

## I. RESEARCH ARTICLES

DOI: 10.17951/et.2016.28.169

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EUROPEANS, POLES, GERMANS, FRENCH.  
CONCEPTUALISATION AND EVALUATION OF IMAGES\*

The article deals with the conceptualisation and evaluation of the images behind the quasi-ethnonym *Europeans* (Polish *Europejczycy*), compared with those behind the ethnonyms *Poles* (*Polacy*), *Germans* (*Niemcy*), and *French* (*Francuzi*). The description is based on the results of an experimental study conducted in the years 2010–2011 among Poles aged 18–25. Open questions were asked: “How would you finish the sentences: *I like it that Europeans/Poles/Germans/the French are...* and *I don't like it that Europeans/Poles/Germans/the French are...*”. On this basis a typology of positive and negative features evoked by this term was established. The typology led to the construction of a hierarchy of features indicated by the respondents and a comparison of the images of Europeans with those of three European nations: the Poles, the Germans, and the French. The following conclusions are drawn: (1) the evaluation of the images behind the term *Europeans* is more positive than behind the three national ethnonyms; (2) the elements of the cognitive definition of the term *Europeans* show greater similarity to those of the ethnonym *Poles* than those of the ethnonyms *Germans* and *French*; (3) the cognitive definition of *Europeans* contains a certain number of features that are clearly different from those attributed to the ethnonyms *Poles*, *Germans*, and *French*. These features are more changeable than others.

KEY WORDS: Europeans, Poles, national stereotypes, conceptualisation, evaluation, young people, cognitive definition

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\* The article appeared in Polish as “Europejczycy. Konceptualizacja i ewaluacja wyobrażeń ukrytych za nazwą wspólnoty” in *Etnolingwistyka* 28, pp. 169–186. The present English translation has been financed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, project titled “English edition of the journal *Etnolingwistyka. Problemy języka i kultury* in electronic form” (no. 3bH 15 0204 83).

## 1. Research assumptions: the whys and the hows

The discussion below concerns the conceptualisation and evaluation, on the part of young Poles, of the images behind the ethnonym *Europeans* (Polish *Europejczycy*) as compared to three other ethnonyms of European nations: *Poles* (*Polacy*), *Germans* (*Niemcy*), and *French* (*Francuzi*).<sup>1</sup> The study deals with data elicited from young people, following the opinions of Norman Ryder (1965) or Olivier Galland and Bernard Roudet (2001), who take young people to often be “a vector of social change”.<sup>2</sup> Annie Percheron (1993) and Galland and Roudet (2005), in turn, claim that the attitudes of young people are “a magnifying mirror of the whole community”.<sup>3</sup>

Issues related to the understanding of European ethnonyms seem to be particularly important about twenty-five years after the fall of communism and about a decade after Poland’s accession to the European Union – these ground-breaking historical events must have influenced Poles’ perception of the world. The perception and conceptualisation of the world by a member of a linguistic community is connected with their identity, socio-political experience (Bartmiński 2010) and, in particular, their system of values (Bartmiński 2006, 2007). The complex meaning of the word *Europeans* reconstructed from the survey cannot be found in dictionaries because it resides primarily in the minds of Polish speakers. Therefore, in order to obtain access to the different ways of understanding this term by young Poles, an open survey was conducted. This approach, inspired by the works of the ethnolinguist Jerzy Bartmiński (2006) and the sociologist Andrzej P. Wejland (1991), allowed me to classify the positive and negative features attributed by young Poles to the ethnonyms *Poles*, *Germans*, and *French*, and especially to the term *Europeans*. The resultant typology also made it possible to establish the hierarchy of features indicated by the respondents and to compare the conceptualisations of the ethnonyms being analysed.

The features indicated by the respondents have been grouped into ten aspectual categories: psychological, cultural, expressing attitude to otherness, social, psychosocial, geographic and economic, political, physical and aesthetic, historical, and religious. The set of descriptions resulting from

<sup>1</sup> The study is a part of the research carried out within a wider thematic framework of the author’s Ph.D. dissertation (Viviand 2014). The analysis concerns the Polish ethnonyms (*Europejczycy*, *Polacy*, *Niemcy*, and *Francuzi*) but for the sake of simplicity their English counterparts will be used here.

<sup>2</sup> “La jeunesse est [...] souvent le vecteur du changement social.” (Galland and Roudet 2001)

<sup>3</sup> “Un miroir grossissant des positions de la société tout entière.” (Galland and Roudet 2005)

the survey is, in accordance with ethnolinguistic assumptions, part of the so-called cognitive definition, i.e. an interpretative scheme entertained by language speakers. The cognitive definition accounts for the way an entity is perceived and categorised by speakers of a given language. The categorisation process involved is not scientific or taxonomic: the key role is played here by connotation, which should be understood broadly as semantic content (intension), which – in contrast to denotation (extension) – embraces all attested features of the object being conceptualised.

The aim of the study is thus not only to determine the elements of cognitive definitions that are specific to the understanding of the name *Europeans*, but also to compare the set of characteristics that contribute to the understanding of the ethnonyms *Poles*, *Germans*, and *French*. The adoption of the plural nominative form of the ethnonym (*Europeans*), instead of the singular (*European*), allowed me to direct the respondents' attention to the characteristics of the whole community. Having joined the European Union on May 1, 2004, Poland is now undergoing socio-political and cultural formation. It is thus interesting to examine the characteristics attributed by young Poles to Europeans. Is it a mosaic of features borrowed from the cognitive models specific to the other three ethnonyms, or is the understanding of the term *Europeans* a combination of completely new features? Furthermore, comparisons with earlier research has allowed for determining how the conceptualisations and evaluations discovered here relate to those previously established for Poles in general.

As has already been pointed out, an open survey method was used for the purpose. This allowed the subjects to provide free and unlimited responses, unaffected by the so-called "sponsor effect",<sup>4</sup> as the questionnaire did not contain suggestions from the researcher. 137 respondents took part in the study: they were Poles aged 18–25, with varied and balanced social profiles, students and young employees with or without higher education background, coming from different regions of Western and Eastern Poland, from urban and rural areas. However, despite this diversity, it must be emphasised that the representativeness of the sample is limited.

The respondents were asked to complete two sets of sentences:

- *I like it that Europeans/Poles/Germans/the French are...* (the features listed in these sentences were then classified as positive and marked in grey in the charts)

and

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<sup>4</sup> This is the influence the researcher exerts on the subjects' responses (e.g. by asking specific questions) and on the analysis of the data thus obtained.

– *I don't like it that Europeans/Poles/Germans/the French are...* (the characteristics listed were classified as negative and marked in black).<sup>5</sup>

This sentence type was used in a previous survey conducted by Jolanta Urban (1993), whose aim was to describe the linguistic stereotypes of Germans and Poles. The advantage of the method is that explicit evaluation of the features being listed can be obtained from the respondents themselves, rather than coming from the researcher.

## 2. Features attributed to Europeans

### 2.1. Psychological aspect

This group contains features expressed via words or expressions related to people's characters, abilities, approaches to work, order, feelings, interests, addictions, and generally life.

The psychological aspect of the understanding of the four ethnonyms was mentioned by the respondents first (out of the ten distinguished aspects). Psychological features constitute 31% of all the features attributed to the ethnonyms *Poles*, *Germans*, and *French*. In the case of the *Europeans*, however, psychological features constitute only 10% (43 cases). Compared to national ethnonyms, the cognitive definition of *Europeans* contains very few psychological features. According to young Poles, *Europeans* are characterised by certain positive intellectual abilities, such as intelligence (5 times) and creativity (3 times). On the other hand, the negatively evaluated liberalism is also mentioned (3 times). The chart below shows only those cases when a given feature was mentioned at least three times. Considering that it contains only 11 mentions, it can be stated that the psychological features of *Europeans* are poorly entrenched in the awareness of young Poles (Figure 1).

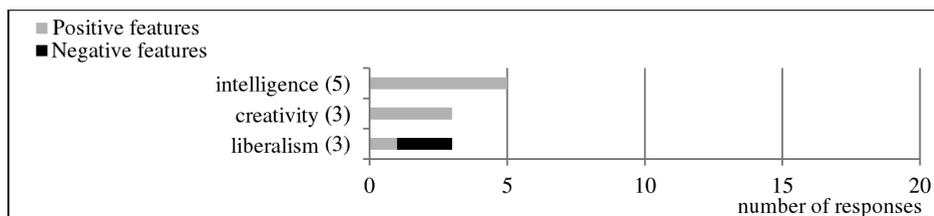


Figure 1. Features attributed to the ethnonym *Europeans* mentioned at least three times – the psychological aspect

<sup>5</sup> The modifier *true*, as in e.g. *true Europeans* (cf. Bartmiński 2009, ch. 5 and 14), was not used in the questions because an idealised description of the community was sought.

In the entire set of psychological features attributed to *Europeans*, ca. 65% are positive (28 positive features vs. 15 negative ones). Thus, features associated with the psychological aspect of the name *Europeans* are perceived more positively than those of *Poles*, *Germans*, and *French*, where 59% of features are positive (i.e. 417 vs. 286 negative ones) (Figure 2).

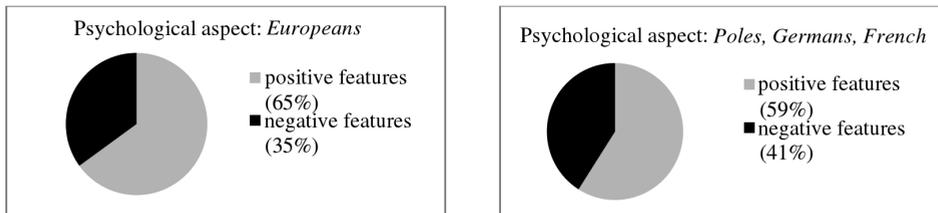


Figure 2. The ratio of positive to negative features of *Europeans* as compared to individual nations – the psychological aspect

## 2.2. Cultural aspect

The respondents' answers pertaining to the cultural aspect associated with the four ethnonyms concerned the artistic heritage (architecture, literature, music, etc.), as well as upbringing and education, including the command of foreign languages and good manners.

The cultural aspect was mentioned by the respondents in the second place. Out of all features linked with the ethnonyms *Poles*, *Germans*, and *French*, 12% were related to the cultural aspect. However, as many as 19%

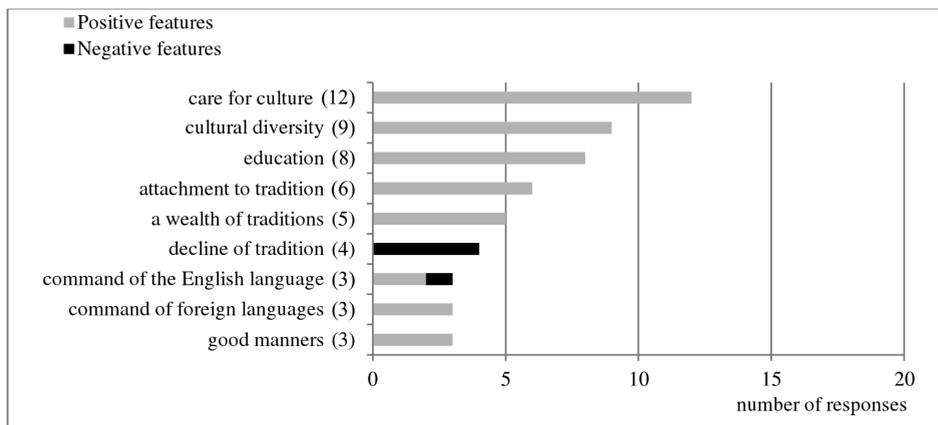


Figure 3. Features attributed to the ethnonym *Europeans* mentioned at least three times – the cultural aspect

of the features attributed to the ethnonym *Europeans* were cultural (78 mentions). The cultural aspect turns out to be particularly important for the understanding of the word *Europeans* by young Poles, who associate the people of Europe with a large number of positive characteristics. The respondents pointed to: care for culture (12), cultural diversity (9); high level of knowledge and sophistication of conduct: education (8), command of English (two positive and one negative judgement), command of foreign languages (3), good manners (3); plus: attachment to tradition (6) and a wealth of traditions (5). However, according to young people, the relationship between Europeans and tradition is slowly disappearing: this negatively evaluated process was mentioned four times (Figure 3).

In the entire set of cultural features attributed to *Europeans*, about 81% are positive (63 vs. 15 negative ones). The positive value of this aspect is therefore much more pronounced in the case of *Europeans* than in individual nationalities, *Poles*, *Germans*, or *French*, who were assigned positive features only in 67% of cases (201 times vs. 97 negative mentions) (Figure 4).

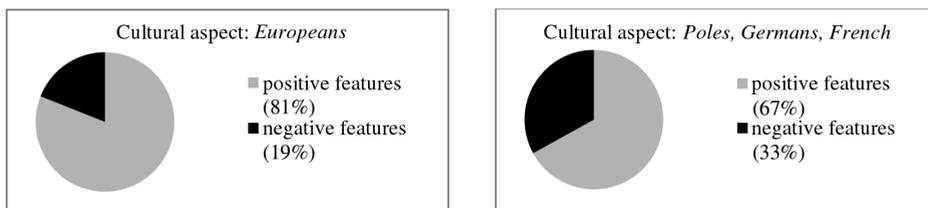


Figure 4. The ratio of positive to negative features of *Europeans* as compared to individual nations – the cultural aspect

### 2.3. Attitude to otherness

In the context of understanding of the four ethnonyms, attitude to otherness was invoked by the respondents in the third place. Out of all features attributed to the ethnonyms *Poles*, *Germans*, and *French*, 11% related to the attitude to otherness. In the case of *Europeans*, the proportion was even higher at 15% (64 cases). These features are considered as particularly positive: openness (17), tolerance (8), friendly attitude towards foreigners (4), and open-minded lifestyle, manifested as a predilection for travel (15) and cosmopolitanism (6), which, however, was once evaluated negatively. One feature, that of being closed to other cultures (4), is judged as negative and attenuates the image of the “open European” (Figure 5).

In the entire set of features related to the attitude of *Europeans* to otherness, about 83% are positive (53 mentions are positive and 11 negative).

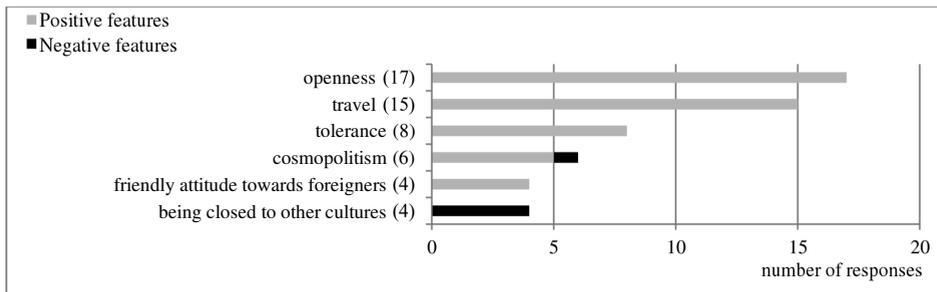


Figure 5. Features attributed to the ethnonym *Europeans* mentioned at least three times – attitude to otherness

This ratio is remarkably high compared to other national ethnonyms, where only 39% are positive (95 vs. 146 negative ones) (Figure 6).

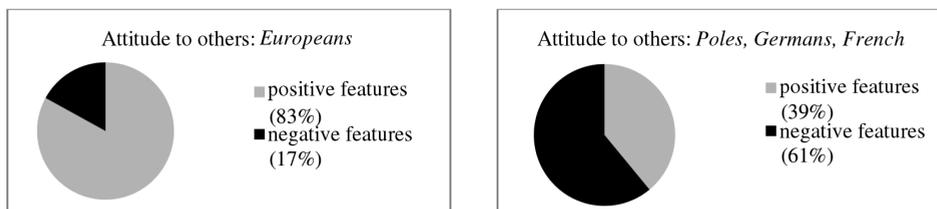


Figure 6. The ratio of positive to negative features attributed to *Europeans* as compared to individual nations – attitude to otherness

## 2.4. Social aspect

The subjects' responses that activate the social aspect are words or expressions of openness, tolerance, positive relation to foreigners, immigrants and generally other nations or cultures, but also to everything that relates to travelling and curiosity of the world.

The social aspect in the characteristics of the four ethnonyms was mentioned by the respondents in the fourth place. Out of all features attributed to the ethnonyms *Poles*, *Germans*, and *French*, 12% related to social features. They are thus more numerous than in the case of the ethnonym *Europeans*, where only 9% (39 cases) of all features invoked belong to this type. These attributes, mostly positive, relate to a particularly friendly relationship with others, as well as to the general notion of togetherness: mutual help (8), friendly disposition (4), community spirit (4), and solidarity (4) (Figure 7).

In the entire set of social features attributed to *Europeans*, about 77% are positive (i.e. 30 vs. 9 negative ones). The features that relate to the social aspect of the term *Europeans* are again more positive than those assigned

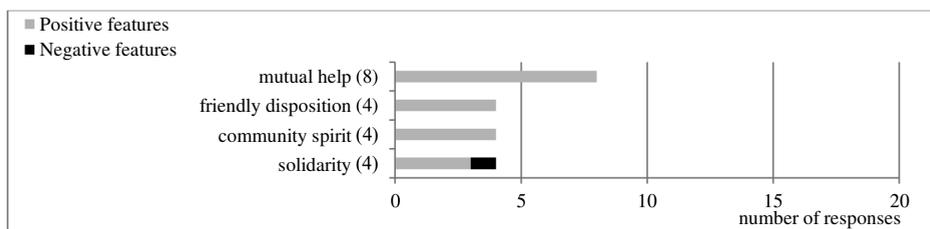


Figure 7. Features attributed to the ethnonym *Europeans* mentioned at least three times – the social aspect

to *Poles*, *Germans*, and *French*, where only 71% are positive (186 vs. 75 negative ones) (Figure 8).

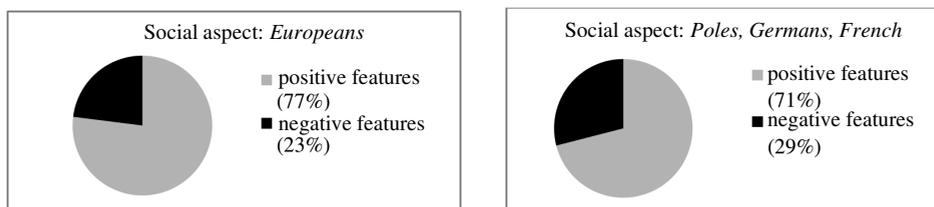


Figure 8. The ratio of positive to negative features of *Europeans* as compared to individual nations – the social aspect

## 2.5. Geographic and economic aspect

The responses in this group include words or expressions related to territory, to the resources and wealth of specific countries, the standard of living and the level of development, and the attitude of inhabitants to their country or territory.

The geographic and economic aspects of the understanding of the four ethnonyms was mentioned by the respondents in the fifth place. In the entire set of features attributed to the ethnonyms *Poles*, *Germans*, and *French*, 9% relate to geographic and economic features. However, in the set of features attributed to the ethnonym *Europeans* as many as 13% belong to this type (56 cases). These features are positive when they relate to desired aspects of economy: development (7) or modernity (6). On the other hand, they are negative when it comes to the economic division within Europe: into the rich and the poor (5), the East and the West (4), or when they express the limits of economic development: less economic influence exercised by Europeans in comparison with Americans (3), attachment to money (3), relocation of production to China (3) (Figure 9).

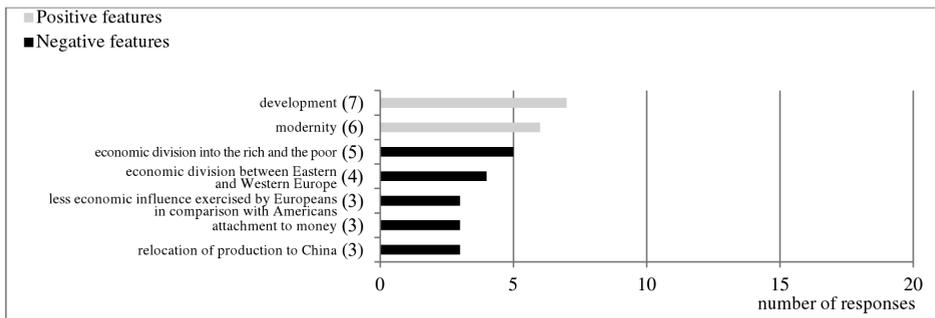


Figure 9. Features attributed to the ethnonym *Europeans* mentioned at least three times – the geographic and economic aspect

In the entire set of geographic and economic features, ca. 45% of those relating to *Europeans* are positive (25 positive vs. 31 negative mentions). These qualities are less positive than those attributes to *Poles*, *Germans*, and *French*, where 62% of all features relating to this aspect are positive (i.e. 128 vs. 80 negative ones).

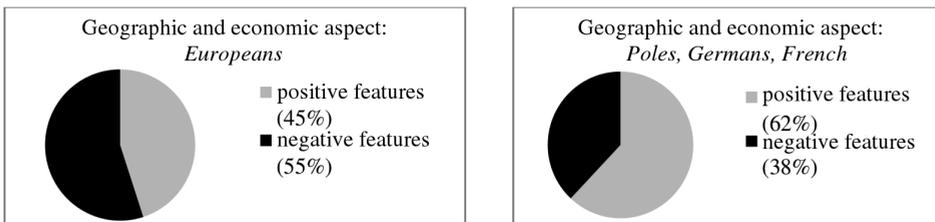


Figure 10. The ratio of positive to negative features of *Europeans* as compared to individual nations – the geographic and economic aspect

## 2.6. Psychosocial aspect

The responses pertaining to the psychosocial aspect include words or expressions relating to people's attitude to their own nationality, self-perception, pride and shame, their personal dignity and the dignity of the whole nation, or to their sense of superiority or inferiority.

The psychosocial aspect of understanding the four ethnonyms was invoked by the respondents in the sixth place. In the entire set of features attributed to the ethnonyms *Poles*, *Germans*, and *French*, 9% belong to the psychosocial aspect. These features relate in particular to fascination with the United States (13) and to unjustifiably high self-esteem, manifested as the sense of superiority (6) and conceit (5) – all being evaluated as negative features (Figure 11).

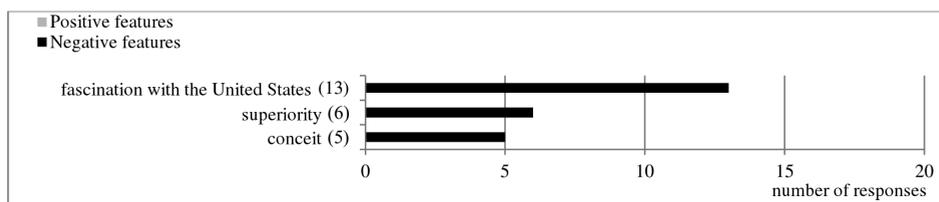


Figure 11. Features attributed to the ethnonym *Europeans* mentioned at least three times – the psychosocial aspect

Out of all psychosocial features attributed to *Europeans*, about 27% are positive (10 positive mentions vs. 29 negative ones). The features that belong to the psychosocial aspect of understanding the term *Europeans* are again more positive than those assigned to *Poles*, *Germans*, and *French*, where only 18% are positive (i.e. 38 vs. 168 negative ones) (Figure 12).

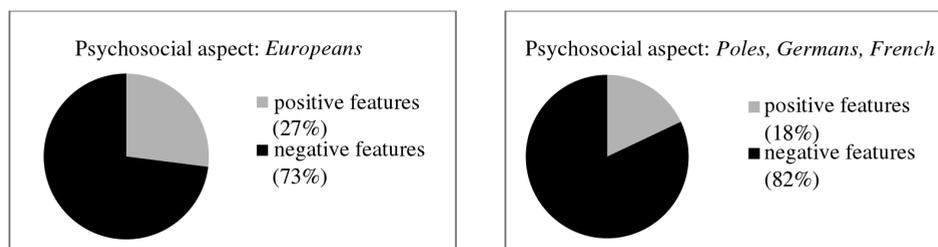


Figure 12. The ratio of positive to negative features of *Europeans* as compared to individual nations – the psychosocial aspect

## 2.7. Political aspect

The responses concerning the political aspect include words or expressions that are directly related to politics, the political system, the state, the administrative system, but also to citizenship and patriotism.

The political aspect of understanding the four ethnonyms was invoked by the respondents in the seventh place. In the whole set of features attributed to the ethnonyms *Poles*, *Germans*, and *French*, 6% belong to the political aspect. For young Poles, the image of *Europeans* is related more to politics than the image of individual European nations: as many as 19% of features assigned to *Europeans* are of political nature (81 cases). The positive political features of *Europeans* are linked specifically to the oneness of the European Union: unity (20), EU (14), integration (9), while the negative features concern mainly situations of conflict: political divisions (7), internal political conflicts (5), or excessive engagement with the USA (3) (Figure 13).

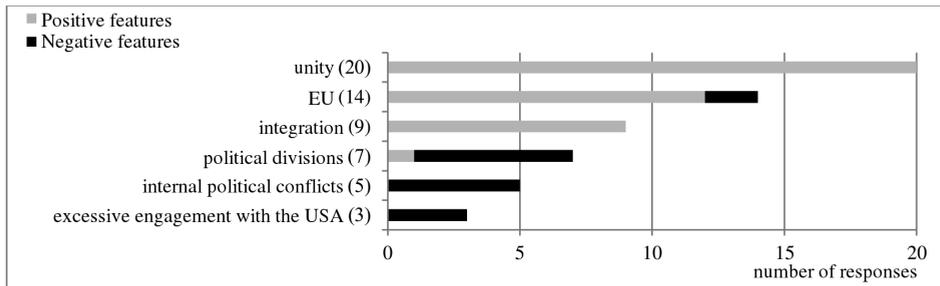


Figure 13. Features attributed to the ethnonym *Europeans* mentioned at least three times – the political aspect

Ca. 65% of all political features attributed to *Europeans* are positive (53 are positive and 28 are negative). The proportion is again higher than in the case of features assigned to *Poles*, *Germans*, and *French*, where only 39% are positive (i.e. 49 vs. 76 negative ones) (Figure 14).

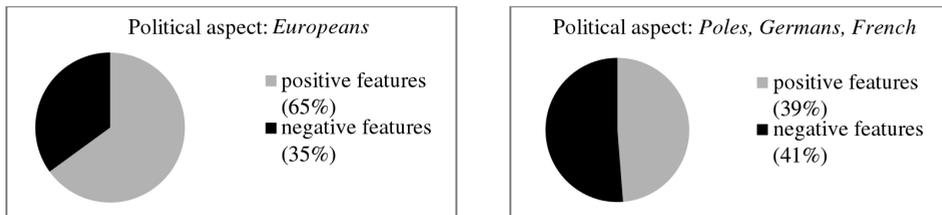


Figure 14. The ratio of positive to negative features of *Europeans* as compared to individual nations – the political aspect

## 2.8. Physical and aesthetic aspect

The responses pertaining to the physical and aesthetic aspect contain words or expressions related to appearance, beauty, ugliness, attire, the use of perfume, good and bad taste, and the auditory effect produced by speech.

This aspect was mentioned by the respondents in the eighth place. In the entire set of features attributed to the ethnonyms *Poles*, *Germans*, and *French*, 6% are cases of physical and aesthetic features. However, in the case of *Europeans* only 1% of all features belong to the physical and aesthetic aspect (4 cases). In these 4 cases, no feature was mentioned three times in the survey. There were 4 different features, the positive ones being original lifestyle (1), fashion follower (1), beautiful figures of European women (1); the negative feature is white skin (1). Thus, according to young Poles, *Europeans* do not have a characteristic appearance.

## 2.9. Historical aspect

Some responses in the survey pertain to the historical aspect, i.e. historical events and historical awareness of the peoples and communities designated by the ethnonyms.

The historical aspect of the understanding of the four ethnonyms was invoked by the respondents in the ninth place and includes only 3% of all features attributed to the ethnonyms *Poles*, *Germans*, and *French*. Similarly, of the whole set of attributes assigned to Europeans, 4% represent historical features (15 cases). The only positive feature that was mentioned in the survey at least three times was a rich history (7 cases) (Figure 15).

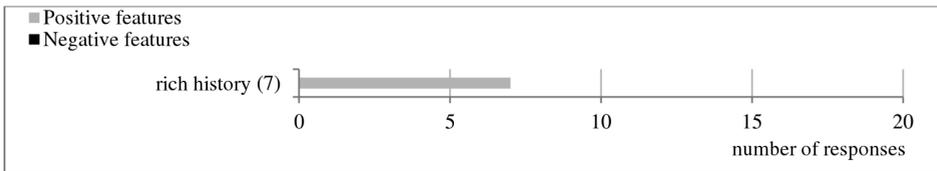


Figure 15. Features attributed to the ethnonym *Europeans* mentioned at least three times – the historical aspect

In the entire set of historical features assigned to *Europeans*, 80% are positive (i.e. 12 positive features vs. 3 negative ones). The features that belong to the historical aspect of the name *Europeans* are thus significantly more positive than those of *Poles*, *Germans*, or *French*, where only 30% are positive (22 positive vs. 52 negative ones) (Figure 16).

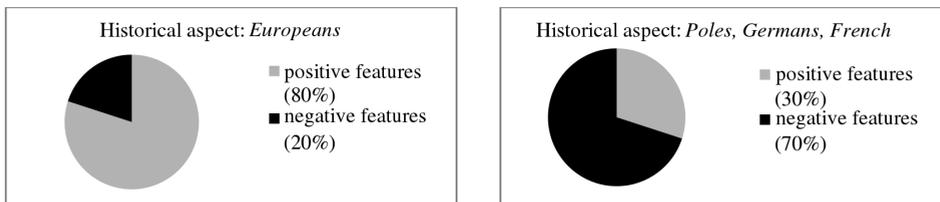


Figure 16. The ratio of positive to negative features of *Europeans* as compared to individual nations – the historical aspect

## 2.10. Religious aspect

The responses that represent the religious aspect include words or expressions that describe attitudes to religion, God, religious symbols, values, and traditions.

This aspect was mentioned by the respondents as the last one. Only 1% in the entire set of features attributed to *Poles*, *Germans*, and *French* pertain

to the religious aspect, the same applies to the ethnonym *Europeans* (4 cases). Only one negative feature was mentioned in the surveys: detachment from religion (4) (Figure 17).

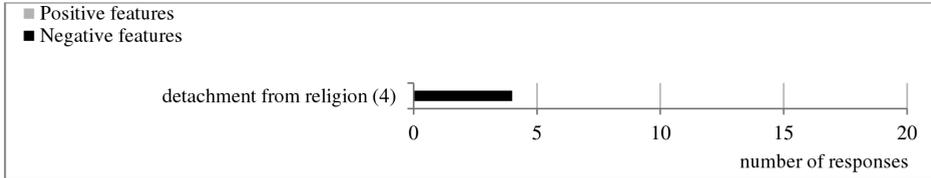


Figure 17. Features attributed to the ethnonym *Europeans* mentioned at least three times – the religious aspect

In the entire set of religious features assigned to *Europeans*, none is positive and four are negative (however, the number of responses is not representative). The religious features of the name *Europeans* are therefore less positive than those relating to *Poles*, *Germans*, and *French*, of which 44% are positive (12 features vs. 15 positive ones) (Figure 18).

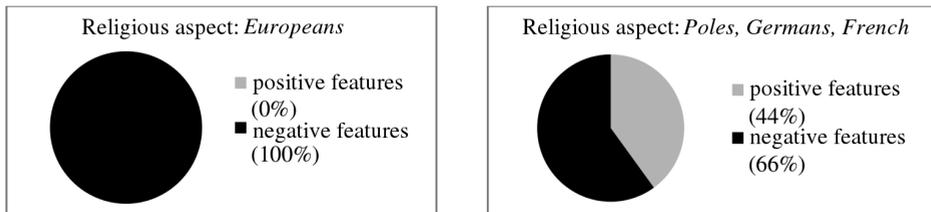


Figure 18. The ratio of positive to negative features of *Europeans* as compared to individual nations – the religious aspect

As far as the axiological dimension is concerned, evaluation of the images behind the name *Europeans* is more positive than for the ethnonyms *Poles*, *Germans*, and *French*, although Poles, Germans, and French are Europeans living in the heart of Europe. The use of the name *Europeans* allows young Poles to activate cognitive schemas that are more favourable than in the case of the names of individual European nations. In the case of the historical aspect, despite the fact that the histories of Poland, Germany, and France are crucial to the history of Europe, the historical aspect of the understanding of the words *Poles*, *Germans*, and *French* is more negative than the same aspect with respect to the meaning of *Europeans*. This group contains negative attributes that are not present in the description of Europeans (in particular, the descriptions of World War II). In other words, the term *Europeans* evokes a more positive image of the same people by evoking the richness of their history.

### 3. Old and new images of Europeans

As a result of the survey, various images of the *European* reported in other studies have been confirmed. The image of *the traditionalist European*, which contains elements such as attachment to tradition and wealth, was previously presented by Bartmiński (2006). The image of *the educated and cultured European*, with features such as education and *savoir-vivre*, also contains features that were identified in previous studies (Prochorowa 1998, Bartmiński 2006, Roguska 2011). The image of *the cosmopolitan European* – which in our survey relates to such features as linguistic proficiency, command of English, predilection for travel, and cosmopolitanism – is also far from new: linguistic proficiency, predilection for travel, and curiosity on the part of Europeans were already presented in Prochorowa (1998) and Bartmiński (2006). The image of *the open-minded European*, who in this survey is characterised by openness to people, tolerance, kindness, readiness to help others, and solidarity, was also outlined in Bartmiński (2006) and Roguska (2011) – these authors point to the growing tendency on the part of Poles to attribute such features to Europeans. Our study also corroborated the existence of the image of *the privileged European*, with attributes such as development and modernity – cf. again Bartmiński (2006) or Roguska (2011), where Europeans were claimed to be viewed in terms of their wealth and high standards of living they enjoy. The image of *the European as a citizen of the European Union* (Batko 2005), was also confirmed in our survey: Europeans were often associated with the EU. In addition, Bartmiński (2006) mentions the image of *the European with a unique culture*, marked by a common history shared with other Europeans. A trace of this image can also be found in the present study, e.g. in references to the richness of European history. Furthermore, a trace of the image of *the Christian European*, identified by Roguska (2011), can also be found in this survey: young Poles stress the detachment of Europeans from religion.

As a result of the study, as many as seven new images have been identified:

1. *the wise European* (features: intelligence and creativity);
2. *the multicultural European* (feature: cultural diversity);
3. *the divided Europeans – the rich Europeans from the West and the poor from the East* (features: division between Eastern and Western Europe, disparity between the rich and the poor);
4. *the weak European on the international scene* (features: smaller power than that of Americans, relocation of production to China);
5. *the conceited European* (features: arrogance and sense of superiority over inhabitants of other continents);

6. *the European united with other Europeans* (features: unity and readiness to integrate, especially in difficult situations);
7. *the European in conflict with other Europeans* (features: large-scale political divisions, small-scale conflicts and disagreements).

Seven new images is a relatively high number compared to other ethnonyms. Nine new images were identified for *Poles*,<sup>6</sup> three for *French*,<sup>7</sup> and none for *Germans* (the Polish image of *Germans* seems to be very stable and relatively unsusceptible to change). A large number of new images proves that in the eyes of young Poles, the image of *Europeans* (as indeed that of *Poles*) is very dynamic.

#### 4. Cognitive definition of *Europeans* vs. cognitive definitions of *Poles*, *Germans*, and *French*

The cognitive definition of the term *Europeans* shares more elements with that of the ethnonym *Poles* than with the definitions of *Germans* or *French*. This is an unexpected finding. Before conducting this study, I hypothesised that the cognitive definition of *Europeans* would be closer to the heterostereotypical ethnonyms *French* and *German* than to the auto-stereotypical ethnonym *Poles*. Germans and the French are citizens of those countries that in the Polish awareness have long been associated with Europe and regarded as the main propagators of the EU integration process (Warchala 2001). In addition, Poles joined the EU late and do not necessarily associate their own culture with the culture of Europeans (Prochorowa 1998).

However, the survey shows that the perception of *Europeans* by young Poles is closer to the understanding of the ethnonym *Poles* than to the ethnonyms *French* and *Germans*<sup>8</sup> (Viviand 2014). The features identified for both *Europeans* and *Poles* belong to the psychological, cultural, economic and geographic, and, in particular, the social and psychosocial aspects, and include: creativity and intelligence, attachment to tradition, education,

<sup>6</sup> These are: (i) *the grumpy Pole*; (ii) *the intelligent Pole*; (iii) *the vulnerable Pole*; (iv) *the unpredictable Pole*; (v) *the ill-mannered Pole*; (vi) *the Pole with complexes*; (vii) *the humble Pole*; (viii) *the politically troubled Pole*; and (ix) *the Pole indifferent to the problems of the community*.

<sup>7</sup> These are: (i) *the French person fascinated with their country*; (ii) *the French person living in an attractive country*; (iii) *the French person detached from religion*.

<sup>8</sup> The respondents marked only five features common to the French and Europeans: liberalism, savoir-vivre, cultural richness, friendly disposition, detachment from religion. The Germans and Europeans, in turn, only share two features: predilection for travel and (the high level of) development.

ability to unite, mutual help, solidarity, friendly disposition, development, fascination with Western countries, which manifests itself in, *inter alia*, the adoption of foreign models (the US model for *Europeans*) and in complexes (again, a US complex in the case of *Europeans*).

The high proportion of common features of *Poles* and *Europeans* can be explained by their auto-stereotypical nature. Young Poles identify themselves as Europeans to a considerable degree, although they also stress many differences.

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