

The European Identity of Welfare and the Economic Crisis

Corina Cace^{*}

Academy of Economic Studies, Bucharest.

Sorin Cace^{**}

Institute for Quality of Life Research, Bucharest.

Victor Nicolăescu^{***}

“Petre Andrei” University, Iași.

Luminița Dumitrescu^{****}

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bucharest.

Abstract: The current economic crisis has pushed the European Union member states into recession. Most affected are the new member states which adhered in 2004 and 2007. The foundation of the European identity recorded at the level of citizens' representations was built also on the consolidated system of welfare which was specific to western countries. Within the context of a post-crisis evolution, the article offers the possibility to reflect to an evaluation of the dynamics of political and technical decisions undertaken by the European institutions to support new member states for an active participation into European construction during the crisis period. From this perspective, it is worthy to note that the delay in the decision making processes designed to diminish the effects of economic crisis in an integrative manner is due both to the lack of experience in the management of major critical situations within the EU-27 formula but also to a prudent and timed exercise of the new member states in terms of their fully undertaking the European identity into a welfare space defined by liberty, security and justice. The article underlined the success of positive conditionality recorded during the pre-accession period, for most of the member states shall become institutionalized due to new measures adopted by European institutions, and on the long run, shall encourage co-

* Academy of Economic Studies, Training Department, Piața Romană nr. 6, sector 1, 010374, Bucharest, Romania. E-mail: corina.cace@dppd.ase.ro.

** Institute for Quality of Life Research (ICCV), Calea 13 Septembrie nr. 13, sector 5, 050711, Bucharest, Romania. E-mail: corsorin@mailbox.ro.

*** “Petre Andrei” University, Faculty of Social Work and Sociology, Strada Ghica Vodă nr. 13, 700400, Iași, Romania. E-mail: vic72ro@gmail.com.

**** Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Human Resources Department, Aleea Alexandru nr. 31, Sector 1, 011822, Bucharest, Romania. Email: dumitrescu_luminita@hotmail.com.

participation of all member states into overcoming the crisis and to consolidate their European identity, based on welfare dimension.

Keywords : European Union Member States, positive conditionality, pre-accession, poverty, critical situations.

Cuvinte cheie : Statele membre ale Uniunii Europene, condiționalitate pozitivă, pre-aderare, sărăcie, situații critice.

Introduction: the current European context

The process of European integration and enlargement which was registered during the first decade of the 21st century concurred with an intense political and academic research to identify the roots and dimensions of Europeans in history, religion, science and culture (Goddard et al., 1994). From this perspective, it is of great actuality to analyse the signification of Europe in terms of welfare and identity, as perceived by citizens in the member states.

The present analysis reveals the specific context of the European construction relying on the welfare values, but irrespective of the diverse welfare patterns of the different EU member states, a major crisis is noticed, which affects our societies in various manners. From this perspective, the paper reveals the particular aspects of the European construction, in terms of citizen welfare, the new member states requiring a much longer time-frame until their full integration within the European architecture. The article approaches a current subject of our time, regarding the identification of the common solution to go past the current economic crisis defined by novel regional turbulences, drafting the discussed supranational level of the “United States of Europe”, having as historic landmarks the efficient mechanisms of the positive conditionality applied to the new member states during the pre-accession period. The paper presents the focus on welfare as specific

European construction, while not going deeper into the distinctions raised by identification at the European level (Rusu, 2009). The field literature displays strategy and decision-making analyses and discourses, with historical inferences, and this paper proposes a return to the reality and expectations of the European citizens for the end of the current crisis and for the consolidation of an identity welfare system.

Expanding East has been a matter of strong debate within the European Union, and there were calculated the effects of transition, especially for post-communist states (Bălățescu, 2007). Quite explicable, no other accession wave was given so much attention. The premises and setup for expanding East were completely different from any other previous enlargement. Given the current context in which the majority of the continent lays under the jurisdiction of European Union, the question is whether European identity is a matter concerning the entire continent or not. If the answer is given in relation to the terminology of the word “European”, then other countries which are not yet part of the EU should be also referred to.

The rapid changes in competitiveness due to globalization, as well as the consequences of 2004 and 2007 enlargements, determined the representatives of EU member states to take position regarding the rigidity and stagnation registered at the level of the most important European economies. The estimations regarding the impact of enlargement upon the EU are generally

limited, given the fact that the economic dimension is much complex than anticipated. An early estimate indicates that for the 15 EU member states the probability of gain is of 10 billion Euros altogether from new economic framework created by enlargement. On the long run, this accounts for a 0,2% increase of GDP in each country, which in turn could lead to the creation of approximately 300.000 new jobs (under the hypothesis of a constant relation between work volume and production volume) (Grabbe, 2001).

EU is endowed, at this point, with many of the functions and characteristics of a state and yet, EU is defined as being an “*unfinished process*”, “*an entity under constant evolution*” or a “*network of networks*” (Leonard, 1999), an economic-political construction with multiple levels of governance and sovereignty. EU policy is estimated to build a reference framework which serves, in different ways, the various national and regional policies of its member states.

From the global crisis perspective, effects have multiplied and deepened on those structures less consolidated and with less expertise on the European gear, that is at the level of new member states that adhered in 2004 and 2007. Actually, the enlargement of the latest European construction evinces the fact that integration process needs a new formula to adjust national policies in accordance to new structural challenges brought up by the economic crisis. Therefore, the increase and orientation parameters registered before 2008 are now positioned within stagnation frameworks, and, in some cases, even in frameworks plunging into the abyss of recession.

The new status that new member states are experiencing, after a period of positive conditionality, has not been designed to prevent and combat the economic crisis with the same effective measures as those taken by the older member states.

The passage from the status of a candidate country to the status of a member state with full rights in the EU has been a coordinated and positively conditioned process in which tangible, measurable limits have been set by “older” states, in agreement with newer member states from Eastern and Central Europe (Cace, Cace and Nicolăescu, 2010).

Taking into account that individuals label themselves as members of particular groups such as nation, social class, subculture, ethnicity, gender, occupation (Taylor, 1989), it becomes important to analyse how the European identity is projected in relation to the original welfare of the EU construction, which is, in fact, the stake of the continuous process of expanding and deepening the EU. In other words, the expectations of citizens in new member states, affected to a greater extent by the economic crisis, are translated into a welfare inflow expected to come from the older member states.

The failure of adopting a European Constitution shall remain into the memory of the UE architecture. Nevertheless, the creation of a European identity is one of the most debated topics and no less than five identity patterns are being proposed nowadays (Walkenhorst, 2009, 7–8).

1. *Cultural-historical identity* – it refers to a mutual past perceived through mutual cultural roots and shared values.
2. *Legislative-political identity* – oriented both towards citizenship, representation and participation, as well as towards the perspective of democratic and legitimacy theory.
3. *Social identity* – focused on “Peoples Europe” approach, as well as on the constructivist and communitarian theories.
4. *International identity* – attempting a unique image of the UE around the world. In this case, approaches typical

to regime or governance are much less represented.

5. *Mutual Post-identity* – discussed within the context of post-modernist and post nationalist theories, and it takes into account avoiding the entrapment of identity.

European identity in the processual shape desired by decision makers should take into account the fact that the starting point in the process of formation consisted in a nucleus of states having a different consolidated welfare state models and it led to a structure in which the need for welfare is seen and treated differently by people in “Old Europe” (who feel threatened by losing their level of welfare) and people in “New Europe”, where the desire is to reach levels of welfare that are considered to be normal.

The idea of defining and quantifying European identity by means of creating welfare for its own citizens shall remain a central point of debate and research for as long as “the community quest shall continue” (Schlesinger, 1994, 317). The paper presents the well-known welfare models, shows the synchronous evolution of the European construction and of welfare consolidation, and reveals the importance of the positive conditionality mechanism applied to the new EU member states during the pre-accession process. Within the context of the current economic crisis, the possibilities to have a “common reaction” of the European Union, particularly poverty alleviation, are part of the goal of a consolidated European architecture, supported by the welfare desired by its citizens. This is the perspective from which the present analysis is attempting to correlate the importance of welfare in the process of consolidating a European identity fragmented, at the time being, by the economic global crisis.

Welfare Models in EU

To define the concept of “welfare state” is quite a difficult task, and to some authors it remains an “undefined abstraction” (Titmuss, 1968, 124).

Other authors consider that this term (welfare state) relates to four of the main activities of the state: cash benefits, medical assistance, education and food, inhabitancy and other welfare activities (benefits-line) (Barr, 1992, 742). Also, according to Briggs (1961), the welfare state is defined as a state which exists to fulfil three main purposes: to provide the family with a certain level of minimum income, to provide certain safety mechanisms in case of social risks (incapacity to obtain an income in case of sickness or retirement) and to preserve a certain equity in terms of social services offered. Therefore the welfare state means: “a state in which organized power is deliberately used (through politics and administration) in an effort to modify the play of market forces in at least three directions – first, by granting individuals and families a minimum income irrespective of the market value of their property; second, by narrowing the extent of insecurity, by enabling individuals and families to meet certain “social contingencies” (for example, sickness, old age, and unemployment) which lead, otherwise, to individual and family crisis; and third, by ensuring that all citizens without distinction of status or class are offered the best standards available, in relation to a certain agreed range of services (Briggs, 1961, 222).

A great number of researchers established different typologies of the welfare state. Many evaluated welfare state using different criteria, starting from different angles and analysing different characteristics of welfare states. The most important example is Esping-Andersen triple typology about liberal, social-

democrat and corporatist-conservative regimes, based on criteria such as decommo-dification, social stratification and the principle of complementarity between the market and the state (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

The liberal welfare regime

According to Esping-Andersen (1990), the main characteristic of the liberal welfare state is the firm belief in market sovereignty. Within this regime, the state intervention is minimal, risks are individualized and market solutions are promoted. The Anglo-Saxon nations have liberal welfare regimes, due to their weak social democracy and the absence of a *de facto* Christian – democratic movement in these countries.

Three main characteristics define the liberal welfare regime. First of all, this is a restrictive regime, in the sense that social provisions are restricted when it comes to “high risks” and it favours means testing and prior contributions. Social assistance based on means testing is of much higher importance than programmes based on universal rights. Secondly, the liberal welfare regime is a residual one, since “social” risks are defined in a limited manner. A third fundamental characteristic would be the encouraging of the market or the promotion of “welfare capitalism”. The USA, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Great Britain and Ireland are included in the liberal welfare state typology by Esping-Andersen (1990).

Social-democratic welfare regime

Social-democratic regime is defined by its universalism and its full coverage of risks, or, in another terms, the aspect that Esping-Andersen refers to as a holistic “risks' socialization” (1990). Retirement benefits are generous and equal for everyone.

Another basic principle of social-democratic regimes is egalitarianism.

Rights are attached to individuals and are based on citizenship. Assistance provided for people in need plays an important role. The market contribution in producing welfare is minimalized or abolished, although Esping-Andersen refers to a high degree of welfare decommo-dification (1990). Moreover, there is a tendency to eliminate private welfare within this type of welfare regime.

Finally, the emphasis is on the endeavour to obtain a fulltime job, and therefore employment is maximized and becomes one of the most important characteristics of the social-democratic regime. Esping-Andersen G. (1990) identified social democratic regimes in Northern countries, such as: Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway. These countries can be regarded as “services countries”, since they provide extended services in health care and provisions designed especially for the family (taking care of children and the elderly). Such a generous welfare offer has led to a high degree of de-familiarisation within this type of regime.

Conservative-corporatist welfare regime

The tendency towards state segmentation and familialism is a typical feature of conservative-corporatist welfare regimes (although France and Belgium could be considered as exceptions, in terms of the degree of familialism).

The group of states that Esping-Andersen (1990) analysed as having conservative-corporatist regimes concentrates on the European continent, (with the only exception being Japan. These countries are: Germany, Austria, France, The Netherlands, Belgium and South-European countries.

Conservative welfare regimes are based on the principle of risk funds or solidarity funds. Their welfare systems rely on mandatory social insurance doubled by residual schemes established more or less

„ad-hoc” for those categories with no direct relation to employment. The market plays only a marginal role in the provision of welfare.

Although conservative-corporatist regimes apply residualism similar to that of liberal regimes, the explanation is completely different. While residualism

within conservative-corporatist regimes is meant to compensate for family failure, residualism within liberal regimes is aimed at compensating market failure.

To summarize, the three basic features of conservative welfare regimes are: corporatism, statism and familialism.

Table 1. *Esping-Andersen (1990) typology for European countries*

Liberal Regime	Conservative-Corporatist Regime	Social-Democratic regime
Ireland Great Britain	Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Spain	Denmark, Finland, Suedia

Source: Esping-Andersen., The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism, 1990.

Welfare models significantly contributed to the understanding of how welfare is produced within advanced economies and evinced the basic idea according to which neighbouring countries facing the same problems and challenges can retain and sustain various models of producing welfare. It is Esping-Andersen's merit and of others to have taken the analysis up to the very core of the welfare state.

Special literature mentions many different typologies of the welfare state, and “worlds” and “families” proliferate to draw our attention upon the need to define more accurately the concepts and methods used in comparative analysis of the welfare state.

Two ideas are to be discussed, if we are to keep investing in “welfare models” updated and prepared to face the future. Grouping the regimes according to time and space should take into account the concepts and theories of a changing welfare. First of all, the dynamics of welfare regimes has been paid to little attention, especially in the context of the economic crisis that currently affects the European construction. Secondly, the analysis should be extended beyond the parameters of the more developed economies and oriented towards convergent

expectations of other contributors within the same unique European space. As we have seen so far, there are differences between welfare regimes of developed countries in the EU, but they become of little importance as compared to the differences that exist between developed nations and the new member states of the European Union.

Identity and welfare in the EU

European identity represents a processual construction defined by various coordinates sharing synchronous historical aspects which have influenced and generated welfare policies of member states, even since seven or eight decades ago.

The economic crisis of the ‘30s favoured the idea of state intervention as a social regulator to protect its citizens. As such, “protective state” was replaced by “assisting state”. There was a passage from protecting civil rights (preserving life and property) to protecting economic and social rights (the right to work, to receive social assistance and social services). State modified its functions and, due to specific factors, assumed new ones, in order to ensure its citizens a decent, normal and minimal standard of living. As such, at the

end of the fourth decade of the last century, Western Europe and United States of America embraced a new concept – the welfare state – around which a rich literature developed to shape a model for the state to intervene and produce welfare. Generically speaking, the welfare state (Titmuss, 1974) is frequently associated with modern interventionist state, which is based on a market economy and focused on providing high levels of health care and education, as well as on regulating the labour market and social security.

During the '50s, first institutional forms of the future European community took shape, and as Esping Andersen (1990) described in his work, founding states were constitutive parts of the European welfare.

The idea of European identity is to be found in the public discourse at the beginning of the '70s, after the turning point Woods (1971), when the European Community tried to identify a unique image at international level. On the occasion of the Copenhagen Conference the present reference was introduced to public opinion as “European identity in the world” and it became a standard phrase at the intra-community meetings and discussions regarding the “peoples of Europe” (Tindemans, 1976). Therefore, the idea of a European identity, as stated by the nine members, was based on the principle of unity and responsibility towards the rest of the world and towards the dynamic nature of the European construction, with a stress on the importance of the fight against underdevelopment in general (Stråth, 2002, 388).

During the '70s, once the terminology of European identity was in place, the situation changed and Wilensky H. theory of convergence was questioned, and criticism referred to a “welfare crisis”, during the second part of this decade. For a period starting from after the Second World War and up until the oil crisis (1973/74 and 1978/79), welfare state was based on a

complementarity between economic development and protection for citizens. The state was responsible for “the provision of goods and services needed by the community for ensuring a way of life considered to be a normal one at the level of the respective community” (Zamfir and Zamfir, 1995). When circumstances became inadequate, the developed countries started to transform their welfare systems in various ways – from the mid '70s until the '80s – using political structures and labour force mechanisms. Good examples were given by the neoconservative reaction in Great Britain and USA and non-corporatist reaction in Sweden (Mishra, 1990). Such changes were referred to as “the end of convergence”, in the sense that the scenario of countries with similar development of welfare state had collapsed and this lesson is of great importance to the actual context of economic crisis.

In 1981, The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development warned that welfare state which was developed along a period marked by a high rate of economic growth around the world, might face a crisis under an impoverishing fiscal policy, which increased in a correlated manner alongside the same period of economic burst. In reality, the immediate decline of social security budget did not take place and it took almost two decades for this warning to become true.

During this period, ample changes took place at the level of European architecture, with successive enlargements and diversified institutional forms at supranational level. In the late '80s and the beginning of the '90s, the term of *European identity* appeared more frequently in the documents of the European Community and especially in those of the European Commission (Kostakopoulou, 2001). “The need to have a European identity” becomes a formula which is frequently used when it comes to European integration. Therefore, European identity appears to offer solutions to other various

problems related to European integration (Walkenhorst, 2009, 2–3):

- Ensuring long term public and trans-generational support – a European identity is expected to replace permissive and unclear consensus with a continuous process of enlargement and deepening;
- Formation of a sentiment of a greater solidarity among Europeans, which would allow for redistributive policies, EU taxation and would ensure European welfare. ;
- Adopting formal and informal participation in the democratic process, which translates into a higher participation to the vote for European Parliament and a higher civic commitment to EU policies (“active citizenship”);
- Pointing the right direction in the process of integration, in terms of a political vision of European integration (also called “political finality”).

And yet, European identity is too often studied as an object and not as a process (Petithomme, 2008, 16), fact which questions the intensity of the feeling of identity amongst EU citizens. If we are to analyse the process of “distancing” through which the individual traditional unit of survival is transferred to supranational level, we shall notice a “delay effect”, which could account for the social resistance to effective integration into EU. Interesting to note the fact that, in the fall of 2006, 58% of the Europeans were in favour of European political union, but the percentage of public support was lower amongst the citizens in “Old Europe” (52%), as compared to the percentage of citizens in “New Europe” (64%) (Eurobarometer 66.1.). One of the possible explanations is that western citizens feared for their own welfare, as compared to new citizens. This is a confirmation that the differences between various European realities impede on the formation of a common identity. The process of formation

of a common identity is considered to be an “upward-downwards process” and modulated by the existence of a “socialization effect” which takes time (Laffan, 2004). Castells (2000) defines European identity as a project with social dimensions, which could be defined as “shared sentiments on various issues: the need for universal social protection regarding living conditions; social solidarity; steady occupation; rights of employees; universal human rights; caring for poor people in the world; expanding democracy at local and regional levels; higher citizen participation; protecting cultures with historical roots, most of the times in linguistic terms; gender equality”.

To conclude, we appreciate that, by trying to create a collective European identity, the aim is to minimize the gap between democratic notoriety and the deficit of legitimacy between European Union as a whole and its member societies. At the same time, from the political perspective, the concept of European identity is attractive due to its ambiguity, lack of precision and flexibility (Walkenhorst, 2009, 3). Controversial connotations such as “European federalism” and “the United States of Europe” are avoided. At the time being, democratic needs of European citizens are repositioning and political actors promote the idea that European Union should become a “result oriented democracy” (Schmidt, 2005). From our point of view, welfare is an important common bench-mark for citizens in member states of the EU.

Economic crisis and continuation of positive conditionality

Apparently the financial crisis is affecting only certain groups and their incomes, as well as their purchase power, and as a consequence, their participation into community life is degrading slowly. The borders of social exclusion are not

always visible and the relation between income and social exclusion is not always clear. Supplementary access to occupation is not always the safest way to protect people from poverty and social exclusion. Starting with extremely high rates of poverty and ending with the unemployed, the need to apply complex and coordinated measures is imminent. On one hand we have marginalized individuals and groups with insufficient income and difficult access to the labour market and community life, and on the other hand we have groups of people living at the brim of social exclusion and who cannot provide for a minimum income, even if they are not excluded.

Europe is not easy to conceptualize as homogeneous; on the contrary, we have a field of strong permutations and inequities. Although social problems share the same characteristics, the possibilities and mechanisms to overcome them differ to a great extent. This last affirmation should accompany our analysis regarding best measures to be taken to the purpose of diminishing the effects of economic crisis. At the supra-state level we noted at least two forms of reactions which affected in a different manner member states of the EU:

1. Rapid reactions registered at the level of international organisms (G20), but at the same time, controversial reactions from the point of view of their long term effects upon member states. As such, G20 decided to direct 1.1 thousand billions USD (832 billion Euros) to The Monetary International Fund and to other institutions, alongside with the decision to impose a more strict control on the financial markets, including measures to promote transparency and protection against threats to destabilize the system and against excessive risks. The London Summit (2nd of April 2009) represented the second stage of G20's efforts to combat the world economic crisis – the worst recession since the '30s. (Previous reunion was held in

Washington, in November 2008). In order to support the countries which were most affected by the crisis, leaders approved the supplementation of fund with the amount of 500 billion USD, as a consequence of registered procedures to support a number of twelve countries. Through this mechanism, praised by the EU, states were able to borrow money from the IMF, in order to avoid the deepening of recession. Unfortunately, recovery policies are yet to be expected.

2. Delayed reactions at the level of European bodies, but reactions which are hoped to fully protect the interests of member states as a whole. As such, in November 2008, the European Commission announced a set of recovery measures amounting to 200 billion Euros (approximately 170 billion Euros come from member states budgets, while EU and the European Investment Bank (EIB) financed the rest of 30 billion Euros). The quantification of this process turned out to be difficult to accomplish. The Commission also proposed the simplification of the criteria to grant financial support from Social European Fund, reprogramming expenditures and increasing in advance payments starting with the beginning of 2009, so as member states could rapidly benefit from funds amounting up to 1.8 billion Euro designed to consolidate active policies on the labour market, to redirect support towards more vulnerable categories, to intensify actions designed to develop abilities and, where the case was, to be able to obtain full financing from EU to support projects during this period. The Commission suggested several changes within the European Globalization Adjustment Fund (EGF), which was conceived to support the unemployed to re-enter the labour market. If accepted, those proposals shall provide the EGF with the possibility to rapidly intervene and finance projects in the field of vocational training and labour force recruitment. The annual

available budget of the EGF amounts to 500 billion Euro. The European Commission also launched a new instrument for micro-financing the small and medium enterprises and people who lost their jobs and wish to start their own business.

In June 2010, European Council adopted the Europe 2020 Strategy for economic growth and employment of the labour force, once again confirming all the measurable objectives set at European level. According to these objectives, The European Strategy regarding employment is set to create new and better jobs all along the EU territory. To this purpose, the Strategy encourages measures designed to accomplish three major objectives, at the end of 2020: 75% of the persons aged between 20 and 64 years will be active on the labour force, the rate of school drop-out shall come down to 10%, and the rate of graduation from higher education institutions shall increase up to at least 40% in population aged 30-34 years old; reducing the number of people suffering from poverty and social exclusion with at least 20 million.

As stipulated in the EU recommendations, international financial institutions are to play a bigger part in monitoring the economic risks. In addition to that, emerging economies and countries under way of development shall be given more importance within these institutions.

The history of accession of the new member states in Central and Eastern Europe proved the success of efficient methods to condition the support offered to modernize these states and created a reference framework, which should be coordinated and doubled by proactive measures designed for post-accession period.

Generally speaking, conditionality could be seen as a theoretical sub-component or a method which accounts for logical relationship between two or more

actors. Conditionality supplies a set of instruments to connect the state or the international organization to benefits desired by the other international actor, under the condition of accomplishing certain results (Smith, 1997). From this perspective, conditionality can be perceived as a norm or an institutional agreement. Killick (1998, 6) defined conditionality as “a set of mutual agreements by which a state undertakes or assumes to undertake certain political actions and to this purpose an international financial institution or agency shall provide the adequate financial support”. A certain degree of similarity to legal norms is to be noted, especially in the case of negative conditionality where infringement or rejection of any of the clause of the agreement can lead to penalties or sanctions.

The concept of positive conditionality has been regarded as the “golden carrot” of neighbouring policies, as well as of the enlargement and external affairs policies of the EU. Being approached as an important and valuable method of partnering candidate countries with EU, in order to achieve economic, political and social progress by means of an efficient motivational system, positive conditionality is nowadays utilized in various fields, such as development of neighbouring policy, and is regarded as a successful aspect on the contemporaneous agenda.

The main argument in utilizing positive conditionality, in order to generate authentic welfare within new member states, is given by a higher social, economic and political influence through which more costly and dangerous methods are avoided. Conditionality is based on the belief that assistance shall produce a cumulative progress and a substantial growth: forced reforms create political support and political support allows for reforms and modernization to continue (Fiero, 2003, 95).

The results of Euro-Barometer Inquiry indicate a strong support in favour of conditionality expressed by a stronger government of the EU. The inquiry was conducted in May 2010 – during the peak of the European financial crisis. It revealed an increased demand to a more tight coordination of economic and financial policies at the level of the EU: 75% of the citizens wish for a stronger economic governance (+2 points, as compared to the fall of 2009, and +4 points, as compared to the month of February 2009). Economic governance is given the highest credit in Slovakia (89%), Belgium (87%) and Cyprus (87%). A major opinion turn was noted in favour of stronger economic governance at the level of several countries, such as: Finland and Ireland (+13 points, as compared to the fall of 2009), Belgium and Germany (+7 points), Austria, Luxemburg and Slovakia (+6 points), as well as in the Netherlands (+5 points).

It is important to stress out the fact that the effects of economic crisis are also reflected into a lower perception of the benefits derived from being a member state of the EU, 49% of the Europeans declared in May that the accession of their country to EU was beneficial (-4 points, as compared to the fall of 2009). Yet, another relevant aspect is related to the higher level of trust in the European institutions, as compared to the amount of trust in national governments or national parliaments (42%, as compared to 29% and 31% respectively), even if the amount of trust in EU decreased during the climax period of the economic crisis (42%, as compared to 48% in the fall of 2009). The highest amount of trust was recorded in Estonia (68%), Slovakia (65%), Bulgaria and Denmark (61%), with the lowest in Great Britain (20%).

New member states of the EU which rank low in terms of welfare indicator levels would have better chances to connect to the welfare levels that are specific to

western countries, if they benefited from a better directed and conditioned recovery within the context of future crisis. Recovery from the economic crisis is the responsibility of the European body of institutions and lessons learned from delayed reactions, passivity and, sometimes, neutrality displayed by member states should help avoiding future mistakes. European identity is built by the solidarity of its members and the preservation of the “conservation instinct”, as proved by internal support networks that would bring higher benefits than many of the formal measures which sometimes are packed in formulas lacking applicability.

Diminishing poverty – the aim of European identity of welfare

Ten years ago, the leaders of the EU were committed to take “decisive steps to eradicate poverty” until 2010. Albeit, at the present time, a significant number of EU citizens still live in poverty and have a limited access to basic services, such as health care. Poverty and exclusion affects not only the welfare of people, but also impedes on economic development.

Certain social groups are more exposed to poverty, for example, families with children – especially large families and single parent families – the elderly, people with disabilities and emigrants. In all groups women are more vulnerable than men. People are affected by poverty in a complex way which is not necessary related to social exclusion. Besides the well-known problems related to insufficient dwelling conditions or lack of a house, people living in poverty are also confronted with (www.2010againstopoverty.eu):

- health problems and low access to health care;
- low access to educational, training and recreational activities;
- financial exclusion and over debt;

- limited access to modern technology such as, for example, the internet.

Under the motto “Stop poverty now”, The European Commission and the Spanish Presidency of the EU proclaimed the European Year 2010 of fight against poverty and social exclusion. This campaign is meant to keep the issue of poverty (affecting one in six Europeans) on the front line of the EU agenda throughout the whole year of 2010. EU provides the framework under which member states are to design their own priorities and strategies, taking into account the multidimensional nature of poverty and in line with the following coordinates: (www.2010againstpoverty.eu):

- eradicate children's poverty and family poverty;
- facilitate access to labour market, education and vocational training;
- combat discrimination and approach poverty aspects related to sex and age;
- combat financial exclusion and over debt;
- combat improper dwelling conditions and dwelling exclusion;
- promote social inclusion of vulnerable groups.

Vladimír Špidla, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal opportunities reaffirmed EU's constant support for the implementation of policies designed to prevent and combat poverty: „One European out of six struggles every day to earn his living but poverty can affect us all and our society as a whole. Although most of the instruments to combat poverty are to be found at national levels, three quarters of the Europeans expect EU to help. The European Year has this issue on the first line of its agenda so as the whole Europe may unite its forces to combat poverty and social exclusion” (www.europa.eu). As a consequence, the year 2010 was meant to raise awareness with regard to the causes and consequences

of poverty in Europe, both for key actors, such as governments, and for social partners and public opinion at large. Another aim would be to mobilize various partners in the fight against poverty, to promote social integration and social inclusion, as well as to encourage the designing of new national policies to solve the problems related to poverty and social exclusion.

The issue of European identity should focus on the fragmented aspects of the process of integration that new member states undertake, given the fact that the process of social integration of their citizens is produced by means of noticing positive changes at the level of their daily lives.

Due to the fact that welfare state is based on political and social correlations, as well as on the traditions of each European state, contrary positions are expected to be encountered and implemented up to a certain point (Sakellaropoulos, 2001, 18). Therefore, the pathway to social integration creates a framework for reflection upon the mutual challenges of social problems occurring at the supranational level of the EU. Promoting social protection as a reciprocal element of individual public policies of the member states refers to a network of protection which extends over a series of political fields, all over Europe. Social protection is a reciprocal challenge for all societies in Europe, even if support is given in different ways (Clarke, 2002).

From the perspective of supranational interventions and based on realities we have described so far, the EU is attempting to build a network of integrated policies to the purpose of promoting “*social inclusion*” and eliminating those conditions which favour “*social exclusion*”. These two concepts bear a heavy ideological and political weight, as affirmed by the ample EU literature in the field (Petmesidou, 1996), but they must be correlated with

what represents the term of welfare state – a series of provisions publicly financed or financial support given to health care services, education, child and elderly care, as well as for social security systems, in terms of transfers and budget provisions (Lindbeck, 1988).

Conclusions

Welfare state represents, without any doubt, an evolution of state as an institution, a response to the increased demand for social and economic security, and (within a larger context) it is a result of the increasing welfare of the societies, as well as economic opportunities of those states that developed during the decades of economic growth, after the Second World War. Not surprisingly, the welfare state refers more to Old Europe's developed states, but the aspirations of new member states to a European identity are guided, to a large extent, by reaching those optimal welfare parameters for their own citizens.

Within the context of a prolonged economic crisis which shatters the trust of the European citizens in the construction of EU 27, it is increasingly clear that a new approach is needed, which to answer the economic and social challenges that alter the identity fundamentals of the European Welfare. The recent history of the European construction mentions the efficient mechanisms of the positive conditionality applied to the new member states, which is why a new, more profound system of integration must be defined and applied for all member states, with the

purpose of coping with the future crises. The “loss of sovereignty” within a new, more integrated, more articulated and more active context of the European policies and measures also depends on the extent to which we consider poverty alleviation and the improvement of EU citizens' welfare. If two centuries ago the welfare problem was approached at the national level, by providing wealth-preservation mechanisms, at this time, the perspective becomes European, and it relies on the acknowledged models and on the expanded expectations of the common welfare, which developed over the recent decades of the European construction. This paper also attempts to connect the European welfare models, as landmarks of a European welfare identity, to the coordinates of the successful conditionality used for the new member states during their access to a welfare space. The specific history of older EU member states welfare and the will to converge towards common identity parameters at the level of the new member states constitute the profound reality which claims integrated formulas of consolidation of the European identity space.

Born at the confluence of “fighting and concessions, of calculations and noble ambitions” (Dogan and Pelassy, 1992), the welfare state is nowadays rooted in people's representations as being a constant presence in their lives, and at European level the expectations are that future crisis be entirely managed by the supranational structures charged with the administration of “European wealth”.

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