riva Kastoryano (2010), nationalism is a major challenge for the EU by raising the issue of minorities, identity and diversity and questioning the Union's capacity to lead the states beyond their features. On the other hand, the economic recession proves once again that the emergence of nationalism is a condition.

In times of austerity, the far-right parties are rising in Europe, fed by growing nationalist resentments of citizens or immigrants. These parties have managed to legitimize policies by nationalist and protectionist approach, to please the people of Europe. Cas Mudde (2004 a) studies the issue of populist parties and defines them as „political parties that share an ideology which combine features as: nationalism, xenophobia, authoritarianism, or populism” (p.4). The same author claims that” nationalism entails a political doctrine arguing the convergence of state (the political unit) and nation (the cultural unit); xenophobia refers to the fear of anything alien (including people, ideas, habits); authoritarianism denotes a strict belief in law and order (yet not necessarily an antidemocratic attitude); and populism refers to an ideology that considers society ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic 'pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people” (Mudde 2004 b, p. 543).

2. NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN IDENTITY

The meaning of national identity is based on the concept of nation-state (as its founding principle) that relies on cultural, historical or ethnic references. Therefore, the approaches of national identity are configured on cultural, ethnic or historical backgrounds.

Anthony Smith (1991) sees national identity as the most fundamental and inclusive of all collective identities (class, gender, race, religion, etc.). For Smith, the nation-states and the national identity are fundamental dimensions of the modern world, because of their omnipresence and universality. He claims that "in the cultural sphere, national identity is revealed in a whole range of assumptions and myths, values and memories, as well as in language, law, institutions and ceremonies. Socially, the national bond provides the most inclusive community, the generally accepted boundary within which intercourse normally takes place and the limit for distinguishing the 'outsider'. The nation may also be seen as the basic unit of moral economy, in terms of both territory and of resources and skills" (p. 144).

Smith (1991) speaks about national identity in political terms as determining the composition of the regime's personnel and legitimating the policy goals and administrative practices for every citizen. Also, "the nation and the national identity, by commanding the basic political allegiance of citizens, have become the only recognized source of 'inter-national legitimacy', of the validity of a system of states in each region and continent, and ultimately in the world as a whole." (p. 144).

Regarding the relations between the Union and the Member States, the European Constitutional Treaty brings the obligation to respect the national identities and the fundamental political and constitutional structures of the Member States*. Otherwise, statistics show that the feelings of belonging to EU are tending to be very similar in nature to the way citizens are proud of their nationality.

2.1 Protecting national identity

On a late 90's survey[†] initiated by The European Values Study questioning the opinion on the European Union, many people believed that EU was an organism able to protect national identity.

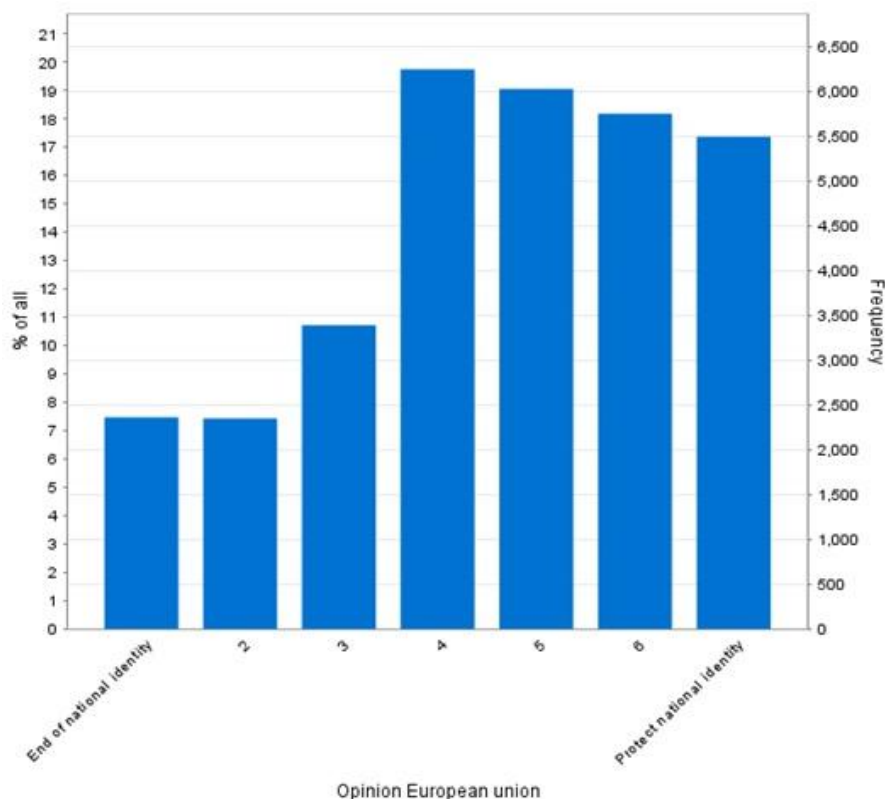
* http://europa.eu/scadplus/constitution/objectives_en.htm

† Research area: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Northern Cyprus, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany (East/West), Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Italy, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Republic of Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Republic of Montenegro, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine.

For them, only a truly united Europe could protect its states national, historical and cultural identities and their national economic interests from the challenges of the superpowers. Few people were thinking that unifying the European states would mean the end of their national, historical and cultural identities. Their national economic interests would also be sacrificed.

As we can see in Figure 1, there is a greater percentage of the answers favouring the idea of European Union as protective for the national identity (about 75 %):

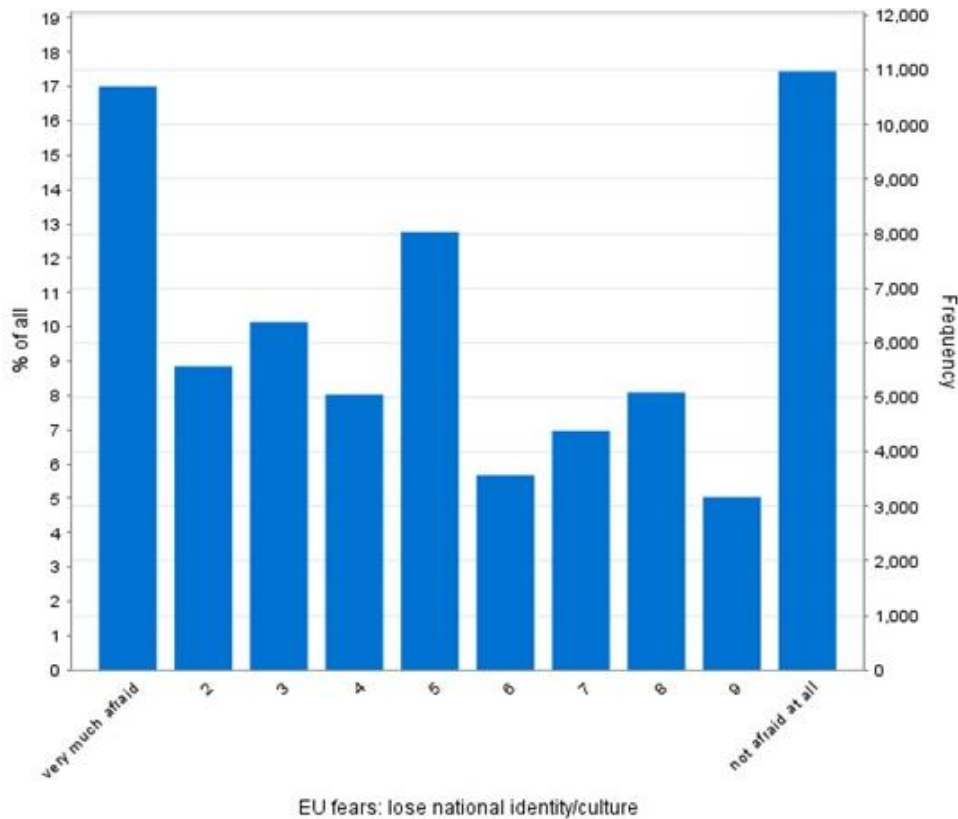
Figure 1 – Opinion on European Union: National Identity (1990-1999)



Source: Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences (<http://zcat.gesis.org/>)

In 2008, the fear of loosing national identity was more intense, due to important factors such as the global crisis, the unemployment or the immigration. If ten years before some people may have had fears about the consequences of the European Union openness, in times of recession, the frequency of sceptical views has increased considerably. As we can see in Figure 2, the percentage of people who answered they were ” very much afraid” of loosing national culture or identity almost equals the percentage of negative answers, of people saying they are ”not afraid of all” (17%).

Figure 2 – Fear of loosing national identity (2008)



Source: Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences (<http://zacat.gesis.org/>)

2.2 Immigration

Immigration affects the national economic system and always represented an important social problem. The European nationalism of the XIXth century was an unifying force which brought together people of diverse backgrounds at the price of subordinating their ethnic identities to the larger territorial unit dominated by the secular state (Pamir, 2005). Today, with the EU consolidation, the state and the ethnic identities operate and interact in a larger, common space. With the dissipation of borders induced by increased international collaboration and the influx of labor force in the European market, it offers the opportunity for business to expand and for millions of people to have better jobs, higher incomes or just a better lifestyle. At the same time we are facing a negative phenomenon, because the mobility of individuals comes with the external migration phenomenon.

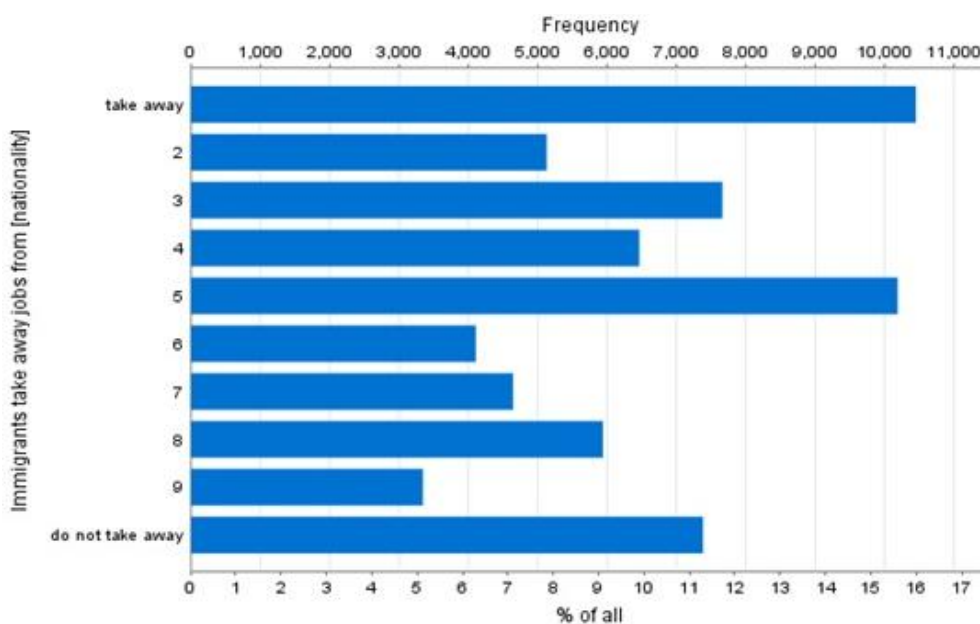
Furthermore, the international migration flows can be considered by the host population as a threat to the national identity and can cause nationalist reactions of rejection. In response to xenophobia of the host population the immigrants could preserve their national identity and

maintain strong links with the original community. Instead of a uniform European society, as a result of integration, we are witnessing an increasing diversity inside the national space.

Thus, penetration and mixture of individuals from different cultural backgrounds other than the reference country are leading to the development of multicultural communities, even within nation-states. In Europe, the evolution of multicultural states is a major threat to nationalist ideology, and migration continues to erode faith in the nation-state, being a challenge for cultural heritage of nations, as well. In fact, there is a rare situation when a state administers a homogeneous community. Therefore, nationalism finds expression inside the communities living within nation-states and aspires to autonomy or their own state constitution (e.g. the Hungarians in Transylvania).

As we can see in the below charts (figures 3 and 4), many people are considering that immigrants take jobs away from natives in a country and will become a threat to society, and only few disagree with this assumptions.

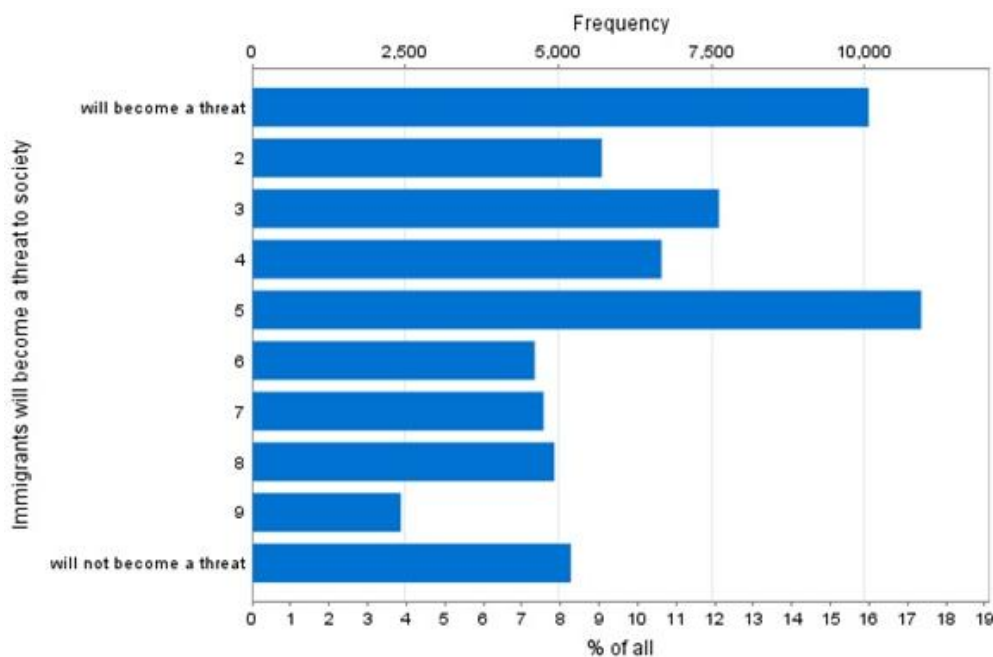
Figure 3 – EU citizens opinion on immigrants taking their jobs



Source: Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences (<http://zcat.gesis.org/>)

About 40% of respondents asked in the survey believed that immigrants are causing damages on the national labor market. A similar percentage sees the future of society affected by the proportion of immigrants.

Figure 4 – EU citizens opinion on immigrants representing a social threat



Source: Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences (<http://zacat.gesis.org/>)

2.3 The nationalist parties

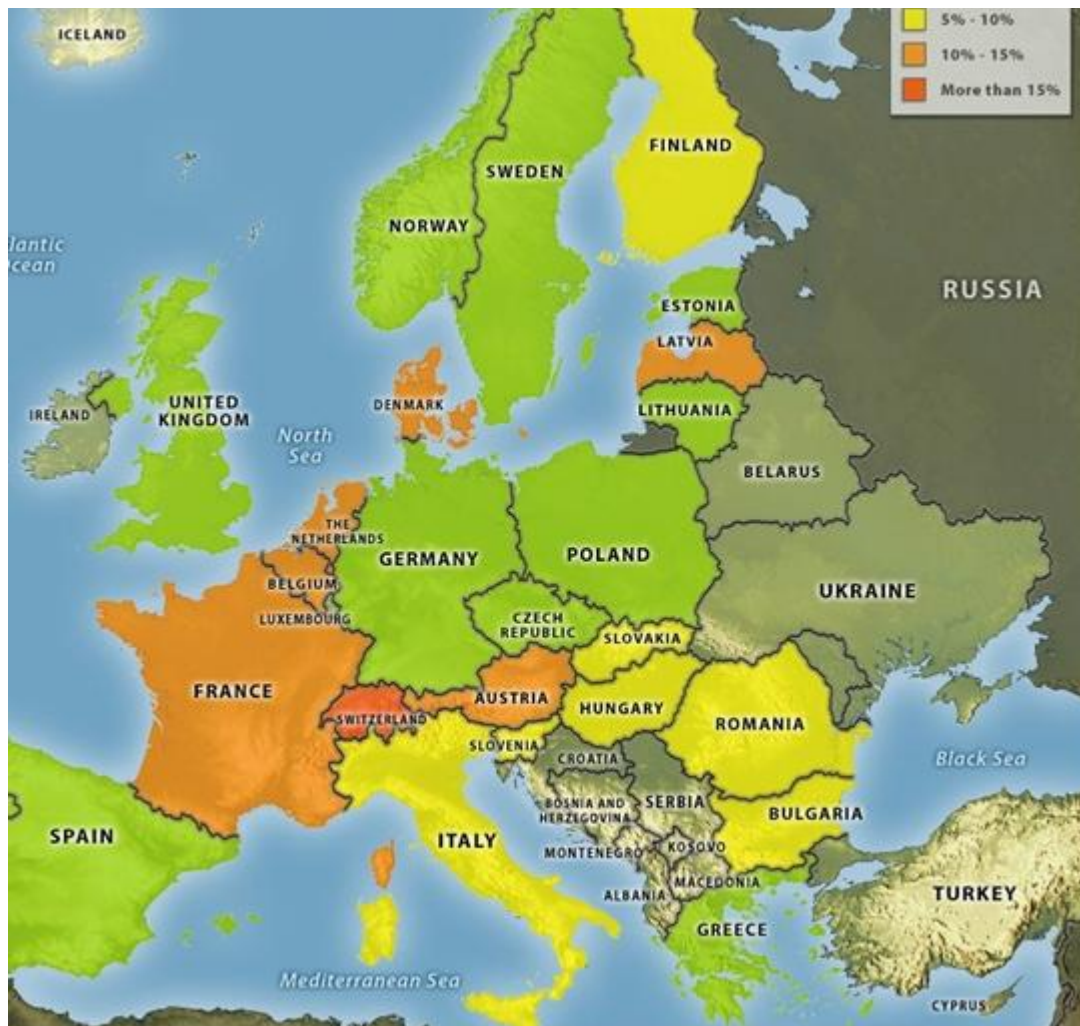
The political and economic history of Europe shows us that the economic recession leads to the emergence of nationalism and enhances the credibility of nationalist governments. We have the example of the '29-'33 crisis that paved the way for Hitler or Mussolini's nationalist governments.

The current global recession hit hard the Euro Zone, challenging the economy and the common currency. Moreover, the instability, the negative "domino" effects of globalization, the inequality and poverty in developing countries, the dependence on powerful supranational bodies are often causing discontents and emerging nationalist ideas, that are expressed mostly through the voice of nationalist or populist parties. In Finland, Austria, Sweden, Denmark, Hungary, the Netherlands, Italy, France or Belgium the rise of populist, xenophobic, Europhobic parties are challenging the European democracy. They represent the voice of citizens, which are disrupted by the globalization, the job losses, or immigration.

BBC News Europe also indicates a resurgence of nationalism in Europe by recording the electoral results for some of the most successful nationalist/ anti-immigrant parties in Europe, exceeding 10 % (figure 5). The France National Front (FN), The Dutch Freedom Party and the Danish People's Party, which are anti-Islamist, True Finns party, in Finland, which is eurosceptic

and a strong opponent of the immigration, etc., they all have great political influence by achieving trust and votes from the electorate, in the past 3 years.

Figure 5 – Average votes for nationalist parties in the last 3 general elections



Source: www.stratfor.com

According to a STRATFOR* (2011) study, in the minds of many nationalist parties in Europe, the ongoing economic crisis "has corroborated much of that which they advocate: those immigration policies should be reformed, that the European integration process should be reverted, and that their national identities should be protected."

In central Europe, offensive or defensive nationalism are a source of tension between neighbor states, such as Hungary, which would grant Hungarian citizenship to ethnic Hungarians outside its borders and Romanians, seeking to complete the Romanian territory. Bulgaria is fighting

* The world's leading private intelligence firm (www.starfor.com)

against Muslim Turkish and Roma minorities. Each of these problems finds support in the progressive nationalist speeches of the populist parties. A degeneration of the situation is a major threat for the already fragile European populations, involving their habits and lifestyles.

The fact that EU states shared their sovereignty is a source of ambiguity, paradox and nationalist extremes, as well. Today's nationalism, far from defining the territorial boundaries of states, is expressed by targeting immigration, Islam or multiculturalism for strengthening the borders that define the national identity.

CONCLUSIONS

Nationalism is made in Europe; the historical experience of all European nations tells us that its story will never end. Great social and economic processes like the integration or the globalization can find a serious opponent in extreme nationalism.

Once again, in times of massive immigration and crisis, Europe encountered the resurgence of nationalism. Of course, restoring industrial and trade policies by making them more offensive could abolish criticisms against the economic openness of the EU. In addition, the acceptance of immigration may be assured by a more active integration policy.

Economic and cultural international relations will always be affected by the differences between people, providing tensions, intolerance, and rejection of the other. Not all these nationalist issues will withdraw in the near future. This is why the European democracy is often helpless in front of the simplistic populist thinking. Only by assuming and highly asserting its own values, the European model of society can defend itself and protect the national identity.

REFERENCES

Europe: Nationalist resurgence (2011), available on BBC News Europe, accessed on February 2012 at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-13115454>.

Hobson, A.J. (2005) *Imperialism: A Study*. New York: Cosimo Inc.

Kohn, H. (n.d) *Nationalism*, available at <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/405644/nationalism>.

Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences, accessed on February 2012 at: <http://zacat.gesis.org/>.

Mudde, C. (2004 a) *Globalization: The multi-faced enemy?*, CERC Working Paper. No.3, pp.4-27.

Mudde, C. (2004 b) *The Populist Zeitgeist*, Oxford: Government & Opposition. No. 3, pp 542-563.

Pamir, P. (1997) *Nationalism, Ethnicity and Democracy: Contemporary Manifestations*, The International Journal of Peace Studies, vol. 2, no. 2, accessed on February 2012 at: http://www.gmu.edu/programs/icar/ijps/vol2_2/pamir.html.

Kastoryano, R. (2010) *L'Europe face aux nationalismes*, accessed on February 2012 at http://www.lemonde.fr/cgi-bin/ACHATS/acheter.cgi?offre=ARCHIVES&type_item=ART_ARCH_30J&objet_id=1139219.

Smith, D. A. (1991) *National Identity*, Reno, Nevada: University of Nevada Press.

The European Crisis Is Feeding Support for Nationalist Political Parties, post originally appeared at Stratfor, accessed on February 2012 at: http://articles.businessinsider.com/2011-11-08/europe/30372377_1_european-union-european-financial-system-nationalist-parties/2.

The founding principles of the Union, The official website of the European Union, accessed February 2012 at http://europa.eu/scadplus/constitution/objectives_en.htm.

www.starfor.com