

Psycho-social effects of transition to the Euro, a longitudinal study

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Abstract

The research aim is to study some of the effects of the introduction of the Euro as a single currency, on attitudes towards the single common currency itself as well as on national and European identity. The study, of longitudinal type, involved three waves: the first one was conducted in November 2001, before the introduction of the Euro; the second one was completed in March 2002 (at the end of the period of double monetary circulation); the data from the third wave was collected in March 2003 (one year after the end of the period of the double monetary regimen). In the first and the second wave, a convenience sample of 255 Italian adults was used; in the third wave, another sample of adults was involved with socio-demographic characteristics as close as possible to the previous one. The questionnaires, similar for all three waves, contained scales for the measurement of national and European identity and of attitude towards the introduction of the new currency (semantic differential). Other questions concerned economic effects and the perception of threats to national identity. Data was analysed by means of confirmatory factor analysis, analysis of variance and analysis of regression. The aim of these analyses was to point out the changes in attitudes towards the Euro after its introduction as a currency and at March 2003, one year later. Therefore, the aim is to investigate if national and/or European identity had been reinforced as a result and to consider the factors responsible for these changes.

Keywords: Attitudes towards the Euro; National identity; European identity

Introduction

On the first of January 2002, the Euro became the official currency of the 12 European Community countries. As Burgoyne, Routh & Ellis (1999) and Servet (1999) have emphasized, this event does not represent only an economic substitution operation of an account unit, that is, of one payment instrument with another, but much more. The legal currency, in fact, is not merely an instrument of exchange without social connotation but is a means by which individuals experience a sense of national belonging. It is also frequently perceived as an expression of the sovereignty of a country and a symbol that represents the country as a whole.

The research conducted before the introduction of the Euro consistently indicated a favourable attitude towards the single currency in the countries of southern Europe (Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece). The attitude of the centre-northern European countries (as Netherlands, United Kingdom, Sweden and Germany) has always been more critical. For the latter, their pride in national currencies and the success of their respective economies was the key reason for their reluctance to abandon their own currency (Dehm & Müller-Peters, 2001; Müller-Peters, 1998; Pepermans & Verleye, 1998; Routh & Burgoyne, 1998; van Everdingen & van Raaij, 1998). By contrast, the single currency did not represent a threat to the national pride of the southern European group of countries. These results have been interpreted in the light of the Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In this theory, social identity is defined as the individual's awareness that he or she belongs to certain social groups together with the emotional significance and value that this has (Tajfel, 1981). National identity can be considered to be a particular type of social identity, a definition of self that includes the nation to which individuals belong (van Everdingen & van Raaij, 1998). This identity generates emotional attachment and reveals itself also in collective symbols, such as the currency. In some countries of Central Europe, in particular in Germany (Dehm & Müller-Peters, 2001), with the introduction of the Euro, an important symbol of positive distinctiveness (as in the case of the Mark) disappeared. Therefore a negative correlation between national and European identity was found, suggesting a degree of incompatibility between the two identities. In the countries of southern Europe, instead, national and European identity coexisted¹. In these countries the national identity, however positive, is created by focusing on dimensions, other than economic-politic ones, such as history, culture and landscape and on where these nations consider themselves superior in comparison to other European nations (Cinnirella, 1997).

¹ See the results of Luna-Arocas et al. (2001) and Díez Medrano & Gutiérrez (2001), concerning Spain and Portugal; and Manganelli, Canova, Capovilla & Cotone (2001), concerning Italy.

In addition to the variables concerning identity, an important impact on attitude was due to expectations regarding the micro and macro economic consequences linked to the introduction of the Euro. The more that people were convinced there would be positive economic effects, the more that the attitudes towards the single European currency were positive (Pepermans & Müller-Peters, 1999; Manganelli et al., 2001). Also the data of the longitudinal studies, carried out by the Eurobarometer, follow a similar pattern as described above.

But we now consider the data relative to periods following the introduction of the Euro, giving particular attention to Italy. The Italian report of Eurobarometer number 57 of October 2002 (Eurobarometer 57 - National Report Standard, 2002) shows that the success of the transitional phase to the single currency in Italy has contributed to make Italians' attitude towards the Euro still more favourable, in comparison with the previous surveys. Italians have accepted the Euro with an enthusiasm that exceeds the average in the other countries of Monetary Economic Union: 70% of those interviewed consider the fact that from the first of January 2002 the Euro replaced the Lira to be a very good or rather good thing, while the European average is 53%. However in the March 2003 edition of Eurobarometer 58 (Eurobarometer 58 - National Report Standard, 2003) it is emphasized that, even if the majority of Italians interviewed confirmed their support of the Euro, the favourable attitude towards the single currency decreases abruptly: only for 52% the introduction of the Euro was a very good or rather good change. The same tendency to show a less positive evaluation of the single currency has been found in the whole Euro zone. This decrease in support coincides with a change in the perception of prices, and is particularly marked in Italy where 81% (24% more in comparison to the spring survey of 2002) of the respondents think that after the introduction of the Euro the prices have increased because of upward rounding (Eurobarometer 58, 2002). In addition to this, after a very strong start, it took a great deal of work for the Euro to replace the Liras, Italian people are in fact among the citizens of the EU who declare the most that they are very or quite attached to the ex national currency (71% of Italians vs an EU average of 61%), demonstrating a kind of nostalgia or regret for the old Liras.

The research that will be presented aims to study the impact on the attitude towards the Euro of national and European identity and of the evaluations of the economic consequences of the single currency introduction. The results of two studies, carried out at different times (that is, before and after the introduction of the Euro) will be described. As previously argued, it is expected that there will be: a) a positive correlation or independence between national and European identity; b) a positive impact of European identity on attitudes towards the Euro; c) a positive attitude towards the Euro, but dropping in the last study (March 2003); d) a worsening in the evaluation of the economic effects, in the last study.

Regarding attitudes towards the introduction of the Euro, we referred to a two-components model of attitude (Bagozzi, Lee, van Loo, 2001): a) evaluative component: appreciation of a target or a behaviour based on the fact that they follow or are consistent with social norms or they are judged right and useful; b) affective component: refers to an appreciation judgement, the expression of positive or negative feelings and emotions.

Finally, the differences concerning some socio-demographic variables (gender, age, level of education) in the considered constructs will be analysed.

Method

The first study², of longitudinal type, was carried out in November 2001 and in March 2002, the second one in March 2003.

Subjects

Study 1. There were 255 adults participating in the first wave, and 239 in the second. Of the latter 97% were living in the North of Italy (Veneto and Lombardia regions): 120 (50%) were female and 119 (50%) male. 24% are aged between 19 and 25 years, 35% between 26 and 34 years, 21% between 35 and 50 years, while 20% of respondents are between 51 and 75 years. As regards to the level of education: 51% had attended high school, 22% possessed a university degree, 21% had attended primary and secondary school and 6% had a professional qualification or equivalent. With regard to profession, 57% of the sample had a clerical or technical position or were teachers, 17% worked as workers, 11% had a professional or a managerial position, and 3% were sales people, whilst 5% were retired, 6% were housewives and 1% were students.

Study 2. In the second study 240 people were interviewed, resident in the same Italian regions as the first study, controlling the variables age, gender and level of education. Therefore this third group matching the group of the

² Some of the results of this research was presented at XXVII Annual Colloquium on Research in Economic Psychology / SABE 2002 Conference on Behavioural Economics, 30th June – 4th July, 2002, Turku, Finland.

239 respondents of study 1 second wave regarding the socio-demographic variables indicated before. However the profession variable has not been controlled³. It is observed that neither sample is representative of the Italian population.

Material

Study 1. Two questionnaires (for the first and the second wave) were used, in order to examine different aspects concerning the introduction of the common currency, and to compare expectations and attitudes of people before and after the introduction of the euro. The questionnaires included:

Identity measures. Identification with the Italian national group was measured with the Brown, Condor, Mathews, Wade and Williams' (1986) scale. Regarding the *National identity* the five items were: "It is important for me to be Italian", "Personally, I identify with Italians", "I feel strong ties to Italians", "I am glad to be Italian", "I consider myself Italian". The response alternatives were: "strongly disagree" (1), "quite disagree" (2), "neither disagree/agree" (3), "quite agree" (4), "extremely agree" (5). The same five items were used for the *European identity* as in the national identity scale, using the word "European" instead of the word "Italian".

Threats perception to national identity. To investigate this topic we used the following four statements⁴: "A country should maintain its national and economic character to differentiate itself from other countries", "By changing currency, Italy will lose a part of its national identity", "A country which does not have its own currency is not a true country", "I would have preferred that Italy hadn't become a part of the European Union". The response scale was: "strongly disagree" (1), "quite disagree" (2), "neither disagree/agree" (3), "quite agree" (4), "strongly agree" (5).

Expectations of economic effects. To measure the perception of possible economic effects linked to the Euro introduction, we used five items: "The value of your savings", "The prices of goods", "The cost of living", "The value of your wage", "Your pension". The response alternatives were: "decreased" (1), "slightly decreased" (2), "stay the same" (3), "slightly increased" (4), "increased" (5).

Attitudes towards the introduction of the Euro. These were measured with eight seven-point scales of semantic differential: "pleasant/unpleasant", "nasty/nice", "undesirable/desirable", "agreeable/disagreeable", "crazy/wise", "useless/useful", "advantageous/disadvantageous", "beneficial/harmful". The concept was: "The introduction of European common currency is...".

Study 2. The questionnaire used in the second study comprised the same items described before. There was also included a question about political orientation; this has been measured by means of a graphical scale (10 centimetres) whose extremes were labelled as "left" and "right".

The questionnaires ended with a request for information of a socio-demographic kind (gender, age, level of education, residence and profession).

Results

Measurement analysis

This analysis has been conducted using the data of the 255 participants of the first study. Initially, to test a two factors structure of the attitude, a model of confirmatory factor analysis with two correlated factors and five observed variables has been conducted by means of LISREL 8.3 statistical package (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). The results of this first analysis show satisfactory fit indices (Table 1) not falsifying the hypothesis of the two factors. The scales representative of the evaluative component were "crazy/wise", "useless/useful", "beneficial/harmful", "advantageous/disadvantageous"; those representative of the affective one were: "nasty/nice"; "undesirable/desirable"; "pleasant/unpleasant", "agreeable/disagreeable".

Also in the case of expectations about economic effects, we proceeded to test a model of confirmatory factor analysis with two correlate factors and four observed variables. The first of the two factors regards micro-economic consequences (the value of own savings, of the wage or of the pension) and the second the macro-economic consequences (the prices of goods and the cost of living). The results do not falsify the hypothesis of the two factors since the fit indices are satisfactory (Table 1).

³ Post-hoc controls indicate that this variable is distributed differently in the two studies [$\chi^2(7) = 25,43, p < .0001$]: the convenience sample of the first study is composed of more people in clerical or technical positions or teachers (57% in study 1 vs 44% in study 2); in the second study, in comparison to the first one, there are more students (1% in study 1 vs 7% in study 2).

⁴ These items, like those concerning expectations of economic effects, are drawn from Müller-Peters et al. (1998).

Regarding the other constructs (national and European identity, threats perception to national identity), analyses show a unidimensional structure (Table 1). The reliability has been tested by means of Cronbach's alpha (Table 2). As from Table 2, the coefficients α are acceptable in all three waves of the research.

Table 1: Goodness-of-fit tests models of first wave

Models	χ^2	d.f.	$p \cong$	RMS EA	CFI	NNFI
1) Attitude toward the introduction of the Euro (two factors)	23.20	8	.00	.08	.98	.97
2) Economic effects (two factors)	0.66	1	.42	.00	.99	.99
3) National identity (one factor)	3.76	2	.15	.06	.99	.99
4) European identity (one factor)	4.51	2	.10	.07	.99	.98
5) Threats perception to national identity (one factor)	1.60	2	.44	.00	.99	.99

Table 2: Reliability of measures in the two studies

Constructs	November 2001	March 2002	March 2003
Italian identity	.89	.90	.90
European identity	.88	.92	.89
Threats perception to national identity	.74	.75	.72
Micro-economic effects	.72	.71	.73
Macro-economic effects	.79	.78	.69
Affective attitude	.86	.87	.86
Evaluative attitude	.84	.80	.80

Therefore we have proceeded to calculate the composite scores (Table 3). Analysis of the univariate variance (oneway), with Student Newman-Keuls post-hoc test, have been conducted in order to analyse the effects of the variable age and level of education; while the Student t for independent sample has been used in order to verify the significance of the differences relative to the gender variable. The comparisons between the means of the scores of November 2001 and March 2002 have been conducted by means of the Student t test for paired sample; those between the scores of March 2002 and March 2003 by means of the calculation of the Student t for independent sample.

Table 3. Mean, standard deviation and t test of composite scores in the two studies

Constructs	November 2001		March 2002		March 2003		Comparison November 2001 - March 2002 t(238)	$p \leq$	Comparison March 2002 - March 2003 t(477)	$p \leq$
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD				
Italian identity	3.84	.91	3.93	.84	3.94	.81	-2.26	.03	-.13	n.s.
European identity	3.59	.75	3.59	.79	3.28	.77	-.02	n.s.	4.34	.001
Threats perception to national identity	2.28	.94	2.22	.84	2.36	.88	-.79	n.s.	-1.78	n.s.
Micro-economic effects	2.91	.45	2.83	.41	2.28	.71	2.13	.03	10.36	.001
Macro-economic effects	3.67	.62	4.00	.55	4.68	.50	-7.12	.001	-14.13	.001
Affective attitude	4.55	1.14	4.95	1.11	4.64	1.21	-6.29	.001	2.92	.01
Evaluative attitude	5.05	1.19	5.29	1.12	4.83	1.16	-3.48	.001	4.41	.001

Note: All scores are different from the central point of the scale, $p \leq .05$; ° Response scale from 1 to 5; Response scale from 1 to 7.

In November 2001, before the introduction of the Euro, the respondents showed a quite high level of identification with their own country and a positive European identity, weaker however than the national one. The introduction of the Euro had not been perceived as a threat to their national identity. The respondents expected weak negative effects on the economic level. Comparing the scores of men and women, it emerged that women more than men expected there to be an increase in cost of living and goods prices ($p \leq .04$); while men had an affective attitude towards the Euro more positive than women ($p \leq .03$). In this first wave, older people showed a stronger level of attachment to their own country, in contrast to younger people, $F(3,235) = 3.13$, $p \leq .03$. The most educated people evaluated the introduction of the Euro more favourably, $F(3,235) = 3.57$, $p \leq .02$; while less educated people perceived the threat to national identity more strongly, $F(3,235) = 6.16$, $p \leq .001$.

After the introduction of the Euro in March 2002, the respondents perceived negative economic effects, but not particularly strong: at micro-economic level they pointed out a small decrease in their own money value (wages, pensions, savings); at the macro-economic level, an increase in inflation. The attitude towards the Euro was, however, still positive, above all concerning the evaluative component: it was thought that the introduction of the Euro was a positive, favourable and useful event. Also in this wave, the older group identified itself more with its own nation than the younger interviewees, $F(3,235) = 3.28$, $p \leq .03$; while the younger (19-25 years) manifested an affective attitude towards the Euro less favourable than the other groups, $F(3,235) = 3.56$, $p \leq .02$. In this wave the most educated people manifested a greater sense of European identity, $F(3,235) = 4.60$, $p \leq .01$, and perceived a lower level of threat to identity, $F(3,235) = 5.94$, $p \leq .01$. There were not, alternatively, significant differences concerning the gender variable.

In the second study the respondents thought that the introduction of the Euro had negative effects both at the micro and macro-economic level: they perceive, in fact, a clear decrease in the value of their own money and an increase in prices and inflation. Respondents did not feel themselves threatened regarding their national identity. They showed a quite strong degree of identification with their country and Europe. The attitude towards the introduction of the Euro, in its evaluative and affective component, was still positive. The women identified themselves more with their country than did the men ($p \leq .01$). Younger interviewees were more optimistic about the effects that the Euro had at micro-economic level, while interviewees between 30 and 50 years were less optimistic, $F(3,236) = 3.37$, $p \leq .02$. As in the previous wave, people with a higher level of education showed a stronger identification with Europeans, $F(3,236) = 3.74$, $p \leq .02$; while those with a lower level of education perceived a stronger threat to national identity, $F(3,236) = 4.52$, $p \leq .01$. The latter always identified themselves with Italians more than others, $F(3,236) = 6.37$, $p \leq .001$.

Comparisons between the data of November 2001 and March 2002 have showed many significant differences between the scores of the same variables (Table 3). In March there was found to be a strengthening of national identity, the expectation of more negative economic effects (that is, a decrease in their own money value and an increase in inflation), while their attitude towards the Euro became more positive. In contrast differences were not found regarding European identity. Comparing the mean scores of March 2002 and March 2003 it can be observed that the attitude towards the Euro, either affective and evaluative, is now less positive; instead, the concern about the consequences that the single currency has had on the value of wages, pensions and savings grows, and also as regards to the increase of the prices and the cost of living. People interviewed in the last wave, in contrast to the previous one, identify themselves less with Europeans. The level of identification with their own country, after the increase of March 2002, remained stable, as did the perception of threat to national identity.

From the examination of the correlations between the constructs, other interesting results emerge. As assumed, Italian and European identities are positively correlated in the two waves of the first study (study 1: first wave $r = .318$ ⁵; second wave $r = .360$); in the second study, they are independent. In all three waves, the evaluative attitude correlates positively with the expectation of positive micro-economic effects (study 1: first wave $r = .297$; second wave $r = .174$; study 2: $r = .237$) beyond that with the European identity (study 1: first wave $r = .432$; second wave $r = .402$; study 2: $r = .372$) and negatively with the perception of threat to national identity (study 1: first wave $r = -.393$; second wave $r = -.412$; study 2: $r = -.437$). The European identity correlates negatively with the perception of threat to Italian identity (study 1: first wave $r = -.400$; second wave $r = -.324$; study 2: $r = -.307$). The perception of threat to the identity consequent to the abandoning of their own currency did not correlate with the national identity in both waves of the first study, in confirmation of the fact that Italians based the positive distinctiveness of their own identity on dimensions different from those economic-monetary ones. In the second study (March the 2003) correlation between the two constructs becomes significant (study 2: $r = .250$): a high level of national identity was associated with a respondents' re-evaluation of the role of their own old currency as a symbol of national identity. Political orientation, measured only in the

⁵ All showed Pearson correlation coefficients are significant with $p \leq .01$.

second study, correlates positively with the perception of threat to the national identity (study 2: $r = .208$): individuals politically oriented to the right feel themselves more threatened regarding national identity. The European identity instead is negatively correlated with political orientation (study 2: $r = -.223$), in the sense that individuals who are more left wing have a higher level of European identity.

Therefore we have used two models of multiple regression, the first one foresees as dependent variable the affective attitude towards the introduction of the Euro (Table 4); in the second the dependent variable is the attitude towards the introduction of the Euro in its evaluative component (Table 5). Both models have been analysed considering separately the three surveys: November 2001, March 2002 and March 2003.

Table 4. Results of multiple regression analysis; dependent variable: affective attitude towards the introduction of the Euro

	November 2001 (N= 239)			March 2002 (N= 239)			March 2003 (N= 240)		
	β	$p \leq$	R ² adj.	β	$p \leq$	R ² adj.	β	$p \leq$	R ² adj.
Model			.309			.256			.245
Italian identity	.155	.01		.163	.01		-.040	n.s.	
European identity	.174	.01		.290	.0001		.295	.0001	
Threats perception to national identity	-.302	.0001		-.254	.0001		-.300	.0001	
Micro-economic effects	.221	.0001		.067	n.s.		.122	.04	
Macro-economic effects	-.065	n.s.		.085	n.s.		-.027	n.s.	

Table 5. Results of multiple regression analysis; dependent variable: evaluative attitude towards the introduction of the Euro

	November 2001 (N= 239)			March 2002 (N= 239)			March 2003 (N= 240)		
	β	$p \leq$	R ² adj.	β	$p \leq$	R ² adj.	β	$p \leq$	R ² adj.
Model			.287			.278			.286
Italian identity	.163	.01		.089	n.s.		-.028	n.s.	
European identity	.233	.0001		.272	.0001		.273	.0001	
Threats perception to national identity	-.271	.0001		-.317	.0001		-.334	.0001	
Micro-economic effects	.159	.01		.181	.01		.222	.0001	
Macro-economic effects	-.039	n.s.		.122	.04		.023	n.s.	

The variables influencing the affective attitude towards the Euro (Table 4), in all three waves, are European identity (with a positive impact) and the perception of threat to national identity (with a negative impact). The expectation of improvements at the micro economic level has a positive effect above all in the first wave of the first study. National identity positively influences the attitude towards the Euro, but only in the first study. The macro-economic effects are not significant predictors of this component of attitude in any of the three waves.

The evaluative component of attitude is influenced by the same predictors (Table 5). In all three waves European identity and perception of threat to identity have, respectively, a positive and negative impact on evaluative attitude. The expectations of improvement in some micro-economic indicators have the effect of making the evaluative attitude towards the Euro more positive in all three waves. The perception of the macro-economic consequences has influenced the attitudes only in the second phase. Italian identity has a positive effect on the evaluation of the introduction of the Euro only in the first phase. For both the components of attitude, the perceived threat to national identity due to the abandoning of the old Liras and due to Italian adhesion to the EU has a stronger and also negative impact on the attitudes, in contrast to the other predictors.

Conclusion

First of all, we want to emphasize that results of this research, although obtained from samples not representative of the Italian population, are consistent with findings reported by Eurobarometer studies. Before the introduction of the Euro and immediately after, Italians were Euro-enthusiastic and showed a quite strong level of identification with Europe. As Risse (2002) suggests, these results can be interpreted in the light of the low level of confidence shown by Italians regarding their national political institutions. This level of confidence turns out

to be the lowest among the 15 EU countries (Commission of the European Communities, 2002). It seems, therefore, that Europe itself and the strengthening of European identity represented for the Italians, at that moment, a unique occasion to overcome the problems of their own country and to reform national the political institutions.

In the second wave (March 2002), the respondents were so enthusiastic about the new currency that they were willing to accept negative consequences at the economic level, like the increase in prices. At that moment there was found a strengthening of national identity. This can be explained by an increase in collective self-esteem as result of having achieved the goal of taking part in the Euro project. We have to remember that, in fact, in Italy, like in other countries of southern Europe (Kokkinaki, 1998), the Euro changeover has been a topic widely debated at political and public opinion level, since, in order to satisfy the criteria set up by the Maastricht treaty, it had to adopt programmes of austerity. For Italy, being successful in the work of economic balancing represents something, as a nation, of which it can be proud.

Consistent with what was assumed, Italian and European identities are positively correlated in the first two waves, and are independent in third. Even if national identity resulted being stronger than the European one, in the case of the group of Italians interviewed in this research, the identification with their own nation does not set obstacles to the development of a sense of identification with Europe. As Díez Medrano & Gutiérrez (2001) have demonstrated in the case of Spain, European identity has been constructed in such way to not represent a threat to national identity and can coexists with the national one.

The threat perception to national identity consequent to abandoning of old currency, in the first two waves, did not correlate with national identity (confirming the fact that this latter established the positive distinctiveness on dimensions different from those which were economic). In the last study, however, the correlation between the two constructs became positive: a high level of national identity was accompanied by a re-evaluation for what the national currency could represent at identity and political level.

Another development is that concerning the relationship between identity and attitude towards the Euro: while European identity always influences, and in a positive way, both affective and evaluative attitude towards the Euro; for Italian identity we found different results: in the last wave, alternatively to the previous ones, attitude is not influenced. All this data, together with the decline of the positive attitude towards the single currency and the perception of a clear worsening in an economic plan, could be the reason for the decrease of identification with Europe that respondents show in the third wave⁶.

Another result to be highlighted is that regarding the weight that the threat to national identity has on attitudes towards the Euro: in all studies it is this variable that more than any other influences attitudes, both as far as the emotional reactions towards the new currency (affective component) and as far as the judgement of its rightness and usefulness (evaluative component) are concerned.

Taken together these results showed the importance of studying the effects of psycho-social variables, as identity. This confirmed the greater weight that such variables have, in comparison to the expectations on economic effects, in determining the attitude towards the adoption of the single currency, analogously to what was found in previous research (see, Manganelli et al., 2001).

If 1st of January 2002 has represented a kind of “big bang” for the consumers, not all categories of consumers have been involved in the Euro world in the same way (Vissol, Layani & Ramón, 1999). In fact, from our results significant differences emerged regarding some socio-demographic variables, such as age and level of education. These differences above all concerned identification towards Europe and the perception of threat to national identity: older people showed a stronger level of attachment to their country, in contrast to younger respondents; more educated people identified themselves more with Europe; while less educated ones perceived a greater threat to their national identity. As far as political orientation, moreover, people who declared themselves to be left wing showed a higher level of identification with Europe, while those of have a right wing political orientation perceived a greater threat to national identity due to the introduction of the Euro and therefore expressed a less positive attitude towards this.

In conclusion, the relationship of this Italian group with the Euro and the Europe is positive; however the perception of negative economic effects (like the perception of the value loss of money) risks provoking a process of re-evaluation, or even a nationalist revival, that could undermine the process of the construction of an European identity.

⁶ However, it does not have to neglect the effect that the particular concomitant political moment can have had on this research wave. In March 2003, in fact, a strong internal division was created in the European community as consequence of the debate about intervention in the Iraq war. The divisions that arose as a result of this international event have undermined the image of a united Europe, demonstrating its weakness and the lack of a common foreign policy framework.

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