

Thomas Karv

Public Attitudes Towards the European Union

A study explaining the variations in public support towards the
European Union within and between countries over time





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Åbo Akademi University Press
Tavastgatan 13, FI-20500 Åbo, Finland
Tel. +358 (0)2 215 4793
E-mail: forlaget@abo.fi

Sales and distribution:
Åbo Akademi University Library
Domkyrkogatan 2-4, FI-20500 Åbo, Finland
Tel. +358 (0)2 215 4190
E-mail: publikationer@abo.fi

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EUROPEAN UNION



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Åbo Akademis förlag | Åbo Akademi University Press
Åbo, Finland, 2019

CIP Cataloguing in Publication

Karv, Thomas.

Public attitudes towards the European Union : a study explaining the variations in public support towards the European Union within and between countries over time / Thomas Karv. - Åbo : Åbo Akademi University Press, 2019.

Diss.: Åbo Akademi University.

ISBN 978-951-765-934-5

ISBN 978-951-765-934-5
ISBN 978-951-765-935-2 (digital)
Painosalama Oy
Åbo 2019

Förord

Hösten 2008 flyttade jag från min kära hemby Pensala till, vad som numera är känt som "Nordens energihuvudstad", Vasa. Då hade jag aldrig trott att jag ännu 2019 skulle bo kvar här i staden, och ännu mindre att jag skulle ha skrivit en doktorsavhandling i statskunskap. Men se så blev det. Den process som har tagit mig till denna punkt i livet har varit långt ifrån rak, men åtminstone sedan jag blev antagen som doktorand hösten 2014 har målsättningen varit klar. Jag skulle bli doktor i statskunskap. Kring detta rådde det för min egen del aldrig några tvivel.

Detta skulle dock aldrig ha blivit fallet om det inte vore för min huvudhandledare, docent Kim Strandberg. Jag är evigt tacksam för all den uppmuntran och hjälp som du har gett mig genom hela denna process. Din dörr har alltid varit öppen, för alla typer av ärenden, och du har lärt mig vad som både förväntas och krävs för att kunna bli en god statsvetare. Du har även inkluderat mig i flera projekt och därigenom öppnat dörrar för mig som annars skulle varit stängda.

Ett stort tack går även till min andra handledare, professor Kimmo Grönlund. Stort tack för att jag fått vara en del av både Samforsk och Contre, och för att du trott på mig till den grad att jag 2017 fick anställning inom doktorandnätverket *Citizens and Democracy – Doctoral Network in Public Opinion and Political Behavior (PoBe)*. Utan denna möjlighet har jag svårt att se att jag skulle haft ekonomiska möjligheter att färdigställa denna avhandling. Stort tack till er båda för att ni både har tagit hand om mig och för att ni har visat mig förtroende.

Denna avhandling skulle aldrig ha blivit vad den blev utan all den ovärderliga hjälp som docent Peter Söderlund har bidragit med under hela processen. Ditt sätt att verkligen sätta dig in i andras arbete för att komma med tips kring förbättringar är något som jag tänker försöka anamma i framtiden. Du är ett föredöme för oss doktorander.

Jag vill även tacka avhandlingens förhandsgranskare, docent Lisa Dellmuth från Stockholms universitet och professor Jonas Linde vid Universitetet i Bergen, för era värdefulla kommentarer. Tack även för att ni valde att sätta dyrbar tid på att läsa avhandlingen. Stort tack även till språkgranskare Paul Wilkinson som bidragit till att språket i avhandlingen håller nivån. Ett stort tack riktas även till alla kollegor i forskarkonsortiet Contre, den finlandssvenska forskarskolan, Samforsk och alla ni på B4. Att ha fått vara en del av dessa helheter har varit både intressant och utvecklande, både på ett yrkesmässigt och, inte minst, på ett personligt plan.

Jag vill även speciellt tacka tre stycken kollegor, PD Claus Stolpe, PD Janne Berg och PD Jenny Lindholm. Utan Claus inspirerande föreläsningar under mitt första studieår skulle jag troligtvis inte ha stannat kvar vid Åbo Akademi, och som kollega uppskattar jag att du tar dig tid för att diskutera stort som smått. Utan Janne skulle jag troligtvis aldrig kommit på tanken på att börja doktorera, men att dagligen under många år gå förbi Jannes fönster och se honom jobba intensivt på sin egen avhandling väckte en nyfikenhet för denna bana som utmynnade i detta resultat. Jennys bidrag till både verksamheten och trivseln här på B4 går heller inte att överskatta, och du förtjänar ett stort tack för all den uppmuntran som du gett när det känts kämpigt.

Jag vill även passa på att tacka mina föräldrar. Ni har knappast haft det helt lätt genom åren, men ni har trots det alltid sett till att jag har det jag behöver och även stöttat mig i vått och torrt. Stort tack även till min sambo Charlotta Väisänen, som utan tvekan är den som fått stå ut med mest under alla dessa år. Tack för att du trots allt har orkat med mig och visat förståelse för hur jag har prioriterat. Förhoppningsvis lugnar livet ner sig efter att man har disputerat, men jag är långt ifrån säker baserat på vad jag har hört från mina kära kollegor.

Avslutningsvis vill jag även tacka två personer som inte längre finns bland oss, min morfar Lars Strandwall och min före detta lärare och fullmäktigekollega Bo Kronqvist. Denna bok tillägnas ert minne.

Till sist vill jag påpeka att arbetet med denna avhandling har möjliggjorts genom ekonomiskt stöd från Högskolestiftelsen i Österbotten, Harry Schaumans Stiftelse, Svensk-Österbottniska Samfundet, Åbo Akademi och Kulturfonden för Sverige och Finland. Ett ödmjukt tack för ert stöd och förtroende.

Nykarleby den 5 juli 2019

Thomas Lars Wilhelm Karv

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Abstract

Public attitudes towards the European Union (EU) have become increasingly important over time. This especially since the process of European integration has become widely considered as a political process affected by attitudinal fluctuations. Higher levels of public support contribute to the democratic legitimisation of the EU, as the European public should be considered as the only source of democratic legitimacy. The EU as an object should not, however, be empirically approached as a singular entity, hence guidelines from system support theory are used to approach the EU as a multidimensional political object divided into separate system important elements, towards which public attitudes are directed. This approach considers the common understanding that the European public differs in their evaluations of the different elements of the EU. Despite the vast amount of literature that has focused on individual-level determinants of EU attitudes, there is still a lack of macro-level studies including both a longitudinal and cross-sectional perspective. The research problem that this study seeks to answer, therefore, centres on explaining the varied levels of public support for the EU within the EU area. This study identifies the underlying national contextual-level determinants for the variations in public support for the EU within and between countries over time.

The research problem is approached by deploying both descriptive and statistical analyses. Survey data provided by Eurobarometer is used to measure country levels of public support, while Eurostat provides the main part of the national contextual-level factors used to explain country-level variations. In this study, the effects on public support from several different types of contextual-level factors are accounted for, including economic performance, democratic culture, external pressure and the EU-relation of the 28 member states. Eight different system elements of the EU were also identified as being of importance for the system persistence capabilities of the EU, divided into three main system components. Hence, this study analyses the determinants of public support for European integration policies, the

EU regime and the European political community. Furthermore, this study shows that the within countries variations in public support are predicted, to a large extent, by the economic performance of countries, while the variations between countries are more related to cultural and demographic differences across the EU area.

Public attitudes towards the EU vary extensively both within countries as well as across the EU area. Connecting country levels of public support to national level circumstances confirms the argument that public attitudes towards the EU are formed within the national level contexts. Therefore, what the European public thinks about the EU does not appear to be directly related to what the EU is actually doing. The understanding that the country levels of public support are prone to fluctuation over time, based on national circumstances, contributes to an unstable foundation for the future of European integration. As the EU has been considered to have been in an almost constant state of crisis since the start of the global recession in 2008, this should be regarded as a worrying sign for the future system persistence capabilities of the EU.

1. Introduction

Some day historians will probably rank Europe's peaceful integration achieved in half a century of sustained efforts among mankind's major achievements.

Rothacher, 2005, p. 1

What the European public think about the European Union (EU) has become increasingly important as more and more national decision-making powers are transferred to the European political institutions. Simultaneously, public attitudes towards the EU have been shown to vary significantly both within and between the member states. Therefore, the main research problem that this thesis intends to answer focuses on why public attitudes towards the EU vary within and between the member states of the EU over time. The research interest of this thesis centres around the kind of attitudes that reflect support for the EU, as sufficient levels of public support are considered to provide the EU with enough democratic legitimacy for its existence not to be questioned during system crises. The growing importance of sufficient levels of public support for the EU can be traced back to the general transformation from a European common market into something starting more to resemble a semi-political Union, as this transformation has also changed the public perceptions of the EU (Anderson & Kaltenthaler, 1996). It is therefore argued here that sufficient levels of public support for the EU should be considered to be of existential importance for both the system persistence capabilities and for the future development of the EU. This is not a new argument, however, as Lindberg and Scheingold (1970) already argued that as the EU grows, it will become more dependent on public support for legitimising its existence.

The possibility for a member state to actually leave the EU was previously considered merely as an abstract possibility, yet the Brexit vote in June 2016 showed that an abstract vision can turn into a political reality when the public is given a direct choice. According to De Vries (2018, p. 3), the outcome of the Brexit referendum provide a clear

indication of what may lie ahead. Over time, the EU in particular, and European integration in general, have become politicised issues within most of the member states, and not only in the United Kingdom. As politicised issues, the future development of the EU will not only be determined by the preferences of the political elites but also by the preferences of the European public (Hooghe & Marks, 2008; Statham & Trezz, 2015; Kriesi, 2016). Over time, the EU has created an economically, socially and politically interconnected political community, and hence the political decisions of one member state also have direct consequences for the rest. Therefore, it is argued here that it is crucial for researchers to differentiate between countries when analysing public support. It can be directly misleading to treat the EU area as a single entity without taking national variations into consideration. Therefore, the research aim of this thesis is to identify the kinds of national contextual-level factors that explain the variations in public support for the EU within and between countries over time. As such, this thesis seeks to provide explanations for the varying levels of public support at two analytical levels, while simultaneously empirically approaching the EU as a multidimensional political object.

Scholars have argued that a one-dimensional approach to analysing public support for the EU is insufficient, and instead many agree on the need to distinguish between different elements of the EU when analysing public attitudes towards it (Gabel, 1998; McLaren, 2002; Hooghe & Marks, 2004; Boomgaarden, Schunk, Elenbaas & De Vreese, 2011; Hobolt & Brouard, 2011). As the European public is capable of differentiating between different aspects of the EU, this also needs to be accounted for within empirical research. The theoretical guidelines of the thesis are therefore based on a theoretical framework developed by Easton (1965; 1975), who developed the system support theory in order to analyse the system persistence capabilities of a political system. In his framework, he divided a political system into three separate but interrelated system components, towards which public attitudes were primarily directed, while also differentiating between two kinds of supportive public attitudes, specific and diffuse support.

Hence, public support for the EU is in this thesis not treated as something directed towards something vaguely defined as the EU, but instead primarily towards one of the three main system components that are argued here to be of system importance for the EU from a long-term system persistence perspective: European integration policies, the EU regime and the European political community. These three system components together constitute the main components of system importance for the EU as a political system. Therefore, in order to obtain a comprehensive overview regarding public support for the EU the most sufficient way is by approaching it through system support theory, and thereby scrutinising separately what the European public thinks about the three main system components. In this study, the concept of public support for the EU is therefore perceived as a multidimensional analytical concept. As Angela Merkel noted, the future of the euro, the EU and Europe are undeniably intertwined.¹ In this respect, it has become important for researchers to differentiate between what the European public think about these system components, in order to be able to forecast what the European public think about the whole European political system.

The concept of public attitudes generally reflects how the general public respond in a specific way, either negatively or positively, towards some political object (Tourangeau & Galesic, 2008, pp. 141–142). The concept of public support within this study, however, refers to an overall positive assessment of a political object (Niedermayer & Westle, 1995, p. 47), and the research focus of this thesis is on the country-specific levels of public support for the different system important elements of the EU, which are deemed of importance for the system persistence capabilities and future development of the EU seen from a system perspective. In the following section, the main arguments as to why this kind of research should be considered of both academic and political significance are presented.

¹ In reference to her statement: “If the euro fails, Europe fails”. Stated during the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party summit in Leipzig, Germany, 2011.

1.1 The European Union under pressure

Gone are the days where national leaders could decide Europe's future behind closed doors without worrying about public opinion.

Hobolt, 2012, p. 100

At least since the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, the European integration process has been considered a political process directly affected by public sentiments (Gabel & Whitten, 1997, p. 81).² According to Vasilopoulou (2013, p. 7), the Maastricht Treaty was the first time when the European political elites openly showed their willingness to transfer decision-making powers from the national to the EU arena also in other than market-related policy areas, which had a significant effect on public attitudes towards European integration. Since then, the EU and European integration have started to become increasingly politicised issues within domestic politics, signaling that the European public have become increasingly divided towards further European integration and towards the EU in general. Hoeglinger (2016, p. 13) argued that “the presence of diverging attitudes among different social groups or political actors is a necessary precondition of political conflict”. The politicisation process thereby contributes to making previously non-political issues political (Zurn, Binder & Ecker-Ehrhardt, 2012, p. 73), as has been the case with the EU. It should not, however, be considered as a surprise that as “European integration has grown in scope and depth, it has proved ripe for politicization” (Hooghe & Marks 2008, p. 18).³ The extent of this politicisation process, however, varies across the EU area (Grande & Kriesi, 2016).

Politicisation is defined by Grande and Hutter (2016, p. 7) as “the expansion of the scope of conflict within a political system”. Therefore,

² The treaty that transformed the European Community (EC) into the European Union (EU) and marked the beginning of “a new stage in the process of creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe”.

³ This occurred even though Martin Schulz, the former leader of the then second largest party in Germany (SPD), as late as in December 2017 openly called for the creation of a United States of Europe by 2025.

as the “scope of conflict” regarding European integration has expanded, more actors have become important for the outcomes. This has contributed to widespread political debates within the EU area regarding the future development of European integration (De Wilde, 2011; Hurrelmann, Gora & Wagner, 2015). As a result, the future of European integration is not only determined by the explicit preferences of the political elites, but increasingly also by public preferences. As a political process also directly affected by public attitudes, the future development of the European integration process has now become “increasingly susceptible to swings in public mood” (Kaina & Karolewski, 2013, p. 6).

The political effects of public attitudes towards European integration are, however, twofold, as public attitudes should be seen as a driver both for and against deeper European integration (Ioannou, Leblond & Niemann, 2015, p. 170). According to Genschel and Jachtenfuchs (2016, pp. 52–53), the European public can therefore either be perceived as a source of demand for integration or as an obstacle to integration. However, the national referendums regarding the approval of the Maastricht Treaty already showed that the European public does have both the ability, and sometimes also the willingness, to forestall deeper European integration (Anderson, 1998, p. 570). Since then it has been established that what the public within the different member states thinks about the EU has real political implications for the future of the EU as a whole.⁴ This assumption is not either constrained to a particular kind of member state, as “European integration appears to be significantly influenced, or constrained, by public opinion in both the core and the periphery” (Bolstad, 2015, p. 23). In relation to this, it has also become widely assumed that “no elite decision-maker is going to push integration if it means a domestic backlash that could push them from office”

⁴ The Maastricht Treaty was first voted down in a popular referendum in Denmark, although in a second referendum it was accepted after Denmark received some exceptions from the treaty. It was also close to be voted down in France, where only 50.8 per cent of the voters voted in favour.

(Anderson & Kaltenthaler, 1996, p. 176). Over time, that general assumption has therefore increasingly “put public support for the EU, its institutions and its policies high on the scholarly agenda” (Harteveld, van der Meer & De Vries, 2013, p. 543).

The EU’s official motto since 2000 is *unity in diversity*, although the history of European integration is almost as much about failure as it is about success (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015, p. 115). With regard to the EU in particular, and European integration in general, the recent decade has also been described as a “decade of crises” (Schimmelfennig, 2018, p. 969). During this period, the Brexit vote on the 23rd of June 2016 should be regarded as constituting the most directly threatening of these crises from a system persistence perspective, as it undoubtedly set an example for other countries to consider. Even though Brexit could, and should, be regarded as the most significant single crisis the EU has faced, it is just the latest in a long history of EU crises. Jean Monnet, one of the founding fathers of the EU, even noted in his memoirs that Europe would be built through crises and that it would be the sum of their solutions (1978, p. 46). The failed referendums on the implementation of the European Constitution (2005), the Eurocrisis (2010) and the migration crisis (2015) could all be deemed as serious EU crises, just to mention a few of the most recent ones. Taken together, these crises have affected both the media narrative and the public perception of the EU to such an extent that the EU’s future existence has become more questioned for every new crisis. Some have even ventured as far as arguing that because of the results of these crises “the European Union faces an existential challenge” (Hobolt & De Vries, 2016a, p. 414).

The developments during the last decade have therefore resulted in a shift of focus with regard to European integration, as the political debate has now inevitably moved from “what Europe” to “whether Europe” (Franklin & Hobolt, 2014, p. 415). According to both Tömmel (2014, p. 335) and McCormick (2014, p. 218), this is mainly because more and more Europeans have started to perceive the EU as the source for many of the national problems instead of the solution to problems that

cannot be fixed at the national level. It has, however, already for some time been the common procedure of national politicians to blame the implementation of necessary, but unpopular, decisions on Brussels (Obradovic, 1996, p. 202), and as a result increasing numbers of Europeans “no longer associate the EU with greater freedom and opportunity; instead, they blame it for financial pain, prolonged joblessness, and a lack of democratic choice” (Matthijs & Keleman, 2015, p. 97).

From a broad perspective the concept of public support for the EU is usually used to reflect country-level “support for the constitutional settlement of the European Union as laid down in the various treaties, including support for the membership of the Union” (Hobolt & De Vries, 2016a, pp. 415–416). Hence, within the European integration literature, the theoretical concept of public support for the EU has mostly been used as a sum indicator for EU-related public attitudes, mixing together attitudes towards specific European integration policies, such as the Euro, with attitudes towards the democratic performance of the EU and towards EU level political institutions (Hobolt & De Vries, 2016a). A sufficient level of public support for the EU is therefore assumed to democratically legitimise the EU as a political system, thereby simultaneously legitimising the political authority of the EU regime and the European integration process (Hooghe & Marks, 2008). A sufficient level of public support for the EU within the member states is therefore considered as “the political foundation for integration” (Gabel, 1998, p. 333), and many scholars now agree that the European public plays an important role in determining the future of the European integration process (Hooghe & Marks, 2008; Hix & Hoyland, 2013; Armingeon & Ceka, 2014).

Schmitt and Thomassen (1999, p. 9) “somewhat loosely” defined democratic legitimacy as the idea that the existing political system is acceptable according to the public, which led them to ask philosophical questions regarding what actually is meant by the concept of a political system and which elements of it should be deemed acceptable by the public for the political system to be democratically legitimised.

According to them, there are two ways to assess the legitimacy of a political system, the first being if the system conforms to certain normative criteria, and the second being the extent to which the political system is acceptable according to the members participating in the political system. As a political system based on the member states' voluntary compliance, the EU is therefore assumed to be dependent on a minimal level of public support to be democratically legitimated. Hence, the concept of democratic legitimacy within this study is defined as the idea that the existing political system of the EU is acceptable according to the European public.

According to Dogan (1994, p. 302), legitimacy is, however, something that comes in degrees and is a theoretical concept that can also be empirically measured. In this thesis, it is suggested that the most appropriate way to measure the extent of the EU's democratic legitimacy is to measure the levels of public support for the three main system components of importance for the system persistence capabilities of the EU as a political system. There are many aspects of the EU that the public generally approve of, while the public might generally disapprove of other aspects simultaneously. All aspects are not, however, of equal importance from a system persistence perspective. Therefore this kind of differentiation of the EU as a political system into different evaluable elements should be considered essential within empirical research focusing on EU attitudes.

The political relevance of studying public support in the form of public attitudes towards the EU is derived from the understanding that "politicians in democratic societies generally follow voters' preferences" (Fligstein, Polyakova & Sandholtz, 2012, p. 118). Fluctuations in public support therefore force political parties to adapt their positions on the EU based on the public preferences (Toshkov, 2011, p. 171). Easton (1965, p. 154) suggested that every significant development within a political community affects how different aspects of the political system are being evaluated by the members participating in the shared political community. However, "as long as European integration did not cause too much harm, no one was

concerned about its development (Obradovic, 1996, p. 192). This presumption has, undoubtedly and irreversibly, changed during the last decade.

Starting in 2008, the EU experienced an unprecedented economic and financial crisis, referred to by Piketty (2014, p. 472) as being “the worst crisis to hit capitalism since 1929”. The origin of the global financial crisis, hereafter referred to as the global recession, can be traced back to the American real-estate crisis and the collapse of Lehmann Brothers in 2008. The global recession continued in Europe with the start of the Eurocrisis, or the sovereign-debt crisis, in 2010 that forced 8 out of 28 EU member states to apply for financial bailouts from the European Central Bank (ECB), The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Commission (EC), together commonly referred to as “the Troika” (Hobolt & De Vries, 2016b, p. 1).⁵ Schimmelfennig (2017, p. 23) went as far as suggesting that the “eurozone crisis has been the deepest in European integration”. If the economic challenges were not enough, the Arab spring, the rise of ISIS, the war in eastern Ukraine and the civil wars in Syria, Libya and Iraq contributed to creating a migration crisis that placed further pressure on the EU’s internal stability and cohesion. During the peak of the migration crisis in 2015, intra-EU border controls between member states such as Denmark and Sweden were established for the first time since the 1950’s, something which were deemed almost unthinkable before the start of the migration crisis. These crises, together with earlier crises such as the failure to ratify a European Constitution in 2005, have inevitably placed the future of the EU and the benefits of European integration into serious political, academic and public questioning. As a result of the recent crises, the fragile political and social stability achieved through almost 70 years of institutional integration in Europe is being increasingly challenged from within.⁶

⁵ The countries that received bail-outs from the Troika were the Republic of Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Portugal, Romania and Spain.

⁶ For similar argumentation see also Zielonka, 2014; Copelovitch, Frieden and Walter, 2016; Jones, Keleman and Meunier, 2015; Majone, 2016; Piketty, 2014; Hobolt and Wratil, 2015; Schmidt, 2015 and Hobolt and De Vries, 2016a.

Simultaneously, as the EU has been affected by both internal and external crises, the political leverage of the EU has increased significantly at the global stage. The EU area is, when seen as a cohesive political entity, the second largest economy in the world as well as both the largest exporter and importer of goods and services (Aldcroft & Morewood, 2013, p. 349), not to mention the fact that the EU represents a shared population reaching over 500 million citizens divided into 28 member states (7.1% of the world's total population in 2018). As a supranational political system in Europe, created through voluntary compliance and the pooling of resources, the EU's democratic legitimacy has ultimately thus been derived from the public perception of shared benefits for the participating member states. Furthermore, the EU, with all its undeniable flaws and shortcomings, is to date globally, as well as historically, by far the most successful example of voluntarily transferring of decision-making powers from the national to a supranational arena. The EU has therefore also functioned as a role model for other similar projects worldwide, such as Mercosur⁷ and the African Union.

In an increasingly interconnected, digitised and globalised world, there are also those who have even argued that the concept of nation states should soon be regarded as an outworn political structure.⁸ However, when the perceived benefits of dismantling nation states are not as clear to the public as they are for the political elites, there is always the possibility of "taking back control".⁹ Why is it then, that after more than 60 years of mostly successful European integration under the guidance of the EU, that the public within many member states are again seemingly starting to embrace nationalism and

⁷ Mercosur includes the five South American countries Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Colombia and Venezuela. It should also be noted that Venezuela was suspended from the organisation in 2016.

⁸ Among these are the former Danish Prime Minister Paul Schluter who, in 1998, called the nation-state the twin of the industrial society and, therefore an outworn structure soon to be extinct, and former President of the Czech Republic Vaclav Havel has also stated that national sovereignty is an outmoded concept in European politics (in Citrin & Sides, 2004, p. 41).

⁹ One of many slogans used by "Brexiters" during the referendum campaign in 2016.

protectionism and turning against European solidarity and cooperation?

The institutional development of the EU, for the purpose of the institutional fulfilment of European integration policies, has historically been achieved through political compromises, based on the rule of “lowest common denominator” between the member state political elites (Jones, Keleman & Meunier, 2015, p. 5). A commonly used argument is that these compromises were rendered possible by what Lindberg and Scheingold (1970) famously have referred to as a “permissive consensus” provided by the European public towards European integration policies. The long period of “permissive consensus” from the European public is, however, now widely considered to be over (Zurn, 2016, p. 164), and instead the public has over time started to express, something referred to as, “constraining dissensus” towards further European integration policies (Hooghe & Marks, 2008), rejecting more “integration by stealth” (Ross, 2008, p. 410). According to Klingeren, Boomgaarden and De Vreese (2013, p. 690), negative attitudes towards the EU might thereby “induce stagnation, standstill and ultimately the implosion of European integration,” and could therefore be considered as a system threatening development. After the events during the last decade, there are many who argue that the EU lacks a clear vision for the future when the original, and since then mostly prevailing, vision of a future “United States of Europe” has fallen out of grace. Hence, De Vries (2018, p. 43) argues that the lack of an elite and public consensus about the future direction of the EU constitutes an existential challenge to the European project.

The increasing public expressions of opposition, and even hostility, towards the EU signal that a significant number of Europeans oppose further integration under the current circumstances, signals that the political elites are no longer able to ignore (De Wilde, 2015, p. 3). The lack of a clear vision for the EU, the failure with the creation of a European constitution, the global recession, the Eurocrisis and the migration crisis have all contributed to the rise of public opposition

towards the EU, something broadly referred to as Euroscepticism. The concept of Euroscepticism is broadly defined as opposition to the EU (Vasilopoulou, 2018, p. 123), but it can also relate to “opposition towards a specific policy or integration effort” (Boomgaarden et al., 2011, p. 242). As EU attitudes have been growing increasingly negative in many of the member states, the future development of the EU and European integration policies have become widely discussed topics during national level elections. Euroscepticism has been described as an inevitable “grit in the system” (Usherwood & Startin, 2013, p. 2), and increased opposition towards the EU and European integration should have been expected when the EU developed in a more integrationist direction (McCormick, 2014, p. 101). This development is something which populist parties especially have been able to capitalise on during elections (Kneuer, 2019). Euroscepticism thereby constitutes the opposite perspective when it comes to EU attitudes, and as such needs further elaboration.

Euroscepticism could be understood as an element of public discourse opposing the legitimacy of the EU (De Wilde & Trenz, 2012, p. 4) and the concept of Euroscepticism is widely used when both academics and journalists try to describe public sentiments towards the EU. According to Mair (2007), any political system that does not allow for policy-specific opposition will create opposition against the political system itself, which might explain why any kind of opposition towards any aspect of the EU sometimes is perceived as opposition towards the political system of the EU as a whole. In relation to this, Taggart and Szczerbiak (2002) and Kopecky and Mudde (2002) suggests that Euroscepticism, as a multidimensional concept, indicates one of two separate but interrelated public sentiments. It may indicate public opposition towards a specific policy and/or the current workings of the EU (soft Euroscepticism/specific opposition) or it might indicate public opposition towards European integration as an idea (hard Euroscepticism/diffuse opposition). This is a crucial distinction.

Almost 50 years ago, Lindberg and Scheingold (1970, p. 270) speculated on three future possibilities for the development of the EU

and European integration. These scenarios are arguably still relevant in 2019. (1) The EU could develop into an “equilibrium state” where policies are implemented through mutual agreements between the member states. (2) The EU could develop into a fully federal European super-state with the member states independently having no say in the larger European issues. (3) The EU could suffer crises that would lead to the decision-making powers being transferred back to the national arenas, which in the end could lead to the complete dissolution of the EU. Furthermore, according to the “bicycle-theory,” the EU must keep moving forward, especially during crises, not to fall (Majone, 2016, p. 2). If one agrees with these hypotheses, there are two possibilities for the EU: keep moving forward towards a fully federal European super-state or start transferring decision-making powers back to the member states, which might over time lead to the complete dissolution of the EU. Whichever way, this process is expected to be both indirectly and directly affected by the preferences of the public within the constituting member states (Hobolt, 2015, p. 238).

Caldeira and Gibson (1995) also suggested that because of the lacking law enforcement mechanisms, except the possibility of shaming sinning countries into compliance, the EU ultimately depends on sufficient levels of public support for its continued existence. This statement, over time, has become even more valid considering the political developments during the last decade within a number of member states. As De Vries (2018, p. 217) also points out when suggesting that “at a time when Eurosceptic sentiment is rising, the Union relies more on public approval than ever before”. After this introduction to the larger developments related to the EU and why this is a phenomenon that needs to be studied more extensively, the following section presents the more explicit research purpose of this thesis.

1.1.1 Research interest and general research questions

It is not enough any longer to say that the Union, in its current or earlier versions, has created peace in Europe.

Giddens, 2007, p. 204

This section will present the general guidelines for how this study is to be conducted and also present the general research questions that will guide this thesis. Like many other scholars interested in public attitudes towards the EU, the research contribution with this study is connected to the growing literature on what Hobolt and De Vries (2016a, p. 414) argue is the core question in the extensive European integration literature: what explains variation in public attitudes towards European integration? The study of public attitudes lies at the centre when researchers want to understand how the public relate to political, economic and social developments, and according to De Vreese, Azrout and Boomgaarden (2018, p. 2) public attitudes towards the EU “are at the heart of the political, societal and scientific debates regarding the future of European integration”. Public opinion surveys are what make this kind of research possible, and surveys are hence a valuable instrument for academics and politicians alike. The purpose of this thesis is hence to contribute to this already extensive literature by focusing on member state variations in public support for the three main system components of the EU as a political system: European integration policies, the EU regime and the European political community.

This thesis differs from similar studies in four specific ways. First of all, the research focus lies solely on aggregated country levels of public support, hence all 28 member states are treated equally within the statistical analyses. Furthermore, the empirical part of the thesis differs between eight different elements of the EU as a political system, towards which the public attitudes are directed. Moreover, the empirical research focus is also solely on the effects of national contextual-level factors on country levels of public support, and therefore individual level data will not be included in the statistical

analyses. This is mainly because a significant amount of empirical research have already been conducted explaining the individual level predictors of EU attitudes, predictors that do not appear to have been changing much over time. However, there is arguably still much to be studied about the effects of national contextual-level factors on the macro-level variations in public support, especially from a longitudinal perspective as country levels of public support have been shown to fluctuate significantly.

Finally, the thesis will also hence include a time component, as there have been significant developments in public support for the EU over time that need to be accounted for. As there is comparative data only available from 2004 onwards, including all of the current 28 member states of the EU, 2004 will constitute the departure point for the empirical parts of this thesis. As 2017 will constitute the end point for the empirical part, the statistical analyses will be able to account for all of the crises that have been shown to have affected EU attitudes during this period. The longitudinal overview presented in chapter six will also clearly show that the member state levels of public support for the EU are more stable in some member states, while the levels of public support fluctuate heavily within others, and also that there are apparent variations between the system components towards which the public attitudes are directed. In order to narrow down the research puzzle, the three general research questions of this thesis are here presented:

1. How have the member state levels of public support for the different system components of the EU as a political system developed over time?
2. To what extent can contextual-level factors explain the variations within countries in public support for the different system components of the EU as a political system?

3. To what extent can contextual-level factors explain the variations between countries in public support for the different system components of the EU as a political system?

These three research questions will be more thoroughly presented in the following sections.

Trends in public support for the EU

The end of what Lindberg and Scheingold (1970) referred to as the “permissive consensus” amongst the European public towards European integration has attracted a large amount of attention among researchers during the last decade. However, already prior to the start of the global recession, Mair (2007, p. 2) suggested that “there is neither consensus nor much that is permissive” in relation to EU attitudes. Furthermore, it has also been suggested that public support for the EU and European integration have been in almost constant decline within the EU area since the Maastricht Treaty (1992), something that has been described as “the post-Maastricht Blues” (Eichenberg & Dalton, 2007). Nevertheless, this development has been considered to have accelerated after the start of the global recession, and more specifically after the start of the Eurocrisis. Therefore, there has been a plethora of studies trying to identify the underlying reasons that are able to explain why public support for the EU has been declining. However, an obvious limitation with many of these studies is that they only choose to focus on one indicator measuring public support for the EU, and hence most studies do not provide the full picture regarding the development of EU attitudes.

Even though it is apparent that public support for some elements of the EU has undoubtedly declined, the picture becomes more complex when studying the EU from a system support perspective. This complexity becomes especially apparent when looking at the 28 member states separately, and there are also significant variations within countries between the levels of public support towards the system important elements of the EU identified in this study. For this

purpose, country-specific longitudinal trends in public support for the EU as a political system during 2004–2017, divided into three main system components, European integration policies, the EU regime and the European political community, will be initially presented in the empirical part to answer this descriptive research question.

Variations in public support within countries over time

In this thesis, fluctuations in country levels of public support are argued to have real political implications for the system persistence capabilities of the EU as a political system. It has, however, already been argued for some time that it is “critically important to understand the factors that drive public opinion toward the integration process and the European Union” (Anderson & Kaltenthaler, 1996, p. 192). Hence, “understanding how public opinion changes, its moods, cycles, and dynamics, has become one of the biggest problems in public opinion research today” (Bishop, 2005, p. 91). Furthermore, Zurn (2016, p. 173) also argues that “within-EU comparisons between different member states have improved our understanding of politicization. They undeniably show that it is extremely important to compare and to account for variation”. The developments within the EU area since 2008 also seem to have placed the perceived national level benefits of EU membership, and European integration policies, into increased questioning by the European public and the political elites alike.

It has also become widely assumed that the variations in public support within countries are mainly derived from contextual-level factors at the national levels, which are used as proxies when forming EU attitudes. There is, however, still no agreement regarding the kind of contextual-level factors that the public use as proxies when forming their EU attitudes, and how the effects differ between the different system important elements of the EU as a political system. Using a comparative research design, this study intends to answer this research question by showing how the variations in public support within countries over time can be explained by similar contextual-level developments across the EU area.

Variations in public support between countries

Many studies have tried to explain why public support for the EU differs between countries, providing a wide range of explanations usually derived from the economic, social, cultural or political contexts of the countries. However, most studies only choose to focus on one indicator of public support, and there is still a lack of more overarching studies regarding the between-country variations in different types of EU attitudes within the literature. Therefore, this study intends to show to what extent the same contextual-level factors used for explaining the within countries variations in public support are also able to account for the variations between countries in public support. It should be considered of both political and academic concern to account for differences between countries to provide explanations on why different system components of the EU as a political system are evaluated differently between the countries in the EU area. This thinking is in line with Marsh (1999, p. 92), who pointed out the understanding “that countries vary is not simply a fact of academic interest”.

These three research questions will guide the rest of the thesis, and this study will contribute to provide an overarching understanding regarding the country-level variations in public support for different system important elements of the EU as a political system. In the following section the disposition of this thesis is presented.

1.1.2 Disposition of the thesis

This initial part, *Introduction*, comprised three sections that outlined the main research problem, the guiding research questions and provided a general introduction into the subject. The second chapter, *European integration – Introducing the research field*, begins with a historical overview regarding European integration and presents the three grand theories of European integration that have been used to understand the success and failures of European integration. As one of the main arguments of this thesis is that EU attitudes matter for the future development of the EU, it differs from the two main theories of European integration: neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism. As

such, the study is argued to fall theoretically under the postfunctionalistic umbrella, which emphasises the increasing role of the European public in the European integration process (Hooghe & Marks, 2008). Chapter three, *The conceptual framework of EU support*, begins with a theoretical discussion regarding the usefulness of the system support theory and its defining concepts. The chapter also presents the three main system components of the EU, towards which EU attitudes are directed: European integration policies, the EU regime and the European political community. Chapter four, *Explanations for EU support*, presents the main contributions from previous research regarding how the country-level variations in public support have been explained.

Starting from chapter five, *Research method*, the more empirical part of the thesis begins. Here, the empirical research design is presented, as well as the research method and statistical method used for obtaining the results. In chapter six, *Results*, the main results are presented and discussed. This chapter will begin with an extensive descriptive overview regarding country-level developments in EU support during the period of 2004–2017. Thereafter, the results from the statistical analyses are presented together with the analytical limitations of the statistical method. In the final chapter, *Conclusions*, the results are summed up together with a discussion regarding the main contributions and limitations of this study. In the final section, the findings will also be related to earlier findings within the EU literature, as well as to the future development prospects for the EU.

2. European integration – Introducing the research field

In seeking to understand the process of the internationalization of governance and its prospects, political culture, public opinion, and political legitimacy can neither be taken for granted nor ignored.

Sinnott, 1995, p. 31

This chapter places this thesis within the grand theories that have been used to understand the progress of European integration; a process by which the modern form of the EU is the result. This in order to show how the political importance of public attitudes is something that has seemingly grown over time as the European integration process has proceeded and evolved. In its present form, the EU is also unrecognisable from the original European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) founded in 1952, and therefore this chapter will also include a short historical overview regarding the institutional development of the EU until present time. This in order to place this thesis in its rightful historical context.

First and foremost, the political implementations of European integration policies have been made possible by the institutional framework of the EU. It is therefore insufficient to separate the process of European integration from the EU as an object of empirical interest, as these two are inseparable within this context. The EU has developed into its current form through an integration process that has proceeded stepwise through a challenging political process, spanning almost 70 years. During this period, the EU has been transformed from a European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) to a European Community (EC), and since 1993 into a European Union. However, this process of European integration has been anything but straightforward. A great amount of research has therefore focused on explaining the political processes that have enabled the progress of European integration, which has been conducted through a continuing development of the institutional framework of the EU. However, as the

EU has transformed, the practical usefulness of using the theoretical guidelines provided by the grand theories have also changed.

It also needs to be clearly stated that no theoretical lens is able to explain everything when it comes to European integration, as there are always multiple processes taking place within different arenas. In other words, a great number of events have directly had an impact on the European integration process (Ruggie, Katzenstein, Keohane & Schmitter, 2005, p. 280). Nevertheless, historically two grand theories have been used to understand how European integration proceeds: neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism (Jones et al., 2015). However, as the issue of European integration has become increasingly politicised within the EU area, the so-called post-functionalistic approach during the last decade has developed into a third theory, or theoretical lens, within the literature that takes this growing importance of public opinion into account (Hooghe & Marks, 2008). In this chapter, these three main theoretical lenses used to understand and explain the development of the EU through the European integration process are briefly presented. This in order to place this thesis within the larger theoretical schools of thought. Following a short historical overview of the European integration process, these three theories are presented stepwise in the remaining parts of this chapter.

2.1 Historical development

The historical development towards institutionalised European integration started as a direct consequence of the Industrial Revolution in Europe during the nineteenth century. According to Archer (2015), one of the main results of the Industrial Revolution was that it contributed to an improvement in intra-European communications. Through the improvement of common links within Europe, these changes underlined the need for increased co-ordination within Europe, as well as more political arenas enabling direct communication between the country leaderships. During the end of the nineteenth century, the countries of Europe were also, out of necessity, searching

for new ways to cooperate over crucial issues such as European-wide peace and trade.

Although these discussions were briefly interrupted during the Great War (1914–1918), afterwards, during the inter-war period of 1918–1939, the so-called Pan-European Union movement, under the leadership of Count Coudenhove-Kalergi, was among the first to suggest the creation of something at least resembling a supranational political, economic and cultural European community. Coudenhove-Kalergi (1931, p. 638) argued that “between the “national” period of humanity and the period that will come one day of the organization of the whole world as a single federation of states, we must pass through a “continental” period, a time when narrow national patriotism changes into patriotism for large areas of the world”. Coudenhove-Kalergi furthermore presented three main arguments for the necessity of creating a European community. The main argument was to prevent war in Europe, the second to prevent economic ruin and the third to defend Europe from the Bolshevik danger. Before this could become more than a vision, an all-inclusive European war broke out again. Further delaying the process of European integration to take off voluntarily.

Nevertheless, after the end of the Second World War (1939–45), the precursor of the EU at last emerged from the ashes of war. Suddenly it became clearer to the leading West-European politicians that “if the competition among nation-states had led to “total war” twice within the first half of the twentieth century, then European cooperation suggested itself as an appropriate theme for the future” (Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970, pp. 2–3). Seemingly wiser from the developments in Europe during the inter-war period, the common understanding among the West-European political leadership was that explicit nationalism, and German military power, needed to be contained for history not to repeat itself (Scharpf, 1999, p. 44). The original goal for Schumann, Monnet and the other founding fathers of the EU was therefore originally to create a European Defence Union that over time

would transform into a federal political union.¹⁰ That in turn would help to “overcome the antagonistic attitudes of states” (Saurugger, 2013, p. 16). The idea was that the creation of a Defence Union between France, West Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg, the so-called European Defence Community (EDC), together with the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) founded in 1951, would lay the groundwork for further integration within other policy areas.

The original plan, however, failed when the French Parliament failed to ratify the EDC in 1954. According to Majone (2006, p. 610), the so-called European Political Community (EPC) was also “supposed to provide a pre-federal democratic framework” for the EDC and the ECSC, albeit the EPC also collapsed together with the EDC. Instead, out of necessity, the ECSC became the institutional arena from which the European integration project was born.¹¹ This directly established a peacekeeping mechanism in disguise that could prevent war between the participating member states, by pooling the resources necessary for the war-industry under a supranational structure (Karolewski, 2016, p. 23).¹² A regional European supranational cooperation arena, that would lay the groundwork for further European integration, was then finally institutionalised.

There is a widespread agreement within EU literature that “the underlying motive behind European integration has always been peace” (Olsen & McCormick, 2016, p. 17). Even though “the process itself has focused on economics, the overriding goal of European integration has been to prevent war on the European continent – to reduce nationalism in order to provide long-term peace” (McLaren, 2004, p. 896). Therefore, “the engine of European integration has ultimately been the economy” (Olsen & McCormick, 2016, p. 238). In

¹⁰ The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) merged with the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1967 and was renamed the European Union in the Maastricht Treaty. References will be to the EU if nothing else is mentioned.

¹¹ This occurred even though the EDC agreement was approved by all six foreign ministers and already ratified by four of the six national parliaments.

¹² France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Italy and West Germany.

the preamble to the first Treaty of Paris 1951 (the treaty that established the ECSC) it was stated that “the merging of essential interests would be a substitute for age-old rivalries; to create, by establishing an economic community, the basis for a broader and deeper community among peoples long divided by bloody conflicts”. However, the economic integration of Europe first began with the Treaty of Rome in 1957 that created the European Economic Community (EEC) (Deflem & Pampel, 1996, p. 119). Since then, the “economic integration bore the burden of building a polity” (Laffan, 1996, p. 92). The transformation of the EEC into the current EU started with the Single European Act (1986) and the Maastricht Treaty (1992). With these two EU treaties, the EU started its institutional transformation from a mainly economic cooperation project between European countries into a semi-political European Union with increased supranational authority over the decision-making processes (Anderson & Kaltenthaler, 1996). Especially the Maastricht Treaty is considered to have constituted “a landmark in European integration” (Marks, Scharpf, Schmitter & Streeck, 1996, p. 342). The supranational character of the EU since the Maastricht Treaty has further increased with every new EU treaty (Mair, 2007, p. 15).¹³

The most extensive effort to increase the problem-solving capabilities of the EU, in order to adapt to the global developments, was to create a European Constitution that would have replaced all of the previous EU treaties. The process officially started in 2001, but after the European Constitution was rejected in popular referendums in France and the Netherlands in 2005, motivated by fears related to globalisation and EU enlargements (Wood & Quassier, 2008, p. 193), the EU bureaucrats and the national political leaderships were forced to reconsider.¹⁴ Already Lindberg and Scheingold (1970, p. 277) had suggested that the permissive consensus might not withstand a major transfer of power from the national to the European level, and Franklin, Marsh and McLaren (1994) suggested that even the Maastricht Treaty

¹³ These are the Treaty of Amsterdam 1997, the Treaty of Nice 2001 and the Treaty of Lisbon 2007.

¹⁴ See Appendix Table 3 page 312 for an overview of EU-related national referendums.

was a step too far in the European integration process. Therefore, it was just a matter of time before the public within some member states would start to directly alter the direction of European integration and the “use of referendums on European integration underscores the importance of public opinion to the success of the European project” (Banducci, Karp & Loedel, 2009, p. 565). Nevertheless, after a brief “period of reflection,” the new idea was to keep the old EU treaties as a compromise, but instead amend them with a new one.

Hence, instead of a new European Constitution, the EU presented something of a compromise, or a “reform treaty”. The reform treaty, more widely known as the Lisbon Treaty (2007), was also approved by all the national parliaments. However, in the only member state where the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty demanded an authorisation from the public through a referendum, Ireland, it was first rejected. However, after a second referendum along with a significant charm-offensive by the Irish pro-EU political parties, it passed with an overwhelming majority of 67% in favour, in comparison with 47% in the first referendum (Piris, 2010). This were similar to the process of approving the Maastricht Treaty in Denmark, which also demanded two referendums, as well as exceptions to the Treaty for Denmark (the Edinburgh agreement), before finally being approved.¹⁵

Even though the Lisbon Treaty in many ways might have reformed the institutional capabilities of the EU to the better, according to Piris (2010, p. 48), it was the first time that the integrationists had been obliged to retreat in a visible way. They had also been forced to accept the disappearance of any word or symbol in the Lisbon Treaty that would have signalled the EU having even more characteristics in common with a federal state. The EU area is still undoubtedly politically more integrated after the Lisbon Treaty than before (Fabbrini, 2015, p. 267), but on the other hand, the member states themselves have since become more internally divided. All member

¹⁵ It should, furthermore, be noted that less than 51% of the voters approved of ratifying the Maastricht Treaty in France during a referendum (Anderson & Kaltenthaler, 1996, p. 176).

states also still have the possibility of veto over the most important legislations of national concern at the EU level, as well as the possibility of withdrawing from the EU completely by activating article 50 in the Lisbon Treaty. As the memories of the horrors of the Second World War have slowly faded, Europe has also witnessed a re-emergence of widespread nationalism and protectionism, a development that Robert Schuman, one of the founding fathers, already warned about.¹⁶ It has been suggested that this development is connected to an almost constant series of crises that have hit the EU area during the last decade. For the European public, it might even appear that the EU is in an almost constant state of crisis (Jones et al., 2015, p. 19), and this especially since the start of the Eurocrisis.

During the course of the EU's still relatively short history, the EU has to date for the most part come strengthened through crises. This is because many of the crises seems to have actualised the need for more supranational decision-making in order for the EU to become more effective in fulfilling its purpose. This is also a development suggested by neofunctionalist theory (Haas, 1958). What separates the latest crisis from earlier crises is the fact that when European integration was largely perceived as a "non-issue" amongst the European public, many of the crises could be solved by compromises reached between the EU-friendly political elites within the member state countries (van Ingelgom, 2014, p. 1). As the issue of European integration has become politicised to an unprecedented extent, this is no longer a political possibility. Therefore, the compromise-seeking nature within the EU's decision-making processes could be considered as constituting the root to the EU's current dysfunctionality and lack of political leverage. Hence, at least the problems created by the Eurocrisis can also be directly traced back to the fact that the political elites created the EU's dysfunctionality when the EU was transformed into an almost full

¹⁶ "World peace cannot be safeguarded if constructive efforts are not made commensurate with the dangers that threaten it. An organized and revitalized Europe can make a contribution to civilization which is indispensable for maintaining such peaceful relations" (The Schuman Declaration, 9th May 1950).

economic union without simultaneously creating a full political union to steer it (Zimmermann, 2016).

The concept of a Union was formally used for the first time in the preamble to the Treaty of Rome in 1957, establishing the European Economic Community (EEC). In this preamble, the signatory states expressed their goal “to lay the foundation of an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe” (Fabbrini, 2015, p. xxi). With the Maastricht Treaty, the name also changed from Community to Union, and the name change in itself could be perceived as a “system transforming event that dramatically altered the nature of the integration process” (Eichenberg & Dalton, 2007, p. 132). This name change also further accelerated the process towards the politicisation of European integration.¹⁷ Since the Lisbon Treaty, the symbols of a political Union are now even more present within the EU area. As an example, EU law became superior to national laws within most policy areas, which gives EU citizens the right to litigate against their own countries if their rights provided by EU law are being violated (Eriksen, 2011, p. 74; Romaniuk & Stivachtis, 2015, p. 188).

The EU is, however, still to date guided by a series of treaties, which in practice functions as a supplement for a constitution when placed together. In chronological order they are: Paris (1952), two treaties of Rome (1958), the Single European Act (1987), Maastricht (1992), Amsterdam (1999), Nice (2003) and Lisbon (2009). The treaties are legally binding for all member states, and EU law, in theory, thereby represents a supranational constitutional legal order (McCormick, 2014, pp. 73-74). According to Habermas (2012, p. 30), these treaties have therefore become the foundation of a European political community, albeit with a European constitution yet to be implemented in practice. These treaties are summarised in Table 1 (see page 39).

¹⁷ However, according to De Wilde et al. (2016, p. 5), a “first episode of politicization could already be observed in 1954 during the failed ratification of the European Defence Community in the French parliament”.

Table 1. Summary of the institutional development of the EU.

Treaty	Signed	Into force	Purpose	Main changes
The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)	1951	1952	To create interdependence in coal and steel so that one country could no longer mobilise its armed forces without others knowing. This eased distrust and tensions after WWII. The ECSC treaty expired in 2002.	
European Economic Community (EEC)	1957	1958	To set up the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom).	Extension of European integration to include general economic cooperation.
The European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom)	1957	1958		
Merger Treaty - Brussels Treaty	1965	1967	To streamline the European institutions.	Creation of a single Commission and a single Council to serve the then three European Communities (EEC, Euratom, ECSC). Repealed by the Treaty of Amsterdam.
Single European Act	1986	1987	To reform the institutions in preparation for Portugal and Spain's membership and speed up decision-making in preparation for the single market.	Extension of qualified majority voting in the Council (making it harder for a single country to veto proposed legislation), creation of the cooperation and assent procedures, giving Parliament more influence.
Treaty on European Union - Maastricht Treaty	1992	1993	To prepare for European Monetary Union and introduce elements of a political union (citizenship, common foreign and internal affairs policy).	Establishment of the European Union and introduction of the co-decision procedure, giving Parliament more say in decision-making. New forms of cooperation between EU governments – for example on defence and justice and home affairs.
Treaty of Amsterdam	1997	1999	To reform the EU institutions in preparation for the arrival of future member countries.	Amendment, renumbering and consolidation of EU and EEC treaties. More transparent decision-making (increased use of the ordinary legislative procedure).
Treaty of Nice	2001	2003	To reform the institutions so that the EU could function efficiently after reaching 25 member countries.	Methods for changing the composition of the Commission and redefining the voting system in the Council.
Treaty of Lisbon	2007	2009	To make the EU more democratic, more efficient and better able to address global problems, such as climate change, with one voice.	More power for the European Parliament, change of voting procedures in the Council, citizens' initiative, a permanent president of the European Council, a new High Representative for Foreign Affairs, a new EU diplomatic service.

As already mentioned, there have traditionally been two grand theories used within EU literature to explain and understand the progress of the European integration process, neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism. However, as the European public's role in the European integration processes and the governing of the EU have been growing for every treaty, a new theoretical lens that also accounts for the European public's role in the European integration process has been suggested, postfunctionalism. Each of these three lenses provides different perspectives from which to understand the nature and

outcomes of European integration developments. These three theoretical lenses will be briefly presented in the following sections in order to place this study within the larger framework of European integration studies, starting with neofunctionalism.

2.1.1 Neofunctionalism

The most widely used theoretical approach to understand the European integration process during the first decades of European integration was neofunctionalism, which is considered as “the founding theory of European integration” (Saurugger, 2013, p. 35). The essence of neofunctionalism is that the extent of European integration is determined by the success of earlier European integration policies, which breeds integration within other areas. The concept of neofunctionalism was originally developed by Haas (1958) with the publication of *The Uniting of Europe*, which according to Ruggie et al. (2005, p. 277) also invented the academic field of European integration studies. After that, neofunctionalism became the leading theory used to understand the European integration process until the 1970’s.¹⁸ The essence of Haas’ idea of neofunctionalism was that European integration would, over time, inevitably be achieved stepwise, through what Haas referred to as the “spillover-effect” of earlier integration processes. Successful integration in one field would increase the attractiveness of further integration within other policy-fields, which therefore would make further integration the rational choice to make for the participating member states. Hence, as more powers were transferred from the national to the EU level institutions, these institutions would, over time, take over the decision-making process and become the main political arenas for the governing of the European political community. According to Olsen and McCormick (2016), the idea behind neofunctionalism was that by promoting European integration in non-controversial areas, such as the harmonisation of technical issues such as weights and measures, it would, over time,

¹⁸ “The Uniting of Europe” was also selected by the journal *Foreign Affairs* in 1997 as one of the most important international relations books of the twentieth century.

contribute to more of the national decision-making powers being transferred to the supranational European level also within more politically sensitive policy areas. This would be mainly to smoothen the policy-making processes, which would inevitably, over time, also lead to the creation of something at least resembling a European federal state.

Haas (1976) himself later dismissed neofunctionalism as a usable theoretical lens for understanding the European integration process, mostly as a result of the then French President Charles de Gaulle's "empty-chair" politics during the 1960's. The irrational behaviour of de Gaulle seemed to prove the limitations of neofunctionalism, as the success achieved through earlier European integration processes did not transform into an increased political willingness among political leaders to proceed with integration also within other policy-fields (Saurugger, 2013, p. 34). Neofunctionalism still experienced a renaissance during the 1980's, when European integration picked up pace again after Greece, Spain and Portugal became both democracies and EU member states. Some researchers have therefore suggested that "Haas turned out to be wrong about being wrong" (Ruggie et al., 2005, p. 280). However, as Sinnott (1995, p. 31) noted, "the exclusive emphasis on élites and the dismissal of public opinion associated with early neo-functional theory does not reflect the real thrust of integration theory" and does therefore not provide a sufficient theoretical lens to understand the recent developments of European integration. In the following section, the other grand theory of European integration will be presented, intergovernmentalism.

2.1.2 Intergovernmentalism

The other main theoretical approach towards European integration is commonly referred to as intergovernmentalism. The essence of intergovernmentalism is that the progress and extent of European integration is determined by the specific needs of the member states, and hence that national interests will always prevail (Hoffmann, 1966). Consequently, it is the national governments that ultimately determine

the success and extent of European integration policies, and the discussion taking place within the political institutions at the EU level are hence largely unimportant. Hence, instead of focusing on the political processes taking place within the EU institutions, researchers should focus on the inter-state bargaining processes taking place to understand the process and progress of European integration. According to Haas (1958, p. 9), intergovernmentalism is therefore more related to the specific policy-process and it occurs when “decisions are made by instructed national delegates, usually on the basis of unanimity, aided by a central secretariat with minimal powers and many commissions of technical experts, recruited nationally and regionally”. Hence, according to the theoretical guidelines provided by intergovernmentalism, further European integration is only preferable for the member states when the country-specific needs are being accounted for. Therefore, member states’ governments are only able to reach a consensus when enough concrete national level benefits are secured for all of the participating member states, according to their national preferences.

During the 1990’s, a variation of intergovernmentalism, referred to as liberal intergovernmentalism, also emerged within the literature (Olsen & McCormick, 2016, p. 23). Proponents of liberal intergovernmentalism combine the neofunctionalist approach while focusing on the importance of member states, and the main argument is that European integration proceeds as a result of intergovernmental bargaining but within the EU level institutions (Majone, 1998). Therefore, European integration, by liberal intergovernmentalist theory, is expected when “the member states share a preference for avoiding welfare losses caused by negative interdependence” (Börzel & Risse, 2018, p. 92). According to Moravcsik (2002), perhaps the most influential proponent of liberal intergovernmentalism, it is therefore not relevant to look at the political institutions responsible for promoting the EU-wide interests (European Parliament, European Commission) because all of the important political decisions for European integration are being determined in the political institutions

functioning through intergovernmental principles (the Council of the European Union, the European Council). Hobolt and Wratil (2015, p. 239) therefore suggested that the proponents of intergovernmentalism focuses on the importance of national political and economic interests, as the national interests shape the member states position towards the EU and European integration policies. However, none of these two grand theories sees the European public as an important actor within the European integration process, and as a result of the politicisation of European integration these two grand theories need to be adapted to understand the current developments of European integration and the EU. In the following section, postfunctionalism as a theoretical lens will be presented.

2.1.3 Postfunctionalism

The most recent theoretical lens developed to understand and analyse the European integration process is referred to as postfunctionalism. Grande and Kriesi (2016, p. 300) even referred to it as “the most promising theoretical platform to advance integration theory”. The essence of postfunctionalism, and what differs this theory from the previous, is that it accounts for the effect of the changing public preferences towards European integration. If neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism perceives European integration as a cooperative process, postfunctionalism by contrast perceives European integration as a conflictual process (Hooghe & Marks, 2019, p. 5). The main reason for the academic interest in postfunctionalism is basically because the “grand theories have largely neglected the role of public opinion” (Hobolt & Wratil, 2015, p. 239). Proponents of postfunctionalism argue that as the European public, over time, has started to play a more important role in determining the pace and width of European integration, as a result of the increased politicisation of European integration, the public preferences regarding European integration cannot be neglected. More precisely, Hooghe and Marks (2008) argue that identity considerations should, over time, become increasingly

important as a determinant of EU attitudes, as a result of European integration becoming politicised.

The importance of this approach has become apparent after the so-called “permissive consensus,” provided by the European public towards European integration policies, has been declared over (Mitchell, 2014, p. 603; De Wilde, Leopold & Schmidtke, 2016, p. 14). The “permissive consensus” was based on widespread belief that the reduction of national borders, both physical and financial, within the EU area would contribute to a mutual prosperity among all of the participating countries (Loveless & Rohrschneider, 2011, p. 5). That widespread belief has become severely tarnished over time, which has contributed to the democratic legitimacy of the EU becoming increasingly questioned. As De Wilde and Trenz (2012, p. 12) further argue, questioning the “principle of integration undermine, by its very nature, the legitimacy of the currently existing EU polity”.

Since 2008, the mostly EU-friendly traditional political parties have instead started to face “constraining dissensus” from the public when making decisions on European integration. This has directly forced the political parties to adapt their positions on Europe in accordance with public preferences (Hooghe & Marks, 2008; Schimmelfennig, 2014), or risk being voted out of office during elections. This development was also to some extent predicted by Karp and Bowler (2006, p. 370), who argued that “as integration moves into policy areas such as a single European currency and seeks to allow many more countries into the club, the EU is no longer of low salience. At this point, the passive permission of voters may grow into opposition”. Hence, the EU and European integration policies are no longer perceived to be of no concern for the European public, and the EU should no longer be perceived as mainly an elite project with no real-life consequences for the ordinary Europeans. This is a transformation that some have argued started with the Maastricht Treaty (Gabel & Palmer, 1995, p. 3), while others suggest that it started already during the 1970’s and that “politicization is certainly not a post-Maastricht phenomenon” (Grande & Kriesi, 2016, p. 281).

Neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism, which both focused on “the functional, efficiency-based rationale for regional integration, economic preferences and bargaining between interest groups” (Schimmelfennig, 2014, pp. 321–322), are, therefore, no longer sufficient to explain the European integration processes occurring during the last decade. However, the postfunctionalist approach could also be perceived to be an evolution of the neofunctionalist approach (Schmitter, 2009). According to postfunctionalist theory, the European public should be perceived as a force for or against European integration that has gained in importance over time as a result of the politicisation of European integration. Therefore, the European public is likely to play a part in determining the future direction of European integration. As the EU has also, arguably, become more transparent and democratised, over time, the European public has also become more directly involved in the EU decision-making processes (Hooghe & Marks, 2008). Therefore, “domestic and European politics have become more tightly coupled as governments have become responsive to public pressures on European integration” (Hooghe & Marks, 2008, p. 2). As European integration has become a politicised issue over which national elections are contested, public opinion, electoral choices and party politics have become focus areas for European integration researchers. Schimmelfennig (2014, p. 322) explicitly referred to the Eurocrisis as a “postfunctionalist moment in the history of European integration,” because the Eurocrisis, together with the global recession, triggered an unprecedented politicisation of European integration as the cost of European integration suddenly became apparent. As evidence, Schimmelfennig (2014, p. 323) suggested that at the height of the Eurocrisis between March of 2011 and March of 2013, every single European election was predominantly about the response to the Eurocrisis, and in only 2 out of 15 elections the incumbent government was re-elected.

Similar to the concept of public support, the concept of Euroscepticism is also considered as a multi-level attitudinal phenomenon (Wessels, 2007). The end of the “permissive consensus”

and the birth of postfunctionalism naturally coincides with the academic interest in the concept of Euroscepticism. According to Taggart (1998), Euroscepticism incorporates at least two different positions towards the EU. First of all, there are those who oppose the idea of European integration and as a consequence oppose the European political system created by the EU regime. Furthermore, there are those who are not against European integration, in principle, but are sceptical towards how it is being implemented through the current EU framework. This division of scepticism and opposition has later been divided by Taggart and Szczerbiak (2002) for analytical purposes into soft Euroscepticism and hard Euroscepticism. Public opposition defined as soft Euroscepticism occurs when there is not a principled objection to European integration or EU membership, but where concerns regarding one or several policy issues lead to the expression of public opposition to the EU, or where there is a sense that there is a mismatch between national- and European interests. Public opposition defined as hard Euroscepticism occurs when there is a more principled opposition to European integration as an idea and the EU specifically as an embodiment of that idea. Such argumentation is used by political parties who believe that their countries should withdraw completely from the EU. This division of Euroscepticism into two different types is widely used to categorise political positions towards the EU and European integration within the literature.¹⁹

Political parties on both fringes of the ideological spectrum have, however, not been late to seize the political opportunities created by the rising public sentiments of Euroscepticism, and in that sense it might be perceived as a logical consequence of the politicisation of European integration (De Wilde & Trezn, 2012, p. 14). When the European public started to express Eurosceptic tendencies more openly, the EU and European integration became politicised issues and, as a result, transferred directly into the agendas of political parties

¹⁹ Kopecky and Mudde (2002, p. 300) used the concepts of diffuse opposition, to describe opposition towards the idea of European integration, and specific opposition, to describe opposition towards the EU as the current embodiment of that idea.

(Crespy & Verschueren, 2009, p. 378). With regards to political parties, Euroscepticism is also not confined to any particular value or belief system but changes and adapts according to the national contexts in which the political parties are located (Vasilopoulou, 2013, p. 2). For political parties situated on the radical left of the political spectrum, Euroscepticism is mostly driven by opposition to specific issues, such as opposition towards the increasingly neoliberal character of the EU. Examples of such types of Eurosceptic parties are *Syriza* in Greece and *Podemos* in Spain. For political parties situated on the radical right of the political spectrum, Euroscepticism is much more culturally driven. Those on the radical left can actually support, or in some cases demand, more integration in some areas such as economic redistributions, while those on the radical right are more prone to categorically reject any form of European-wide cooperation beyond a bare minimum (van Elsas, Hakhverdian & van der Brug, 2016, p. 20). Examples of such types of Eurosceptic parties are *the Party for Freedom* in the Netherlands and *Rassemblement National* in France (formerly known as Front National). The determinants of Eurosceptic sentiments might be rooted in the perception of European integration constituting a threat to national sovereignty (Sorensen, 2007), perceptions that European integration threatens the national identity and culture (Carey, 2002) and from utilitarian considerations regarding the cost-benefits of European integration policies (Karp & Bowler, 2006). More recent studies have also focused on the perceived threat to jobs that the EU poses through open market policies (Grauel, Heine & Lahusen, 2013) and perceived threats to social welfare (Baute, Meuluman, Abts & Swyngedouw, 2018).

Prior to the start of the global recession, the national political leadership and the EU bureaucrats were worried about how little public interest there was in the workings of the EU, but post-2008 many pro-EU politicians would perhaps agree that the less that is written about the EU the better. For researchers interested in understanding the development and process of European integration, postfunctionalism is likely to be the prevailing theoretical lens in the years to come. That

the European public would become an important actor within the European integration process is nothing sensational, but it is something that have been expected. Already in the mid-1990's Deflem and Pampel (1996, p. 120) argued that "movement toward unification requires more than the treaties and policies negotiated by the members of various EC councils, administrative units, and national representatives. The success of Europe's unification depends to no small extent on the support it receives from the citizens of the members of the European Community". Even though this study is not concerned with the specific political processes of European integration within the EU machinery, this study contributes to this line of theory by seeking to explain why the country levels of public support differ over time. If one agrees with the presumption that it matters what the European public thinks about European integration, it also becomes valid to empirically identify the determinants of public support.

Börzel and Risse (2018, p. 93) suggest that "the constraining dissensus and the ensuing politicization driven by Eurosceptical parties, particularly on the right, explain why the member states' governments have not been able to find a common solution and why they continue to renege on measures agreed upon in the Council of Ministers and during European summits". However, taking the most recent developments into consideration, they also argue that "postfunctionalism has a hard time explaining why member states and the EU Commission were able to successfully shield their decisions on deepening integration during the Eurocrisis from the constraining dissensus". Hence, no theoretical lens is able to account for everything that occurs within the EU area related to European integration. Nevertheless, by focusing on the varied country levels of public support for different system components of the EU as a political system, this study is placed within this postfunctionalist line of theory, emphasising that it actually matters what the European public thinks about the EU. The main characteristics of these three grand theories are summarised in Table 2 (see page 49).

Table 2. Summary of the main European integration theories.

	Neofunctionalism	Intergovernmentalism	Postfunctionalism
Focus on the:	Supranational level	National level	Citizen level
Based on the:	Interplay between EU and national interest	National interests	Public interests
In short:	The success of European integration is determined by the "spillover-effects" through earlier integration policies	The success of European integration is determined by an inter-state bargaining process, that considers the national interests of all member states	The success of European integration is, in addition to European and national interests, determined by the preferences of the European public
Main academic proponents:	Haas	Moravcsik	Hooghe & Marks

Chapter summary

This chapter has placed this thesis within the larger literature of grand theories used to understand the underlying processes responsible for determining the development of the EU. The main purpose with this chapter has been to argue that as the issue of European integration has now become irreversibly politicised, the preferences expressed by the European public will alter the direction of European integration. This is illustrated by the fact that after the start of the global recession in 2008, national elections are now being directly contested over positions on the EU. Therefore, political parties' need to take into account EU attitudes within their respective countries when deciding on policies related to European integration and adapt their policies on the EU in accordance with the current national mood. Hence, EU attitudes need to be accounted for when taking decisions on the EU and European integration. This study is related to the postfunctionalist theory of thought and will hopefully contribute to this line of theory by showing how the country levels of public support for the EU vary and are determined by contextual-level factors. In the following chapter, the conceptual framework is presented that will function as a theoretical base for developing the overarching research design of this thesis.

3. The conceptual framework of EU support

Why is it that today in political theory we must turn to the past in order to find inspiration and genuine freshness?

Easton, 1951, p. 36

In the following chapter, the conceptual and theoretical framework of this thesis is presented. This chapter also presents the main theoretical guidelines, as well as conceptual definitions regarding the main concepts that are used. The chapter begins with a theoretical overview of the system support theory and its theoretical resourcefulness for understanding the importance of sufficient levels of public support for a political system. Thereafter, the two types of public support of system importance, specific and diffuse, are presented and discussed. After presenting the arguments for why sufficient levels of public support should be considered of essential importance from a long-term system persistence perspective, the discussion shifts from the general system level to the more concrete EU level.

The second section of this chapter thus focuses on how to conceptually define the EU as a political system, and how to adapt the guidelines provided by the system support theory to a supranational political system such as the EU, that is also still under construction. Based on the guidelines from the system support theory, any kind of political system should be divided into different system components that are being evaluated separately by the members participating in the political community, as a political system, is too complex to be evaluated in its entirety. Hence, the EU as a political system will be divided into three main system components of system importance: European integration policies, the EU regime and the European political community. In the following section, this chapter will start with a discussion regarding the usefulness of using the system support theory as an analytical tool for analysing the system persistence capabilities of a supranational political system, such as the EU.

3.1 The system support theory

The first thing that needs to be clearly stated about the system support theory developed by David Easton (1965) is that it is a very general in character. Nevertheless, the system support theory is used in this thesis as a conceptual starting point in order to emphasise the societal importance of sufficient levels of public support for a political system, as well as the connection between public attitudes and political outcomes. Easton has been attributed as being responsible for introducing the concept of political systems into political science (Bang, 1998, p. 281), and it has also been argued that Easton pioneered the research subject of public support studies (De Vries, 2018, p. 42). Therefore, Easton's system support theory has become a natural place for researchers interested in public support to start from. The system support theory was Easton's contribution to developing a general theory that would be able to explain the inner working, functioning and status of something as abstract as a political system. According to Easton, public attitudes towards the political system were considered of vital importance for the system persistence capabilities of any political system. However, for Easton himself, a theory was not a claim about what exists but a device with which to access it (Gunnell, 2013, p. 202). According to Easton (1965, p. 8), a grand theory is "a type of casual theory that differs from singular generalizations and partial theories, in scope at least, by virtue of its presumed application to the whole of a field of inquiry. In politics, it seeks to illuminate the functioning of political systems in their entirety". Easton (1965, p. 15) developed his version of a system support theory to be able to provide answers to the, strictly speaking, empirically unanswerable research question, "how can any political system ever persist whether the world be one of stability or of change?"

Even though there will probably never be a clear and verifiable answer to Easton's question, the system support theory provides the original reference point for researchers interested in how any kind of political system is affected by periods of "stability or of change" within its political environment. According to Easton (1965, pp. 21–22), the

long-term persistence capabilities of a political system are primarily determined by the fulfilment of two important system functions. The first being related to the ability of a political system to allocate values for a society, and the other being the ability to induce most members of the political community to accept these allocations as legally binding, at least most of the time, within the political system. In this light, Easton (1965, p. 24) argued that “the allocations of values for a society and the relative frequency of compliance with them are the essential variables of political life”.

Easton’s understanding of the functioning of any political system was derived from the idea that a political system is embedded within an environment that always threatens the functioning and viability of the political system. How the public reacts to the events within the environment (economic recessions, corruption scandals etc.) is then measured by the public attitudes directed towards different elements within the political system. When there are declining levels of public support, this development is traced to events and developments within the environment that could be attributed to be the cause of pressure or stress on the political system. If a political system is not able to counter or stop the declining levels of public support, the democratic legitimacy and, hence, long-term viability of the political system is increasingly challenged. Hence, “to persist, the system must be capable of responding with measures that are successful in alleviating the stress so created” (Easton, 1965, p. 33).

According to this logic of the system support theory, the stability and long-term persistence within a political system is achieved through balancing the *inputs* to with the *outputs* from the political system. According to Easton (1965, p. 26), the *inputs* of a political system function as sum variables that concentrate and mirror everything in the physical, biological, social and psychological *environment* that is relevant to the political system. Easton (1965, p. 22) further distinguishes between two types of environment, the intra-societal and the extra-societal. The intra-societal environment consists of systems within the same community, such as the economic, cultural and social

structures. The extra-societal environment includes systems outside the given community itself, such as international political, economic or cultural systems. Together these two classes of system, perceived to lie outside the political system of interest (in this context that of the EU), may be described as the total environment of the political system. The sources of stress, or threats to a political system, can thereby be traced to the events within the total environment.

According to Anckar (1974, p. 8), political science has always focused on trying to describe the inner workings and structures of political systems. Therefore, it is important to note that even though Easton himself did not empirically prove the validity of his analytical model, Easton's model has still been described as "the most elaborate analytical scheme towards an empirical general theory of politics" (Ransom, 1968, p. 355; in Anckar, 1974, p. 83). It has also been further described as "an immense and incalculable contribution to accurate assessment and understanding of this process of change" (Nicholson & Reynolds, 1967, p. 31). Figure 1 (see page 54) presents an overview regarding how Easton chose to illustrate the functioning of a political system in the broadest possible terms. Easton (1965, p. 32) describes the different parts of his simplified model of the workings of a political system as the following:

"The broken lines in the box labelled "The political system" suggest that, through the return flow of demands and support, the authorities obtain information about these possible consequences of their previous behaviour. This puts the authorities in a position to take advantage of the information that has been fed back and to correct or adjust their behavior for the achievement of their goals. It is the fact that there can be such a continuous flow of effects and information between system and environment, we shall see, that ultimately accounts for the capacity of a political system to persist in a world even of violently fluctuating changes. Without feedback and the capacity to respond to it, no system could survive for long, except by accident".

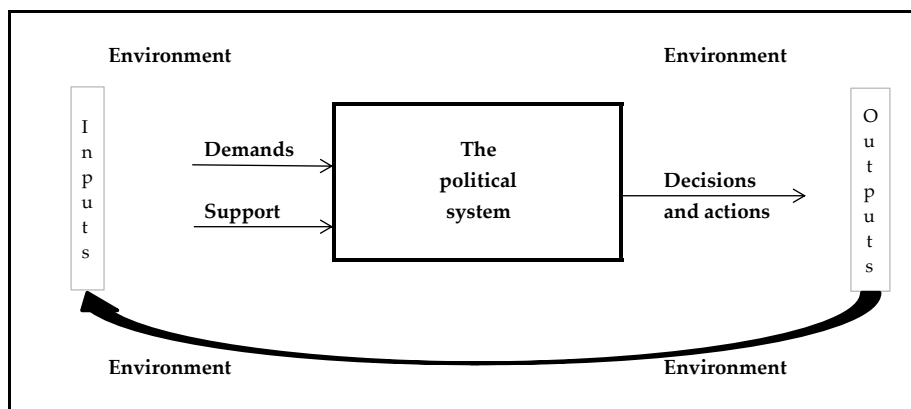


Figure 1. Easton's simplified model of the inner workings of a political system (1965, p. 32).

Even though there are many aspects of the inner workings of a political system that would be possible to analyse more extensively, it is important at this point to note that this study's sole research purpose is to focus on the concept of public support for the EU as a political system. Hence, the actual demands from the European public, and the public response to the political decisions taken by the EU regime, are of secondary importance within this thesis. However, as these concepts are important for understanding the functioning of a political system from Easton's perspective, they will be briefly presented.

Starting with the concept of *demands*, which Easton identified as one of the major sources of stress on a political system. According to Easton (1965, pp. 38–39), "a demand may be defined as an expression of opinion that an authoritative allocation with regard to a particular subject matter should or should not be made by those responsible for doing so". As such, a demand may be quite narrow, specific, and simple in nature, as when grievances and discontents, relevant to a given experience, are directly expressed. In short, political demands by the general public are expected to push the political system in the direction that the members of the political community wants it to move. The other input variable is *support*, described by Easton (1965, p. 156) as "the major summary variable linking a system to its environment," and the main variable of concern within this conceptual framework. Something

also needs to be said about the outputs from the political system, *decisions and actions*. According to Easton (1965, p. 345), “outputs serve to conceptualize the ways in which the system acts back upon the environment and indirectly, therefore, upon itself, by modifying, at times, succeeding inputs of support and demands”. The connection between the outputs and the inputs of a political system Easton (1965, p. 345) identifies as taking place through the *feedback loop*, through “which inputs and outputs each directly or indirectly affect each other and together, the rest of the political system and its environment”. The outputs are important because they have, according to Easton (1965, p. 363), the “ability to affect the persistence or change of a system through the influence they wield over the level of support”. The mechanism linking the inputs with information about the outputs is referred by Easton as *feedback*, intimately connected with the feedback loop.

As Easton himself argued, it is not relevant to speak of public support as being something directed towards the political system as a singular entity, and he explicitly stated that “it is impossible to speak meaningfully for a system as a whole” (1965, p. 165). Instead he proposed that attitudes reflecting public support should be regarded as something directed towards the different main system components that together constitutes the main pillars of a political system. These components in the context of the EU as a political system will be further elaborated on later in this chapter, but in the general terms of the functioning of a political system, the meaning of these system components needs some clarification. Easton argued that a political system, as a theoretical concept, should be divided into three different political objects (in this study referred to as system components) towards which public attitudes are primarily directed. Easton classified these three system components as *the authorities*, *the regime* and *the political community*. These three system important components of a political system could be placed in the political system-box in Figure 1 (see page 54). Even though the relationship between these three system components has not been clearly established within empirical research, “it is generally believed that these objects of support are mutually

related" (Norris, 1999, p. 74). This division of the political system into separate assessable system components also makes it easier to analytically and empirically approach the study of political systems and how public support relates to the long-term functioning and persistence of a political system.

The three main system important political objects that Easton suggested need some further elaboration. The *authorities* refers to the occupants of the authority roles within the regime, hence the political authorities. According to Easton, there is "little likelihood that a system could survive if it failed to support occupants for these authority roles" (1965, p. 212). The *regime* is widely defined as the constitutional order of a political system, hence the structure of authority or the political order. According to Easton (1965, p. 191), it is impossible for a political system to function without a minimal level of public support for the regime responsible for the governing within the political system. When measuring public support for the regime, Easton argued that the regime should be broken down further into three separate regime elements of system importance: the values, norms and structure of authority of the regime. The political community, consisting of the "members seen as a group of persons bound together by a political division of labour" (Easton, 1965, p. 177), refers to the population living inside a geographically defined area, over which the political regime has a political jurisdiction. Hence, public attitudes towards the authorities and the political community, over time, affects the governing capabilities of the regime, but when the regime collapses there is no longer any need of political authorities in connection to the regime, nor is there any longer a political community in which the members of the political community are participating in a shared division of labour.

According to both Almond (1965, p. 186) and Easton (1965), political systems should be perceived as functioning at different levels, and therefore public attitudes towards each separate system component, to some extent, have an effect on the levels of public support towards the political system as a whole. As Norris (1999, pp. 74–75) suggested, "the

erosion of trust in politicians may eventually undermine confidence in the parliament and general elections; and deficient regime support in the long run may even affect the evaluation of the political community". According to Miller (1971, p. 200), "the fundamental goal of the political system is to insure its own survival or persistence," and there are theoretically two ways that a political system's long-term survival and persistence can be ensured. It can either be ensured through creating sufficient levels of public support from the members participating in the shared political community (the general public) which contributes to democratically legitimising the authority of the political system, or by coercion. Since this section has focused on the general system support theory, the following section will focus more explicitly on the dependent variable of this thesis, public support.

3.1.1 Conceptual definition and system relevance

This section will discuss public support as a concept, as defining the core concept of the study is the first step towards empirical measurement (Pennings, Keman & Kleinnijenhuis, 1999, p. 60). In the most general terms, the concept of system support, in this thesis referred to as public support, is at the individual level interpreted as "an attitude by which a person orients himself to an object either favourably or unfavourably, positively or negatively" (Easton, 1975, p. 436). In its aggregated form, for example, country levels of public support for a political system are measured by attitudinal indicators reflecting support towards the system components of the political system. Easton (1965, p. 156) described the concept of system support as "the major summary variable linking a system to its environment," and the country levels of public support could thereby be used to measure how the political regime is perceived by the population participating in the shared political community. The fact that the political regime enjoys sufficient levels of public support is therefore of vital importance for any political system based on voluntarily compliance, because sufficient levels of public support should be considered to democratically legitimise the authority of the regime

responsible for governing. Therefore, both the direction and long-term system persistence capabilities of a political system, in what is commonly referred to as democratic societies, are affected by varying public attitudes and preferences. As Easton (1965, p. 165) also argued, “support is a function not only of actions or intensities of feelings, pro or con, but of the number of members who hold these feelings”. Sufficient levels of public support thereby function as a stamp of approval for any political regime to operate without the need of coercion, hence providing the political regime with enough democratic legitimacy to not become questioned during periods of system pressure derived from somewhere within the systems total environment.

The main system component of a political system is the political regime, because if the political regime fails, the political system inevitably also fails. According to Inglehart (1967), democratic legitimacy for a political regime is achieved through a socialisation process, a process that occurs over time, if ever. Scharpf (1997, p. 20) also argued that the possibility for a regime to create enough democratic legitimacy also depends on a pre-existing sense of community, which according to Scharpf cannot be created by “mere fiat”. In relation to that, Miller (1971, pp. 201–202) argues that the cleavages within a political community, arising from differences in public attitudes or from conflicts among groups within the political community, could erode the democratic legitimacy of a regime. He also argues that a regime without the capacity to cope with such kinds of conflicts derived from the cleavages will eventually dissolve under periods of increased system pressure. Norris (2011, p. 110), Rothschild (1977, p. 488) and Obradovic (1996, p. 194) provide similar argumentation, and agree on the presumption that a political regime which fails to meet the public expectations over longer periods of time will lose its democratic legitimacy. That scenario is something particularly risky for younger democracies that have not yet developed enough public support in order to endure longer periods of system pressure. Obradovic (1996, pp. 194–195) suggests that any kind of political regime with a system of governance that is based on

voluntarily compliance by its members is dependent on public support from the members participating in the political community for democratic legitimisation, because the citizens within the political community are the only legitimate source of power.

According to Obradovic (1996, p. 195), “legitimacy is a concept founded on the premises of the doctrine of popular sovereignty, that the people may be the only legitimate source of power since they represent ultimate authority”. Legitimacy for a political regime is hence derived in the form of public support, but is thus “anything but a univocal concept” (van Ingelgom, 2014, pp. 4–5). There is also no exact threshold for how high the levels of public support should be in order to be considered as sufficiently high for a political regime to be perceived as democratically legitimised. Few, if any, political concepts are therefore as widely debated as democratic legitimacy, and studies about democratic legitimacy can be traced back to Aristotle, who is attributed to have stated that “political power elicits compliance by the use of force, by the distribution of rewards, by education, or by some combination of these three procedures” (in Rothschild, 1977, p. 488). It is not within the scope of this thesis to conduct a deeper theoretical discussion regarding the concept of democratic legitimacy, and hence this thesis settles for a wide definition of democratic legitimacy suitable for the context of democratic legitimacy for the EU. As a strictly theoretical concept, democratic legitimacy is therefore within this thesis defined as the “acceptance of political power by the citizens who are subject to it” (van Ingelgom, 2014, p. 9). Hence, directly connecting public attitudes with democratic legitimacy.

Easton (1965) argues that there are two ways for a political system, based on the voluntarily participation of its members, to create the sufficient levels of democratic legitimacy necessary to be able to withstand periods of system pressure: this can be provided either by efficiency or by affection. The perception of a political regime as democratically legitimated should therefore be considered as something derived from both evaluative and affective considerations (Lipset, 1959, pp. 86–87), and both types of considerations are of critical

importance for the long-term system persistence capabilities of any political regime. Many researchers therefore suggest that there are two kinds of legitimising mechanisms, input legitimisation and output legitimisation. According to Scharpf (1997), input legitimisation is based on the notion of government by the people, while output legitimisation is based on the notion of government for the people. The extent of output legitimisation is, therefore, derived from the outputs, or effectiveness, of a political regime, and is divided further by Scharpf into two kinds of performance criteria: *systemic performance* and *democratic performance*.

The systemic performance describes the capabilities of any political regime to achieve the general public demands, such as security and prosperity, while democratic performance is based on the notion that public preferences result in political outputs. As earlier noted, there is no clear answer to the amount and scope of public support required as an input in the political system in order for enabling the regime to convert public demands into political decisions, because the conversion rate is always determined by the circumstances of each specific demand (Easton, 1965, p. 394). The importance of sufficient levels of public support for the system persistence capabilities of a political system are perhaps best illustrated by Easton (1957, p. 399) himself, who stated that “support resting on a sense of the legitimacy of a government and regime provides a necessary reserve if the system is to weather those frequent storms when the more obvious outputs of the system seem to impose greater hardships than rewards”. These storms that Easton refers to are expected to transform into stress on the political system. Easton (1965, p. 24) suggested that:

“Stress will be said to occur when there is a danger that the essential variables will be pushed beyond what we may designate as their critical range. What this means is that something may be happening in the environment – the system suffers total defeat at the hands of an enemy, or widespread disorganization in and dissatisfaction from the system is aroused by a severe economic crisis. Let us say that as a result, the authorities are consistently unable to make decisions or if they strive to do so, the decisions are no longer regularly accepted

as binding. Under these conditions, authoritative allocations of values are no longer possible and the society would collapse for want of a system of behavior to fulfill one of its vital functions”.

Therefore, sufficient levels of public support are crucial for any political system in order to withstand longer periods of stress. As previously mentioned, Easton further distinguished between two different types of public support of system importance: specific and diffuse. These two theoretical concepts are, however, highly problematic and should be used with caution, as the meaning of the concepts varies depending on how they have been used.

Theoretically speaking, these two types of public support could be directed towards each system component directly, as Easton suggests, for example, that longer periods of specific support for the regime transfers into diffuse support for the regime. Hence, public attitudes towards the regime could theoretically reflect both the specific and the diffuse kinds of support. Easton, however, argued that it is more likely that the public attitudes directed towards the political authorities reflect the specific kind of support, as public attitudes towards the political authorities are the most likely to fluctuate during periods of system stress. However, public attitudes towards the regime should be more likely to remain stable, even during periods of system stress, hence, public attitudes towards the regime are more likely to be of the more diffuse kind of support. Nevertheless, public support for the regime should not be expected to remain stable no matter what occurs within the total environment of the political system. Public attitudes towards the political community should, however, remain stable almost no matter what kind of system stress occurs. Hence public attitudes directed towards the political community are most likely to reflect the diffuse kind of support.

Unfortunately, within the post-Easton public support literature, these concepts have caused a great amount of frustration. Norris (2011) has therefore instead suggested that public support should be perceived as something ranging on a support continuum, from the most specific to the most diffuse kind of support. Norris herself

suggested that specific support should be considered to reflect public support for the “less” system important elements and that diffuse support be used to reflect public support for the “more” system important elements of a political system. As this way of using these two main types of public support facilitates their usability, that is also how these two concepts will be used within this thesis.

In short, the system persistence capabilities of any political system are determined by the interplay between these two kinds of public support (van Ingelgom, 2014, p. 6). It is also the division of the concept of system support into the more output-related specific support and the more input-related diffuse support that has resulted in Easton’s work being widely cited and adopted by researchers (Niedermeyer & Westle, 1995, p. 36). The levels of specific support for a system component are basically determined by the attitudes of the members participating in the political community, and based on utilitarian considerations whether their demands are being fulfilled by the system component that is being evaluated. The levels of diffuse support, on the other hand, are based on deeper held attitudes, sentiments of loyalty and attachment towards a system component, and thereby constitute a more general attachment towards a system component for what it is, not for what it does. As Niedermeyer and Westle (1995, p. 36) suggested, “diffuse support denotes a generalized evaluation, whereas specific support means an output-directed evaluation”. De Vries (2018, p. 43) also suggested that “specific support serves very much like a mental tally that fluctuates according to the regime’s performance, while diffuse support is more affective in nature”.

Easton (1965, p. 343) suggested that, at least theoretically, “each kind of support will spill over to the other and influence it”. Therefore, at least theoretically, specific and diffuse support are perceived to be causally related, implying, for example, that longer periods of positive experiences with the political authorities will nurture higher levels of support for the regime, and, over time, result in higher levels of public attachment with the political community. This process should be considered to provide the authorities with the necessary levels of public

support that enables them to also implement unpopular political policies (Wessels, 2007, p. 289). These two theoretical concepts need further clarification, and in the following section the defining characteristics of the specific kind of support will be discussed.

3.1.1.1 Specific support

Easton (1965, p. 268) suggested that “wherever the input of support can be closely associated with the satisfactions obtained from specific classes of output, I shall designate it as specific support,” and public attitudes closely related to the fulfilment of demands by the members of the political community could thereby be considered to reflect the more specific kind of support. According to Easton, the levels of specific support hence reflect how the political demands from the members of the political community are being fulfilled by the particular system element that is being evaluated. In this way, the levels of specific support are expected to fluctuate according to the perceived and/or actual performance and benefits derived from the system element that is evaluated. Easton (1975, p. 439) further argued that the uniqueness of specific support lies in its direct relationship to how the members of the political community evaluate the perceived outputs and benefits of a system element, and that “this kind of support varies with the perceived benefits or satisfactions”.

Following Scharpf (1997), the specific kind of support is expected to provide the political system with output legitimisation. The levels of the specific kind of support, as an evaluative and performance-based kind of support, are therefore expected to fluctuate according to the performance and perceived benefits derived from the system element being evaluated by the public. Using this interpretation of the concept, the levels of specific support are determined by how the public relates to the results and benefits “for the people” that the system element enables. The specific kind of support also closely resembles the utilitarian type of support (Karp & Bowler, 2006), indicating that the levels of specific support result from a rationally based cost-benefit analysis. Therefore, when the costs of public support are perceived to

exceed the benefits, the specific kind of support is also expected to fluctuate. Hence, specific support is also the kind of support that is directed towards specific policy-issues. Likewise, public support for policy-issues is also expected to remain stable over time if the perceived benefits of a policy are not affected by the events within the total environment of the political system. In the following section, the defining characteristics of the more system important kind of support, i.e. diffuse support, are discussed.

3.1.1.2 Diffuse support

Political regimes are able to withstand longer periods of system pressure even though the performance of the regime is far from sufficient. In light of this, Easton (1965, p. 176) suggested that “underlying the functioning of all systems, there must be some cohesive cement – a sense of feeling of community amongst the members. Unless such identity emerges, the political system itself may never take shape or if it does, it may not survive”. This “cohesive cement” could be conceptualised as diffuse support or as system affect (Almond & Verba, 1963). Sufficient levels of the diffuse kind of support should therefore be considered of vital importance for the long-term system persistence capabilities of any political system. According to Easton, prolonged periods of positive regime performance should nurture a great amount of specific support, which over time should be “transformed” into the more diffuse, or affective, kind of support directed towards the political community. Hence, democratic legitimisation provided through political efficiency or performance is theoretically easier for a political regime to create, but also easier to forfeit than the more diffuse kind of support (Linde & Ekman, 2003, p. 400).

Within political communities based on voluntarily compliance, the members of the political community are therefore able to tolerate longer periods of frustration with the political processes of the political regime without the minimal levels of public support falling under the crucial threshold leading to system collapse. Therefore, Easton argues

that there must be another type of support that enables the members of the political community to continue supporting the foundations of the prevailing political regime, even though they are not at all satisfied with the current state of affairs. According to Easton, the defining characteristic of this kind of support is that it constitutes a reservoir of favourable public attitudes that helps the members of the political community tolerate political decisions or political directions that they are in principle opposed to. Except in the long-run, the more diffuse kind of support is not affected by the daily workings within the regime because it constitutes a general attachment towards a system element for its own sake and is not directly determined by how the element performs or what it provides. Easton (1975, p. 444) described diffuse support as a concept based on what a system component is or represents, and as such diffuse support constitutes a kind of generalised attachment towards the system element. The diffuse kind of support is therefore also more difficult to create but also difficult to weaken once it is strong. Diffuse support should therefore be considered to provide a political system with the necessary legitimacy reserve that is crucial when the regime faces system pressure, and could thereby also be described as constituting a “reservoir of institutional goodwill” (Bowler & Karp, 2004, p. 272).

According to Miller (1971, p. 204), a “political system has several ways of coping with support stress. The most immediate response is likely to be an effort to generate specific support through allocative outputs which meet the current demands of the members or anticipate and abort possible future demands”. Miller therefore suggests that “the political system might seek a long-range solution to support stress by acting to create diffuse support”. The levels of diffuse support are then primarily based on loyalty to the principles and institutions within the system of governance for what they represent, rather than based on performance or benefits (Citrin, McClosky, Shanks & Verney, 1975). According to Easton (1965, pp. 325–327), the most effective way for the political regime to create the more diffuse kind of support was by promoting some kind of “sense of political community” or “mutual

political identification" within the political community. The concept of "sense of community" was however first introduced by Deutsch (1953), and he defined the concept as a matter of mutual loyalty and loyalties by the members within a political community. Easton (1965, p. 332), developing Deutsch's original conceptualisation, describes the sense of political community as the existence of a "we-feeling" among a group of people not just as a group but also as "a political entity that works together and will likely share a common political fate and destiny". Easton (1965, p. 325) further argued that when "their sense of community is high, we can say that they are putting in considerable support for the political community. Where it is low, the level of support deteriorates accordingly". It has since been assumed that a political system can function effectively only within political communities where antagonism among the members of the community is not too great (Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970, p. 26).

According to Scharpf (1997), diffuse support provides the political system with input legitimisation. Hence, it is more related to the concept of "by the people". However, this is not to be confused with Easton's use of the term "inputs" with regards to a political system. Within national settings, the country levels of the diffuse kind of support could be measured using indicators of the most affective public attitudes, such as national pride, willingness to fight for one's country or mutual identification (Norris, 2011). Therefore, the diffuse kind of support is considered to represent "an enduring bond that enables subjects of rule to oppose the incumbents of offices and their policies and yet retain support for the offices and institutions" (Gronau & Schmidtke, 2016, p. 541). Hence, the best way for any regime to prepare for the inevitable system crises, when the performance of the regime does not match the political demands by the members of the political community (the public), is by creating the more diffuse kind of support (Miller, 1971, p. 204). It is therefore assumed that within political communities based on voluntarily compliance, public support from the citizens participating in the political community democratically legitimises the superiority and political mandate of the regime,

constituting the main political authority. For the context of measuring country levels of diffuse support, levels of nationalism are the most logical reflection of diffuse support in the Eastonian sense (Easton, 1965, p. 181). In the following section, the causal relationship between these two kinds of public support will be more thoroughly discussed.

3.1.1.3 The causal relationship

What I am suggesting here is that support resting on a sense of the legitimacy of a government and regime provides a necessary reserve if the system is to weather those frequent storms when the more obvious outputs of the system seem to impose greater hardships than rewards.

Easton, 1957, p. 399

As presented, the specific and diffuse kinds of support are the two types of public support used to theoretically distinguish between two types of public attitudes, both being of importance for the system persistence capabilities of a political system. They are, however, analytically separable and have different defining characteristics. Still, as Niedermayer and Westle (1995, p. 37) noted “the distinction between the modes of support is somewhat problematic”. Nevertheless, as Dalton (2014, p. 258) suggested, the “distinction between diffuse and specific support is important in understanding the significance of different aspects of political support. A democratic political system must ensure the support of its members if the system is to remain viable because it rules by the consent of the governed”. Easton (1965, p. 343) further suggested that the theoretical concepts of specific and diffuse support are closely interrelated, and also that “each kind of support will spill over to the other and influence it”. The creation of a diffuse kind of support is therefore assumed to be based on a history of high levels of specific support, and hence “successful political and economic development generates a reservoir of goodwill (diffuse support) that can be used to cover up minor or temporal setbacks in the system’s ability to produce outputs” (Linde & Ekman, 2003, p. 406). How these

two concepts are perceived in relation to the general workings of a political system is summarised in Figure 2.

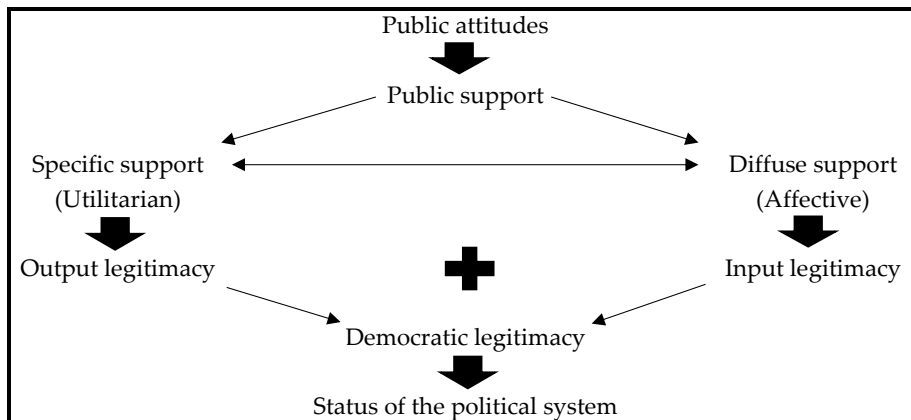


Figure 2. Public attitudes as a reflection of the system persistence capabilities of a political system.

However, Easton (1965, p. 312) argued that “if the feeling were to prevail that the regime itself militated against the public interest, in time continued acceptance of the regime as right and proper could not be taken for granted”. That is mainly because a “decline of support at the regime level, if it persists for a long enough period, readily spills over into the community and adversely affects attachment to it” (Easton, 1965, p. 321). In short, the public should be more likely to accept longer periods of dissatisfaction with regime performance if the diffuse support is strong. According to Easton (1965, p. 275), there are also ways for a political regime to nurture public support before crises emerge, and if “it is recognized that discontent with the regime or community is increasing, the first, easiest, and most direct response which may be taken to cope with the situation is to make some effort to improve the adequacy of the outputs”. Hence, at least theoretically, it could be expected that “direct satisfaction for demands will at least generate specific support; and the longer such satisfactions are felt, the more likely it is that a higher level of political good will can develop” (Easton, 1965, p. 275). Therefore, Wessels (2007, p. 289) argues that

longer periods of public satisfaction with the performance of the regime will also create more diffuse support for the regime. On the other hand, as Dalton (2014, p. 257) argues, a “decline in regime support might provoke a basic challenge to political institutions or calls for reform in government procedures”. Dalton further suggests that “weakening ties to the political community might foretell eventual revolution, civil war, or the loss of legitimacy”.

Many researchers focusing on public attitudes towards the EU have therefore regularly chosen to take their theoretical starting point from Easton’s (1965) conceptual framework.²⁰ Through this, they are theoretically able to connect the developments in the country levels of public support for the EU, within the EU area, into the larger and more important question regarding the system persistence capabilities of the EU as a political system. Because as Lindberg and Scheingold (1970, p. 111) suggested, “the systems analysis approach helps us to identify the most essential political processes in a simple and economical fashion and hence leads us to ask the most relevant kinds of questions about any system of behavior”. Even though Easton did not develop the system support theory solely for the context of international political systems, Easton (1965, p. 486) himself suggested that an international or regional political system is just a system on another level of abstraction, and he argued that international political systems in every aspect, except one, are equivalent to the political systems within the nation states. International political systems only differ from those of nation states because they are composed of units of large and powerful subsystems instead of citizens. In the EU area, these units are the 28 member states voluntarily choosing to participate in the shared European political community, created by the EU regime over time through European integration policies.

²⁰ Easton’s system support theory has also been widely used within similar studies, such as Lindberg and Scheingold (1970), Kopecky and Mudde (2002), Risse (2005), Wessels (2007), Kohler-Koch (2011), Boomgaarden et al. (2011), Cram (2012), Armingeon and Ceka (2014), Richardson and Mazey (2004), van Ingelgom (2014), Dotti Sani and Magistro (2016), Kaina (2016) and Roose (2016), to mention a few.

It has even been suggested that the empirical resourcefulness of the system support theory might be most directly tested with international political systems (Kaplan, 1968, p. 38; Anckar, 1974, p. 64). As Scharpf (2010, p. 69) also stated, “the institutional capacity and legitimacy of Europeanized governing should be evaluated by reference to the same normative criteria that we generally use for the evaluation of governing institutions”. Nevertheless, as Ares, Ceka and Kriesi (2017) suggested, the relationship between specific and diffuse support becomes even more complicated within a multilevel governance system like the EU. Furthermore, Gronau and Schmitdke (2016, pp. 536–537) argue that international political systems seek “legitimacy not only from member states, but also from civil servants working for international institutions and from the broader public”. As Lindberg and Scheingold (1970, p. 262) also argued, “the legitimacy of the Community is likely to be related to the nature of the system and more specifically to the extent that it corresponds to the expectations of various groups”.

Before shifting focus to the different system components of the EU as a political system, something needs to be noted regarding the critique that Easton and the system support theory have received during the last five decades. There has been no lack of critique towards Easton’s system support theory, as was to be expected when trying to create a grand theory of something as abstract as the concept of system support and the functioning of political systems (Bang, 1998). Kaplan (1968, p. 30), for instance, pointed out that the first thing to be said about Easton’s system support theory is that it is not a theory. Kaplan further argued that no propositions of relevance about the real world can be derived from it, and that it is merely a tool for achieving a middle-level range of generalisation about political or social macrostructures. Peters (1998, p. 112) referred to system support theories as the most general of political theories, while Anckar (1974) and Reading (1972), in particular, criticised the use of the system persistence concept, as it is strictly speaking impossible to validate. According to Anckar (1974, p. 87), the political system described by Easton could not cease to exist even if it wanted to. Reading (1972, p.

262) further criticised the degree of abstraction with the political system, because it is, according to him, impossible to identify a system on the verge of system collapse using Easton's guidelines. Reading further criticised Easton's conceptualisation of diffuse support, and especially how diffuse support could come to the rescue of a system during periods of system pressure, and how the interactions between specific and diffuse support actually works. Others were more frank with their critique, such as Astin (1972, pp. 730–731) who stated that "it is impossible to see how Easton can call this primitive nomenclature a contribution to empirical sciences". Astin (1972, p. 737) also stated that "Easton proceeds as though mechanism, organisms, and individualism could be comfortably incorporated in a single scheme is evidence of a genuinely hospitable if somewhat uncritical intellect".²¹

Nevertheless, as Kaplan (1968) also suggested, Easton's system support theory should be perceived as providing theoretical guidelines that can be adapted, depending on the context, for understanding how real-world events might affect the political system instead of being regarded as some kind of conventional wisdom in itself. It is also possible to argue that it is in the general adaptability that the system support theory's usefulness lies, as this theory was "designed to be sufficiently general to be applicable to almost all political systems" (Peters, 1998, p. 112). Peters (1998) further suggested that even though there were several weaknesses with the system support theory, Easton made a number of important contributions to comparative politics and managed to provide a very general perspective of something as complex as political life. Most importantly, the theory also pinpointed the significance of feedback by establishing the importance for governments to consider the public response to previous actions when discussing policies. Hence, the validity of the system support theory is not something that can actually be empirically directly tested within this, or any, study. It does, however, provide important theoretical guidelines for understanding the greater political importance of public

²¹ Nettl (1966, p. 314) further suggested that researchers focusing on political systems think of themselves as "participating in an intellectual consensus of pioneers".

support, and the probable underlying causes behind why different types of public support fluctuate within and between countries.

Furthermore, the underlying causes that might lead to system collapse could be traced to the events within the political system (intra-societal environment) or outside the political system (extra-societal environment). It is also the understanding that a political system is not something definitive nor eternal that makes the long-term persistence capabilities of political systems of interest to study. That is why Easton's framework is especially relevant with regard to the system persistence capabilities of relatively new international political systems, especially because the more affective kind of diffuse support is assumed to be in a lower supply in the context of international systems than in the context of nation states. This simultaneously makes international political systems, such as the EU, more receptive of system stress and hence more dependent on public support from, and within, the participating member states. As De Winter and Swyngedouw (1999, p. 66) also suggested, "international governance, like national or regional government, can only gain legitimacy when the public agrees with the rules of the game". Therefore, the argument for using country levels of public support as measurements for the health, status and stability of a political system, such as the EU, are derived from the understanding that a political system can actually cease to exist. This has been proven over and over again throughout history, both with regard to national level political regimes (Czechoslovakia 1918–1993) and international political organisations (League of Nations 1920–1946).

Although Dalton (2014, p. 256) noted that "support is a term with many possible meanings," within this thesis, sufficient country levels of public support for the system important elements of the EU are assumed to provide the EU with enough democratic legitimacy. Thereby simultaneously legitimising European integration as something generally desirable for the members participating in the European political community. As with the multidimensionality of the concept of public support, Euroscepticism should also be considered as

a multidimensional concept. As Vasilopoulou (2013, p. 3) suggested, Eurosceptic sentiments can be directed specifically towards the EU as a political system as a whole, to the institutional design of the EU regime, or towards specific European integration policies such as enlargement or the single European currency.

In this introduction to system support theory, it has been described how public support provides a political system with democratic legitimacy, and that there are different kinds of public support for system importance that are internally related. However, as Easton and many others have argued, a political system needs to be divided into different system components and component elements towards which the public support is directed. After a short summary regarding the main points presented in this subchapter, the following subchapter will present the three main system components of the EU as a political system, together with eight specific component related elements, which are in this thesis considered to be of importance for the future development and system persistence capabilities of the EU.

Summary

This subchapter has discussed and presented the general guidelines derived from the system support theory and the reason why this particular theory constitutes a valid point of departure for this thesis. It has been argued in this subchapter that the division of a political system into component parts, towards which public support is directed, is crucial in order to study empirically such a complex object of interest as a political system. By dividing the EU as a political system into system components, and later into component elements, it is possible to account for the multidimensionality of the concept of public support as well as the varied importance of the different elements of the EU from a system persistence perspective. It has also been argued that there are two types of public support that are directed towards the system components, i.e. specific and diffuse support. Specific support is more utilitarian in nature. As it is based on cost-benefit calculations, it fluctuates according to the perceived benefits. Diffuse support, on the

other hand, is perceived as the more affective kind of support, and is based on deeper held loyalties and affection towards a system component for what it represents. Therefore, diffuse support is expected to remain more stable over time.

In the following subchapter, the EU is first of all presented and discussed from a system perspective, focusing on why the EU is such a complex political system to study empirically. Thereafter the three main system importance components: European integration policies, the EU regime and the European political community are presented stepwise.

3.2 The EU as a political system

If we select political systems for special study, we do so because we believe that they have characteristically important consequences for society.

Easton, 1957, p. 385

In this subchapter, the defining characteristics of the EU from a system perspective and the main system elements of relevance for the system persistence capabilities and the future development of the EU as a political system are presented. This subchapter will also present and define the three main system important components of the EU, from a system support perspective, of relevance for the system persistence capabilities of the EU and discuss how the country levels of public support towards these system components are internally related. These three, very broad, system components are European integration policies, the EU regime and the European political community. In the following section, the EU as a political system will be defined as a supranational political system in Europe that has been developed by the EU regime during more than 60 years of voluntarily implementation of European integration policies by the participating member states.

First of all, it needs to be clearly stated that the modern version of the EU does not resemble anything like the original European Coal and

Steel Community (ECSC) of 1952. However, the original political purpose has not changed even though the EU as a political entity has. The original political purpose with the emergence of supranational governance at the European level was to achieve cross-sectional benefits by coordinating human activity within Europe (Hooghe & Marks, 2008, p. 2); and to contain German military power for history not to repeat itself (Scharpf, 1999, p. 44). These overarching goals still remains, at least to some extent. Nevertheless, it has been suggested that the EU has evolved over time from something resembling a “would be polity” into a supranational system of governance (Follesdal & Hix, 2006; Fligstein, 2008; Mitchell, 2016). At any rate, at least since the Maastricht Treaty, the EU could be considered as constituting a semi political European political system, which is however governed by both supranational and intergovernmental principles (Hix, 2005; Fabbrini, 2015). The modern version of the EU is, furthermore, a unique example of a multilevel system of governance (Kenealy, Peterson & Corbett, 2015, p. 233), in which the different levels interact to different extents to govern over a shared European political community (Marks et al., 1996, p. 373; Kenealy et al., 2015, p. 239). However, since there is no consensus whatsoever regarding the theoretical status of the EU itself, and how it should be conceptualised and theoretically approached within academic studies, every researcher focusing on the EU as an object of interest needs to start by deciding how the EU is to be perceived in the study (Kenealy et al. 2015, p. 11).

According to Tömmel (2014, p. 309), the scholarly debate regarding the institutional status of the EU has centred on two opposing views: is it better to compare the EU to a federal state or to an international organisation? The EU has been struggling to adapt itself as a simultaneously supranational and intergovernmental political system, which has created uncertainty regarding the status of the EU, mixed together with a complicated and slow decision-making process within the EU bureaucracy. These are exactly the kinds of problems that the two core countries of the Union, France and Germany, wanted to avoid (Huntington, 1996, p. 157). Still, the best way of understanding and

theoretically approaching the EU as a research object is through comparison with the political systems of its incumbent member states (Macmillan, 2014, p. 2; McCormick, 2014, p. 2). Therefore, also Eriksen (2011, p. 82) suggests that the EU should no longer be defined by the perceived limitations within its institutional structure.

Rosamond (2000) further argues that there are a number of ways of approaching and defining the EU as a researcher, depending on the purpose. First of all, it is possible to study and understand the EU as just another international organisation. Furthermore, the EU could be studied as an example of regional integration and be compared with the institutional features of other regional economic cooperation forums, such as NAFTA or Mercosur. Finally, the EU could be studied as a unique organisation that has been built and developed through a unique set of circumstances. Olsen and McCormick (2016, p. 15), furthermore, suggest that there is also another possibility, namely “to understand the EU as a political system in its own right and compare its structures and operating principles with those of conventional national political systems”. That should also be considered as the most appropriate approach, based on the EU’s current, and ever-evolving, institutional structure and political mandates.

According to Easton (1965, p. 153), a “political system may be described in any one of a number of ways depending upon the particular kind of emphasis we wish to give it”. In many ways, it would also be easier to conclude, as a political system, what the EU is not, rather than what it actually is. First and foremost, the EU cannot be considered as a European federation nor as a European super-state. The EU is not either simply another regional European organisation, such as the Nordic Council, to take just one example. In other words, it is insufficient to compare the EU directly with anything but itself. According to Richardson and Mazey (2014, p. 11), the confusion regarding the EU’s status, which has been changing more or less regularly, makes it difficult to formulate adequate terminology to describe the EU. McCormick (2014, p. 2), for instance, refers to the EU as a confederal system with some federal qualities, mainly because

some powers have been transferred to the Union where cooperation is most sensible, but where many of the decisions are still being determined more through intergovernmental than by supranational processes.

The EU could, in addition, also be regarded as a club with associates of common interests (Wood & Quaisser, 2008, p. 18), a “post-national type of political system” (Tömmel, 2014, p. 25), as a regulatory state (Majone, 1998), empire (Zielonka, 2005), “hybrid multilevel political system” (De Vries, 2018, p. 43) or as the world’s most “authoritative general purpose international organization” (Hooghe, Marks, Lenz, Bezuijen, Ceka & Derderyan, 2017, p. 563). Another sufficient description could be as an “experiment in motion” (Kenealy et al., 2015, p. 17), mainly because of the ever-changing development of the EU, or the even more vague definition of “a very special multi-level system” (Jachtenfuchs, 2010, p. 210). As should be clear by this short summary, the question regarding how to define the EU has therefore become a never-ending academic and political debate, and therefore the most suiting description is perhaps still the one provided by the former Commission president Jacques Delors: it is simply an unidentified political object (McCormick, 2014, p. 1). There are not any expectations that an agreement amongst researchers can be reached on this issue within a foreseeable future.

Nevertheless, there seems to be some kind of an agreement amongst researchers that the EU as a political system over time has increasingly started to resemble a supranational version of the political systems within its constituting member states.²² The similar characteristics between the EU and its member states have been elegantly illustrated by Jachtenfuchs (2010, p. 204):

²² The Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU, part six) specifies the powers of the respective EU institutions and the EU’s system of checks and balances, which manifests itself in a relatively rigid separation of power system; not only are powers to propose and adopt legislation divided among the EU institutions – the Commission, the EP, and the Council – legislation has to be transposed by national parliaments and requires the support of national administrations and agencies at the implementation stage.

“The EU has a clearly defined territory in which decisions taken by the EU bodies are collectively binding. This territory is the sum of the territories of its member states. In this territory, nature protection provisions, banking regulations or product standards are equally binding. These rules are adopted by a single set of institutions which covers all policy issues alike. In the standard version of the law-making process, the Commission submits a legislative proposal on which the Council and the European Parliament jointly decide. Complaints can be addressed to the European Court of Justice”.

According to Eriksen (2011), the supranationalistic character of the EU originally started with the acceptance of the constitutional reading of the founding treaties in the 1950's, but further developed explicitly in the 1960's. This development has, according to Eriksen (2011), transformed the European Economic Community from an international organisation into a quasi-federal legal system based on higher law-constitutionalism. It has been suggested that the most important individual event during this transformation phase was when the supremacy of EU law was determined, which stated that national norms must give way to community laws if a conflict arises within the scope of the application of the treaties (Eriksen, 2011, p. 74). Therefore, according to Eriksen (2011, p. 82), the EU has over time evolved into a supranational political order that, however, still recognises the difference of its constituent parties, the member states. According to Rittberger (2014) and Dinan (2014), there is also an agreement within the EU literature that the EU treaties contain key features of a liberal democratic state. According to Zurn (2000, p. 183), however, if the EU as a country were to apply for membership in the EU, it would not qualify because of the inadequate content of the guiding EU-treaties.

Neyer and Wiener (2011, p. 170) argue that the EU, furthermore, lacks all the political competences that are central to the governance capabilities of any democratic state: the powers to tax, to enforce sanctions by means of coercion and to provide security against foreign powers. Scharpf (2012, pp. 15–16) also further argues that the EU does not conform to democratic standards of political interaction, although that should only be perceived to be a problem if the EU is considered

as constituting a liberal democracy in the traditional representative sense of the term.²³ Wiener (2011, p. 214) also suggests that the EU, as a treaty-based organisation, differs from all other similar supranational organisations due to the multitude of political institutions, ranging from legislative (European Parliament), judicative (European Court of Justice) to the executive (European Council and the Council of Ministers). Another important distinction from other similar organisations is the pronounced promotion by the EU of the core democratic and liberal constitutional principles of modern statehood, such as respect for human rights, democracy and political equality, the rule of law and minority rights. To summarise, the purpose of this section has been to present some of the ongoing academic discussion regarding the institutional status of the EU, but not to go any deeper into a research area that resembles something of a conceptual jungle. In line with the argument proposed by Lelieveldt and Princen (2015, p. 41), that although “the EU’s nature and character fall short of that of sovereign nation-states, it nevertheless can be considered a political system in its own right,” it is how the EU is perceived in this thesis.

According to Dogan (1994), single indicators are misleading when measuring complex phenomena; likewise, this chapter will show why it is not sufficient to use only a single indicator to measure public support for the EU as a political system. One of the main arguments in this thesis is that when using the concept of public support towards a supranational political system, it is essential to differentiate with regard to the component of the political system that the public attitudes are directed towards. Niedermeyer and Westle (1995, pp. 33–50), based on Easton’s original framework, differed in their “typology of orientations”-chapter between a number of system components of the EU towards which public attitudes are directed. These system components they divided into the broad categories of the political

²³ Piketty (2014, p. 560) describes the workings within the European Council in the following way: “They meet in secret, do not engage in open public debate, and regularly end their meetings with triumphal midnight communiqués announcing that Europe has been saved, even though the participants themselves do not always seem to be sure about what they have decided”.

collectivity, the political order, the political authorities and the political policies. Political collectivity refers to the political community, but they changed the concept of community to collectivity, even though the meaning remains the same. The political order refers to the organisation of the collectivity, consisting of the political philosophy and the institutional structure of the political order. The political authorities refers to the occupants of the political roles at the international level. The policies component consists of “the substantive dimension of international governance” directly implying orientations towards the policies that are dealt with at the international level. In reference to Easton’s original conceptualisation of a political system as constituting three main political objects of system importance, and Niedermeyer and Westles (1995, p. 50) adaption of Easton’s framework to the EU context, the categorisation of the most important system components of the EU as a political system that have been used in this thesis will be presented in the following three sections. These broad categories of system components will be referred to as *European integration policies*, *the EU regime* and *the European political community*.

However, before moving on to the European integration policies section, a few reflections are in order regarding why the political authorities will not be included as a system important component of the EU in this study. This is mainly due to two reasons. First of all, there is a lack of country level comparative data, as there is no survey data available that has included survey items that could be used to measure country levels of public attitudes towards the political authorities responsible for the governing of the EU. That was also the main reason why both Lindberg and Scheingold (1970) and Niedermeyer and Westle (1995) chose to focus solely on public attitudes towards the EU regime and the European political community in the empirical parts of their respective studies. Besides that, who would these political authorities of system importance actually be at the EU level? As Schmitt and Thomassen (1999, p. 13) also argued, “it is one of the very characteristics of a democratic system that negative support for the incumbent leaders and their policies should lead to “throwing the

rascals out” rather than adopting a different political regime”. The political authorities of relevance for the EU’s functioning and efficiency are still the political authorities active at the country levels, even though the EU-commission under Jean-Claude Juncker and the European Council under Donald Tusk definitely tried to increase the status and public awareness of EU level politicians during the period of 2014–2019.²⁴ However, as the EU could possibly transform into an even more state-like political entity in the future, the political authorities at the EU level might also become a relevant system component to include within future similar studies. This especially if the EU develops into an even more federal direction in the future.

Schmitt and Thomassen (1999, p. 11) argue that “if we rely on the subjective judgments of the members of the political system, we still need to decide for which aspects of the political system their judgements are relevant”. In this thesis, country levels of public support are considered to be directed primarily towards separate elements within these three main system components of the EU. The country levels of public support for these system components are thereafter used to measure and compare the extent of the specific and diffuse kind of support for the EU from a system perspective. Public attitudes towards the EU are perceived as constituting a support continuum, ranging from the most specific to the most diffuse kind of support. The basic logic is as follows: if a system component is specific in character, the kind of support directed towards it is also considered to reflect the more specific kind of support, and if a system component is more diffuse in character, the kind of support that is directed towards it is considered to reflect the more diffuse kind of support. The country levels of public support are used to determine how the different elements of the EU are perceived within the 28 member states, which over time is considered to ultimately determine the EU’s future

²⁴ This might change over time if the European Commission is granted more governmental-like powers, the European Parliament is provided more parliamentary powers or the position as the Head-Commissioner develops into a more presidential-like role similar to that of France or the USA.

development and system persistence capabilities during the inevitable times of increased system pressure on the EU. This argumentation is broadly illustrated by Figure 3.

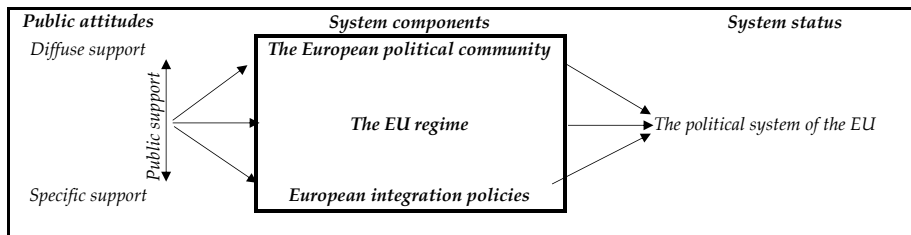


Figure 3. *Simplified model of the functioning of public support for the EU as a political system.*

In the three following sections, the three main system components of the EU as a political system, towards which the country levels of public support are directed, will be presented and described more thoroughly. These three main system components will be further divided into separate component elements, together constituting the more directly evaluable elements of a system component. The following sections further include presentations regarding why it is relevant from a system persistence and development perspective to focus on the country levels of public support towards these separate elements, with the focus being on the defining characteristics that differentiate these elements from each other.

3.2.1 European integration policies

Why should we pursue the project of an “ever-closer Union” any further at all?

Habermas, 2001, p. 6

In this thesis, the concept of European integration is considered as the political process that has enabled the EU’s institutional development, and also the political process that will determine what the EU will develop into in the future. According to Hobolt and De Vries (2016a, p.

416), policy support refers to support “for the content of collective decisions and actions taken by EU actors,” and De Wilde and Trenz (2012) further suggest that it is necessary to distinguish between policy support and regime support in the context of EU attitudes. In this section, three different types of European integration policies are presented as three separate elements of the broader system component of European integration policies towards which the public attitudes are directed. The theoretical assumption is that it matters what the European public think about different types of European integration policies from a system persistence perspective, but also in particular from the perspective of the future development of the EU. After a general discussion regarding the concept of European integration, this section will focus on three types of European integration policy of varying importance for the EU. The first European integration policy is related to the widening of the EU area, the second is related to the deepening of the EU area and the third is related to the securing of an already, partially, implemented European integration policy within the main part of the EU area. Without sufficient country levels of public support for European integration policies, already implemented as well as under discussion for future implementation, the necessity of the EU regime directly, and hence the European political community indirectly, might also over time become questioned.

First and foremost, European integration is here used as a reference to the political process through which the EU has developed, but there are constantly smaller integration processes taking place within, and outside, the framework of the EU. The EU is originally developed from the implementation of different European integration policies within a wide range of policy areas, starting with the pooling of coal and steel production within the ECSC in 1952. Over time, the continuing transference of decision-making powers from the national to the European level has resulted in a wide amount of policy areas coming under the EU’s jurisdiction, as predicted by the so-called neofunctionalist approach to European integration (Haas, 1958). Earlier European integration processes were, however, conducted mainly by

the political elites, and at least indirectly supported by the “permissive consensus” provided by the European public (Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970). However, post-Maastricht European integration within almost every policy area has become increasingly politicised within the member states, and the outcome of proposed European integration policies has therefore become more susceptible to swings in public attitudes. Mitchell (2016, p. 178) therefore argued that “in the absence of permissive consensus favoring integration, public opposition has on numerous occasions stalled or reshaped European developments”. Niedermayer and Westle (1995, p. 44) also suggested that because there is a weak empirical link between attitudes towards the EU in general and European integration policies specifically, they “would not feel comfortable” placing the European integration policies as constituting just another element of the EU regime. They also therefore chose to categorise European integration policies as a separate system component of wider system importance. Within their categorisation they also differed between public attitudes towards already implemented European integration policies as well as public attitudes towards different types of policy proposals.

Political integration was defined by Haas (1968, p. 16) as “the process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities toward a new center, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing national states”. Furthermore, according to Keating (2004, p. 368), European integration in general could also be regarded as a “part of a wider process of state transformation as well as the unique process of polity building”. Theoretically speaking, the political authorities within the member states should be less hesitant to proceed with the process of polity building, through implementing European integration proposals, if they feel that public opinion is relatively in favour of that specific integration proposal. However, the general public might as well perceive European integration, in general, as a threatening process, “leading to a general fear of integration” (Baute et al., 2018, p. 3). That is why there are not many European

politicians or political parties that are prepared to proceed with unpopular European integration policies if they believe it might cause a political backlash during the national elections. The self-awareness of politicians is far too great, as illustrated by the President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker in relation to how the Eurocrisis could be solved: "We all know what to do, we just don't know how to get re-elected after we've done it".²⁵ That is perhaps also why there has not been any significant high-level political discussion regarding a new European constitution after the last attempt were voted down in popular referendums in the Netherlands and France in 2005.²⁶

A number of studies have shown that the European public are conflicted regarding different types of European integration policies (Stoeckel, 2012; De Vries, 2013). Therefore, there has been a growing scholarly interest in issue-specific kinds of attitudes, which are attributed to an increased awareness that the European public can now be directly mobilised against specific integration policies. One such issue was the stalled Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) negotiations, where public opposition, especially in Germany, was attributed to have contributed to the outcome that the negotiations were later stalled at the EU level (Buonanno, 2017).²⁷ When official negotiations between the EU and USA started in 2013, few would then have anticipated that the trade negotiations would lead to "unprecedented debate within Europe" (EU Commissioner Cecilia Malmström 2015, quoted in De Ville & Siles-Brugge, 2017, p. 1491). This "unprecedented debate" more or less forced the negotiators on both sides to reconsider whether it was worth proceeding with the negotiations. According to De Ville and Siles-Brugge (2017), the TTIP-negotiations showed that the EU leadership will have to take the

²⁵ Quoted in *The Economist* (2007), "The Quest for Prosperity", March 15th.

²⁶ However, the European constitution was approved in popular referendums in both Spain (76% approval) and Luxembourg (57% approval).

²⁷ Another recent example is the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between Canada and the EU that almost stalled because of the public opposition to the agreement in Wallonia, Belgium.

opinions of the European public into account also regarding such highly technical issues as trade policies. De Ville and Siles-Brugge (2017, p. 1501) therefore stated that “actors in trade policy (which increasingly also means voters) do not simply make a rational calculation of their economic interest in a particular trade policy (which are also very difficult to know *a priori*), but also take into account the potential or perceived effects of agreements on other public policy objectives as well as on the autonomy of their national (or local level of) government”. However, deeper European integration policies can also be achieved without public consent, or even public awareness, as occurred with the introduction of the Fiscal Compact during the height of the eurozone crisis as a mechanism that “motored economic integration ahead in the eurozone” (De Vries, 2017, p. 204) showed.

Kanthak and Spies (2017, p. 18) also showed by analysing public support for three specific policy proposals related to European integration (TTIP, Eurobonds and an EU financial transaction tax) that “while factors associated with general attitudes towards the EU are also helpful in explaining specific EU policy support, the nature and size of their impact depends significantly on their policy-specific characteristics”. As the most concrete system component of the political system of the EU, public evaluation of implemented European integration policies and policy proposals could be regarded as an indicator for what the EU can develop into without risking public opposition. Especially in the wake of the TTIP-negotiations, the EU-bureaucrats have become more aware of the possibility that the European public can be mobilised against European integration proposals if deemed necessary. As such, public attitudes cannot any longer be ignored when there are discussions in Brussels about significant European integration policies. Theoretically, the European public could, over time, also become mobilised in favour of specific policy proposals and not only function as a constraint on the European integration process. However, “the drivers of policy support may vary in their impact across policies” (Kanthak & Spies, 2017, p. 2). Nevertheless, as Hobolt and De Vries (2016a, p. 416) argue, policy-

specific levels of support should be analysed in a multilevel context and not as an isolated phenomenon. Hence, in the following sections, three types of separate European integration policies of concern for the future development, and for the long-term system persistence capabilities of, the EU from a system perspective, will be presented stepwise. Starting with the possibility of a future widening of the EU area.

Widening

The future prospect of a further widening of the EU area refers directly to the issue of EU enlargement. This would contribute to the widening of the European integration project, a process that “has often been seen to go hand-in-hand with the process of “deepening” integration by transferring more powers to the Union” (Hobolt, 2014, p. 664). The issue of further enlargement is constantly on the EU agenda, as there are still a number of candidate countries seeking EU membership. After the great enlargement of 2004, Jacques Delors, the former president of the European Commission, estimated that there was a 50 per cent chance that the EU area would start to disintegrate as a result of the enlargement (Vollaard, 2008, p. 1). That, however, has still not happened. Nevertheless, according to Grande and Hutter (2016, p. 15), “the conflict about whether a country fits into the EU is no longer fought within an accession state only, it has moved to the centre of the Community.” Since 2004, three more countries have been granted EU membership, and the latest member state to be granted EU membership was Croatia as late as 1.7.2013. On the other hand, Delhey (2005, p. 3) suggested that the enlargements of 2004 turned the EU into a pan-European project, while simultaneously making the EU area more socio-economically, politically and culturally diverse, thus creating a new set of challenges. During the 2010’s, the discussions regarding possible EU memberships have centred on the Balkan states not yet members, and Turkey (Azrout, Joost & De Vreese, 2013).

However, based on political developments in Turkey during the last decade, and other political events within the middle-east region, the serious discussions regarding a possible EU membership for Turkey

have now more or less been frozen for the foreseeable future.²⁸ However, according to an EU strategy document for the Western Balkans (European Commission, 2018), both Serbia and Montenegro should be ready to become members by 2025. In the case of Serbia, a possible EU membership will also be affected by whether a solution to the Kosovo question can be reached. Regarding North Macedonia and Albania there is to date no timeframe for their memberships. There is also the specific case of Kosovo, which by the European Commission has to date only been granted the lesser status of a “possible candidate country,” indicating that Kosovo has been “promised the prospect of joining when they are ready”.²⁹ A summary of the countries that have applied for EU membership is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. List of countries that have applied for EU membership.

Country	Applied	Granted
Albania	2009	2014
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2016	<i>Under negotiations</i>
Iceland	2009	<i>Frozen</i>
North Macedonia	2004	2005
Montenegro	2008	2010
Morocco	1987	<i>Rejected</i>
Norway	1962	<i>Frozen</i>
Serbia	2009	2012
Switzerland	1992	<i>Withdrawn 2016</i>
Turkey	1987	1999

²⁸ According to the Freedom House Index (2018), the level of political freedom in Turkey has declined from 65 in 2008 to 32 in 2018, with 100 indicating full political freedom.

²⁹ This according to the European Commission’s *European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations* (2018) summary.

Not much has been written regarding country-level variations in public support for future enlargements of the EU area, but on the individual level Karp and Bowler (2006) however showed that pro-European sentiments were correlated with public support for both the enlargement and deepening of the EU. Durovic, Bigovic and Milovic (2017) also showed in their study that there are significant differences between the old EU-15 and the new EU-13 member states regarding the country levels of public support for future enlargement. Durovic et al. showed that within the EU-15 area, the proposal was opposed by more than half of the population, while within the EU-13 it was supported by more than half of the population. Tömmel (2014, p. 334) has also suggested that the EU suffers from a lack of support from its citizens towards further enlargements, but the issue of enlargement should also be more country-specific. Presumably the European public could be in favour of, for example, Iceland or Switzerland joining the EU, simultaneously as they might oppose, for example, Turkey joining. At least theoretically, it could presumably be expected that it might be easier for the European public to accept a new member state that would become a net-contributor to the EU-budget (Iceland, Switzerland) than a country that would become a net-receiver from the EU-budget (Turkey).

Hoeglinger (2016, p. 22) suggested that “enlargement is the politico-cultural counterpart to market making”. Although, Hoeglinger further argues that the issue of enlargements is not only about the geographic boundaries of the EU area, but also about the cultural and social boundaries, issues closely connected to questions of group identification and social belonging. However, in the Lisbon Treaty (§ 49) it is stated that “Any European country which respects the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law may apply to become a member of the Union. The Treaty on European Union sets out the conditions”. Even so, there are apparent risks with enlarging the EU area without a stamp of approval provided by the European public. Another important aspect to consider is that the larger the EU area

grows, the more challenging it will become to reach agreements within the EU machinery under the current rules of procedure.

As Ross (2008, p. 393) suggested the previous EU enlargements have “multiplied differences between member states in the goals that they seek from the EU”. Future enlargements might therefore contribute to the EU becoming even more internally dysfunctional. That is also one of the main arguments within the political debate regarding the prospect of further enlargements, as many countries would rather see efforts towards deepening before widening. Furthermore, according to Majone (2006), many of the EU’s legitimacy problems could be solved by limiting, instead of expanding, the jurisdiction of the EU. There is, however, a valid argument as to why enlargements might be necessary, as the EU will have a possibility to safeguard the political developments within the countries that are accepted as members to a larger extent. Hence, by granting a country an EU membership, that country could be kept directly within the EU’s sphere of influence, which might, over time, become crucial, based on possible geopolitical developments within Europe. That is why the widening of the EU area is included as a specific element of the European integration policies component.

Deepening

The future prospect of a further deepening of European integration within the EU area refers directly to the possibility of transferring more decision powers from the national to the European level. According to Hoeglinger (2016, p. 22), the element of “deepening contributes to the strengthening of the new supranational center. It consists of non-economic policies that shift competencies from the national to the European level, including issues that further develop the European Union’s institutional framework. Examples includes democratic participation, the strengthening of the European Parliament, policies to enhance judicial and police cooperation, a common foreign and security policy, and the various aspects of the constitutional treaty”. Furthermore, Schoen (2008, p. 7) also suggests that “establishing common policies clearly implies advancing European integration,” and

in that context it becomes valid to look at issue-specific levels of public support for such proposals. Starting with the Maastricht Treaty, a large number of new European integration policies were introduced within the then three-pillar structure of the EU regime.³⁰ In the Maastricht Treaty, three policy specific goals for future European integration were also introduced for the first time. These were the creation of a common European defence policy, the creation of a common European foreign policy and the creation of a single European currency. In this section, the focus will be on the future prospect of deeper defence cooperation within the EU area.

According to Olsen and McCormick (2016, p. 299), common defence policies were latecomers to the European integration agenda, since the collapse of the EDC in 1954 seemed to have put deeper European integration within defence- and security matters on hold.³¹ However, the Maastricht Treaty reintroduced this process with the establishment of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), which represented a stronger European commitment to a common security policy. In 1999, the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) was also launched as an integral part of the CFSP. Still, the fact that the EU has still not developed either a shared foreign or defence policy is perceived by

³⁰ "The first pillar consists of the European Community, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and Euratom and concerns the domains in which the Member States share their sovereignty via the Community institutions. The process known as the Community method applies in this connection, i.e. a proposal by the European Commission, its adoption by the Council and the European Parliament and the monitoring of compliance with Community law by the Court of Justice. The second pillar establishes common foreign and security policy (CFSP), enshrined in Title V of the Treaty on European Union. This replaces the provisions of the Single European Act and allows Member States to take joint action in the field of foreign policy. This pillar involves an intergovernmental decision-making process which largely relies on unanimity. The Commission and Parliament play a modest role and the Court of Justice has no say in this area. The third pillar concerns cooperation in the field of justice and home affairs (JHA), provided for in Title VI of the Treaty on European Union. The Union is expected to undertake joint action so as to offer European citizens a high level of protection in the area of freedom, security and justice. The decision-making process is also intergovernmental". EUR-Lex.

³¹ Probably as a result of the failed attempts with creating a European Defence Community (EDC) in 1954.

many EU scholars as an obstacle for the EU to become an influential real world power (Olsen & McCormick, 2016, p. 297). However, Kenealy et al. (2015, p. 239) suggest that security considerations, together with peace and prosperity, remain one of the cornerstones of European integration. As there have been ongoing political discussions regarding increased European integration within defence policies during the 2010's, public attitudes towards increased EU cooperation within defence policies represent a concrete policy issue related to the deepening of European integration within this thesis.

According to Genna and Justwan (2019, p. 1), a common European defence policy “could secure member states from external threats, develop a significant role in peace-keeping, and prevent conflict through the adoption of a single European voice”. However, Schoen (2008) argues that when it comes to deeper European integration within either foreign- or defence policies, the European political elites have not been at odds with public attitudes. This, he argues, is because there has been a large majority in favour of transferring more national decision-making powers within these areas to the EU level, simultaneously as the European political elites have seemed reluctant to do so. It should also be noted that, only during the 2010's, there have to date been seven referendums within the EU area directly related to European integration.³² Of those, two have been about EU membership (Croatia 2012; United Kingdom 2016), while the other five have been about more specific policy issues related to the relation between the member state and the EU. In two of the referendums, the public voted in a pro-EU direction (Ireland 2012; Denmark 2014), while the public in the remaining referendums voted in an anti-EU direction (Denmark 2015; Greece 2015; Netherlands 2016). The outcomes of the referendums suggest, what already Anderson (1998) argued in the wake of the Maastricht-referendums, that the European public, when given the

³² See Appendix Table 3 on page 312 for an overview regarding EU-related national level referendums 1972–2016. The overview shows that of the eleven latest referendums, only one has been about joining the EU (Croatia 2012) and the remaining part has been about specific issues such as, for instance, EU treaties, trade-agreements and policy-issues.

opportunity, have both the willingness and ability to determine the direction of European integration.

Nowadays the European public is being asked to form an opinion regarding such issues like increased police co-operation (Denmark 2015) and trade-agreements (the Netherlands), policy issues that can be highly complex even for the most seasoned politicians to understand and form an opinion on. It is therefore not that unthinkable that there could be referendums regarding the creation of a common European defence in the near future, which would constitute a crossroads for the EU in terms of the future development of the EU. Majone (2016, p. 14) even suggested that “in the hope of speeding up the integration process, all efforts should concentrate on what Europe needs most if it is still to play a significant role internationally: a truly common foreign and security policy. This would transform the present European Union into something like a confederation”. That is why the prospect of deepening within an important policy area is included in the European integration policies component as a separate element of system importance.

Securing

The future prospect of securing the achieved level of European integration refers here to the safeguarding of an already implemented European integration policy. It is argued here that public support for already implemented European integration policies are more important than public support for the future widening or the deepening of European integration. This is mainly because failed attempts with European integration within a specific policy area, which might result in the transferring back of the decision-making powers to the national-levels, could contribute to more and more decision-making powers being transferred back to the national level also within other policy areas. As already mentioned, the Maastricht Treaty introduced three policy specific goals for future European integration, of which the creation of a single European currency, the euro, is the one that has had the largest impact on the everyday lives of the European public.

The euro was officially introduced as an electronic currency in 1999 when the new European Central Bank (ECB) began overseeing monetary policies within the eurozone.³³ In 2002 the national currencies within the eurozone were also replaced with euro coins and notes. According to Olsen and McCormick (2016, p. 436), it was a “momentous event,” because never in history had a group of sovereign nation states voluntarily chosen to give up their national currencies and adopt a common currency. Castells, Bouin, Caraca, Cardoso, Thompson and Wieviorka (2017, p. 20) further argued that “every major step of economic and institutional integration has been conducted “to make irreversible the process of European unification, with the creation of the common currency, the euro, being the most blatant expression of this strategy”. Furthermore, “monetary policy is an area of policy that holds significant symbolic value because a country's money is a symbol of its sovereignty” (Kaltenthaler & Anderson, 2001, p. 141).

Roth, Jonung and Nowak-Lehmann (2016, p. 945) suggested that “public support plays a crucial role in determining the sustainability of the euro. The glue that holds a monetary union together is the political will to maintain a single currency. The costs and benefits of the euro as perceived by the public are reflected in their support for the currency”. However, the policy issue that has caused most discussions within the EU during the last two decades is therefore probably the introduction of the single European currency, the euro. Even though public “support for European economic governance is not the same as support for European integration” (Kuhn & Stoeckel, 2014, p. 636), it has been an issue that has come to divide the European public, perhaps even more than any other policy-issue. The implementation of the euro as a single currency within the eurozone undoubtedly directly rendered in the EU becoming an integral part of the day-to-day life of ordinary Europeans. This was in a way that the implementation of more abstract policies, such as the creation of an EU citizenship and EU passports, did not.

³³ Constituting the 19 EU member states that are also using the euro as a national currency.

Also, institutionally the creation of the single European currency contributed to intra-EU divisions, as it firmly established a multi-speed Europe.³⁴ The euro is widely opposed by the public within member states such as the United Kingdom, Sweden and Denmark, while on the other hand Greece tried to do everything to not become ejected from the eurozone during the most severe part of the Eurocrisis. The Eurocrisis also contributed to one of the EU's most significant challenges, as it showed quite clearly the negative consequences of monetary integration and as a result "threatened the very survival of the new currency" (Hobolt & Wratil, 2015, p. 251).

In the midst of the Eurocrisis in 2011, the German chancellor Angela Merkel (26.10.2011) argued that "if the euro fails, Europe fails". The now famous prophecy is here used to illustrate the importance of concrete European integration policies for the system persistence capabilities of the EU. Even though the euro is used by no more than 19 member states (together constituting the eurozone), only Denmark and the United Kingdom have been granted exceptions regarding replacing their national currencies with the euro over time.³⁵ However, Schmitt and Thomassen (1999, p. 261) have also suggested that the implementation of European integration policies that turn out successfully should lead to higher levels of specific support, which in turn, over time, should also be expected to strengthen feelings of identification with Europe, which in this framework could be translated into more diffuse support for the EU. More on that later on. This illustrates the importance of public support for concrete European integration policies also from a system persistence perspective. As Angela Merkel (12.1.2010) also argued, "the Euro is our common fate, and Europe is our common future," and the single European currency should thereby naturally be included as a concrete element of interest in this type of study. Furthermore, Banducci, Karp and Loedel (2003)

³⁴ Referring to the existence of the varied member state levels of European integration within the EU area.

³⁵ The euro is also used by non-EU countries as a national currency: Andorra, Monaco, San Marino, Vatican City, Kosovo and Montenegro.

and Kaltenthaler and Anderson (2001) also suggested that public support for the single European currency is critical for the future development of the EU, as public support functions as an indication for whether the member states will be willing to transfer even more decision-making powers to the EU. Therefore, the securing of an already implemented high-level European integration policy is deemed of system importance for the EU as a political system.

Summary

Within these three sections, the three separate elements of the European integration policies component of interest for the purpose of this study have been presented and discussed in relation to their respective system importance. The main purpose has been to place the system component of European integration policies into the larger framework of the EU as a political system, and more directly as a vital system component related to the development capabilities of the EU. The theoretical assumption is that sufficient country levels of public support towards concrete European integration policies are essential for democratically legitimising these particular European integration policies, as well as the greater process of European integration. However, the public differ in their attitudes towards these three European integration elements, which needs to be accounted for. These three elements are also not of equal importance from a system persistence perspective.

It has been argued here that the country levels of public support for the widening of the EU area, through further enlargements, is the least system important of these three European integration policies. Nevertheless, sufficient levels of public support for future widening are still important as the widening of the EU area might prove to be a geopolitical necessity in the future. Enlargements without public consent might contribute to increased levels of public dissatisfaction also with other aspects of the EU. It has also been argued here that country levels of public support for the deepening of are more important than support for the widening, as deepening results in the

transferring of more national decision-making powers to the EU without any assurance that it will actually benefit the European public. Finally, it has also been argued that public support for the securing of an already implemented European integration policy is the most important of these three. The main argument is that if the euro fails it would undoubtedly affect how the EU is perceived by the European public, with potentially irreversible consequences for the EU.

On the other hand, high levels of public support for specific European integration policies might presumably also force the European political authorities to implement policies in that direction, otherwise the people could presumably elect someone who does. Hence, public support for these European integration policies is also of importance for the future development and direction of the EU. Leaving the question regarding the kind of EU that the European public prefers, it is difficult to imagine anyone being in favour of, say, a single European currency without also supporting some kind of supranational European regime having responsibility over it. It is not as difficult to imagine, however, that someone opposing a single European currency also opposes other things supranational within Europe. Still, it is far from uncommon to oppose specific policy proposals towards deeper European integration while still supporting the larger institutional framework of the EU for what it has contributed to within Europe.

In the following sections, the EU regime as a system component will be presented and discussed. In this framework, the EU regime will, following Norris (1999), be further divided into three separate elements in order to differentiate between three kinds of system important elements of the EU regime. This division of the EU regime follows the same theoretical reasoning as with the three types of European integration policies, as public support towards these three elements is not considered to be of equal importance from a system persistence perspective. The theoretical assumption, therefore, is that longer periods of public dissatisfaction with the most specific elements of the EU regime will over time transfer into public dissatisfaction with also

the more diffuse elements of the EU regime. The following section starts with a general discussion regarding the EU regime before shifting focus to the three separate system elements.

3.2.2 The EU regime

Who do I call if I want to speak to Europe?

Henry Kissinger, former US Secretary of State³⁶

In this section, the EU regime is presented as a system component of the EU from a system perspective, towards which public attitudes are directed. As EU membership is voluntary for the participating member states, the country levels of public support for the EU regime reflect whether EU membership is perceived as a democratically legitimate policy for the member states to proceed with. Therefore, a member state can choose to leave the EU regime if EU membership is no longer perceived to be supported by the public. As there are only 28 member states in the EU (before Brexit), the country levels of public support for the EU regime within every member state are of direct relevance for the system persistence capabilities of the EU as a whole, although this is not, practically speaking, of equal importance, as it would be a more system threatening event if Germany, for instance, suddenly chose to leave the EU than if Malta did. From a system persistence perspective, it could therefore be argued that sufficient country levels of public support for the EU regime are essential, as countries can voluntarily choose to leave without the EU regime having any legal mandate of stopping the process. Therefore, sufficient levels of public support within the member states participating in rule-based supranational regimes are of existential importance for these particular regimes. As Franck (1988, p. 706) argued, in “a community organized around rules, compliance is secured – to whatever degree it is – at least in part by perception of a rule as legitimate by those whom it is addressed. Their perception of legitimacy will vary in degree from rule to rule and time

³⁶ Quoted in Giddens (2014, p. 33).

to time. It becomes a crucial factor, however, in the capacity of any rule to secure compliance when, as in the international systems, there are no other compliance-inducing mechanisms". Therefore, as has been earlier mentioned, the system support theory might be most directly tested with systems at the supranational level (Kaplan, 1968, p. 38; Anckar, 1974, p. 64).

According to Lindberg and Scheingold (1970, p. 40), the concept of regime "refers to the nature of the political system and, therefore, directs us to such issues as the extent of supranational authority and the division of power among the institutions of the Community". In the linguistic sense, the term "regime" has a quite negative undertone, implying a dictatorial or military system of governance. Therefore, the concept that Niedermayer and Westle (1995) used, political order, could also have been used to avoid misinterpretations. However, since the Eastonian concept of regime is the most widely used term by scholars, the term will also be used to describe this system component in this thesis. Hence, within this framework, the EU regime is broadly used in reference to the governance structure of the EU as a political system, created through European integration policies within the European political community. The problem with the EU regime from a system persistence perspective is that when the EU regime is threatened with stress through cleavages or output failures, the EU regime's possibilities to cope or adapt by modifying the regime structures and norms as devices to battle these cleavages, or to compensate for negative performance, are still limited based on the multilevel governing structure of the EU regime. For a national level regime, it is easier to cope with system stress through short-term improvements in the qualities of the outputs along with the hope of increasing levels of public support through popular decisions.

Even though the EU regime is still far from being considered a federal state, it has more institutional similarities with federal states than with other international organisations. For example, there are over 56 000 people working for some of the EU institutions and over 62 000 national bureaucrats regularly travelling to Brussels to coordinate

European with national level policies (Genschel & Jachtenfuchs, 2016, p. 45). The EU regime's structure of authority as a way of making binding EU-wide political decisions has been institutionalised through the creation of both supranational and intergovernmental political institutions (article 13 in the Treaty of the European Union, 2007).³⁷ In addition to these, there are also the so-called interinstitutional political institutions.³⁸ Therefore, according to Tömmel (2014, pp. 319–331), the essential function of the EU regime has been to mediate between general European interest and the specific interests of its member states. On that account, Tömmel argues that the way the EU regime is currently governed is based on a unique combination of two governing principles that arise out of two different types of governing structures, intergovernmentalism and supranationalism. According to Tömmel, the European Commission (EC), the European Court of Justice (ECJ) and the European Parliament (EP) represent European institutional supranationalism, and the Council of the European Union and the European Council represent European intergovernmentalism. The EU regime's broader priorities and visions are determined by the European Council, comprising member state and EU-level leaders. The European public is represented in the direct decision-making processes through the 751 directly elected members of the European Parliament, with national quotas of EU parliamentarians based on member state specific populations.

There is, however, a never-ending discussion among EU researchers as to whether the EU regime should be considered as democratically legitimated or not (e.g. Beetham & Lord, 1998; Scharpf, 1999; Follesdal, 2011). Some researchers even questions the necessity of democratic legitimacy for the EU regime (Majone, 1998; Moravcsik, 2002). In

37 These are: European Parliament (EP), European Commission (EC), Council of the European Union (CEU), Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), European Central Bank (ECB), European Court of Auditors (ECA), European External Action Service (EEAS), European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), European Committee of the Regions (CoR), European Investment Bank (EIB), European Ombudsman and European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS).

38 Such as the Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT), European School of Administration, European Personnel Selection Office and the Publications Office.

theory, the aggregated levels of public support for any political regime reflect whether there is a voluntary acceptance by the ruled of the government of their rulers (Bellamy & Castiglione, 2003, p. 10). Therefore, sufficient levels of public support for a regime are needed in order to provide the regime with enough democratic legitimacy. The fact that the EU regime is perceived as democratically legitimate is not only important from a system persistence perspective, as “further integration in the European Union (EU) increasingly depends on public legitimacy” (Hobolt & Wratil, 2015, p. 239). The EU regime is considered, during its relatively short history, to have gained the necessary levels of democratic legitimacy through a shared European public understanding that the EU regime is the best one available to preserve the peace, security and prosperity within Europe (Kenealy et al., 2015, p. 239).

Another crucial reason why national governments have been willing to transfer power to supranational European institutions is also because they hoped to receive gains that they would not otherwise receive (Tömmel, 2014, p. 21). As such, the authority of the EU regime has also been directly legitimised by the perceived positive benefits gained through an EU membership, providing the EU regime with what Scharpf (1999) refers to as output legitimacy. According to Schmidt (2015, p. 11), “output legitimacy is a performance criterion focused on policy effectiveness” and “output legitimacy describes acceptance of the coercive governing powers of political authorities so long as their exercise is seen to serve the common good of the polity and is constrained by the norms of the community”. The positive economic performances of the member states within the EU area have thereby also contributed to providing the EU regime with the sufficient levels of democratic legitimacy required to withstand pressure and proceed with the European integration project towards deeper cooperation (Ringlerova, 2015). After the start of the global recession in 2008, that is no longer the case.

According to Easton (1965, p. 193), the regime places a set of constraints on the political interaction in a political system, and these

constraints can be divided into three different elements: values (goals and principles), norms and structure of authority (regime structure). The normative values in a regime function as an indicator of the kind of policies that can be implemented without “violating deep feelings of important segments of the community” (Easton, 1965, p. 193). The norms specify the kind of procedures that are to be accepted within the system of governance, or “operating rules and the rules of the game” (Easton, 1965, p. 200). The structure of authority refers to the “organizational concentration of power” determining how power is distributed and organised within the political institutions responsible for governing (Easton, 1965, p. 205). Easton argued that these three system elements both validate and limit political actions and therefore create the context for all political decision-making within a political system.

Easton (1965, p. 211) further concludes that a minimal level of public support (impossible to empirically state what that minimal level is) for the regime is essential if a political system shall be able to persist during longer periods of increased pressure. In direct reference to Easton, but in the concrete context of analysing public attitudes towards the EU regime, Niedermayer and Westle (1995, p. 43) categorised the EU regime as constituting two main elements: its political philosophy and its institutional structure. Political philosophy refers to the values and norms connected to the internationalised governance in general, while the institutional structure refers to the power structure of the system of governance. The political values and norms of the EU regime are based on liberal democratic values, respect for human rights and a functioning free-market; criteria that also have to be fulfilled before any candidate country will be accepted as an EU member state.³⁹ However Norris (1999), analysing public attitudes towards the EU regime,

³⁹ As stated in article 1a. in the Lisbon Treaty: “The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail”.

identified three separate elements of the EU regime component that should be distinguished between within empirical studies: EU regime institutions, EU regime processes and EU regime principles.

According to Norris, public attitudes towards the political institutions of the EU regime can be used to reflect the levels of public support for the institutional structures of European level authority. On the other hand, public attitudes towards the EU regime processes reflect the extent of public support for the performance of the policy implementation processes in practice. Furthermore, public attitudes towards the core principles of the EU regime reflect the extent of a wider public agreement regarding the core principles upon which the EU regime is founded, and hence also the most system important element of the EU regime. Norris' division of the EU regime into three different system important elements of the EU regime component will be used in this study, and further elaborated on in the following sections. Starting with the least system important element of the EU regime, the EU regime institutions.

EU regime institutions

In this section, the EU regime institutions are presented as a system important element of the EU regime. Within this framework, the EU regime institutions refer to the current institutional structure of the EU regime. Public attitudes towards the EU regime institutions therefore resembles what has also been referred to as regime support (Boomgaarden et al., 2011; Lubbers, 2008), and reflects a more diffuse kind of support than attitudes towards European integration policies (Harteveld et al., 2013, p. 551). However, first something needs to be noted regarding the different EU level political institutions and the multi-level governance structure within the EU regime institutions. The supranational European interests of the EU area are promoted by the European Commission (EC), whose 28 Commissioners are elected through the recommendations of member state governments and approved by the European Parliament (EP). The particular interests of the member states are defended and promoted in the Council of the

European Union. The steering and governing of the EU regime therefore functions through a multi-level institutional set-up, where the different institutional levels interact to implement all-enhancing European policies for the common good of the EU area, at least in theory. In reality, the EU level institutions could still be considered as “second-order” institutions in comparison to the national political institutions, then first and foremost the national parliaments that still hold veto over the most important legislations. However, most of the voting at the European level takes place through Qualified Majority Voting (QMV). With every treaty, more policy areas have shifted from unanimity voting to QMV, thereby increasing the supranational character of the EU regime and the decision-making powers of the more supranational EU level institutions. Nevertheless, in certain policy areas that are considered of vital importance nationally, there is still a demand for unanimity for implementation.⁴⁰

According to Norris (1999, p. 88), there are two alternatives on how to interpret declining levels of public support for the EU regime institutions within member states, although with completely different implications. First of all, the erosion of public support for the EU regime institutions might transfer upwards on the EU support continuum and over time start to undermine public support for the processes and principle of the EU regime. This would then, over time, have system threatening consequences for the future of the EU as a political system. The other, more positive, interpretation would indicate that an increasingly sceptical European public should signal the growth of a more critical European public, which feels that the EU regime institutions should become more transparent and democratised in line with more liberal democratic ideals. Such a development might also ultimately strengthen the democratic legitimacy of EU governance if it would be accompanied by increased democratic input in the EU regime institutions.

⁴⁰ In matters regarding, for example, enlargement of the Union, taxation, the common foreign- and security policies, citizenship issues, certain institutional issues and the financing of the Union.

Furthermore, Easton (1965) argued that the levels of the more specific kind public support are primarily based on public evaluations of the outputs and benefits from the regime, and as such, public evaluations of the EU regime are theoretically connected to the concept of political trust. There is a common understanding within the literature that political trust is critical for legitimising the authority of regimes, because trust is assumed to link ordinary citizens to the political institutions that are created to represent them, thereby enhancing both the legitimacy and effectiveness of these institutions (Mishler & Rose, 2001, p. 30). Moreover, according to Heinrich (2016, p. 73), analysing trust in the EU enables researchers “to better understand how the wider public relates to the EU and how this reflects on the integration project as a whole”. Sufficient levels of political trust in the regime are therefore perceived to be both the glue that keeps the political system together, while simultaneously making the political system work (van der Meer, 2010, p. 76).

Without sufficient levels of trust in the political institutions of the regime, it is more or less impossible for the political authorities to implement policies through the political institutions and make the necessary “hard decisions” for the common good of the political community (Hetherington, 1998, p. 791). Trust in the political institutions therefore “entails the belief that it (the political institution) will not act in an arbitrary or discriminatory manner that is harmful to our interests or the nation’s” (Zmerli, Newton & Montero, 2007, p. 41). A minimal level of trust in the political institutions of the regime is also considered necessary within any kind of political system, because sustaining low levels of trust in the regime institutions will ultimately challenge the stability within any political system (Dogan, 1994, p. 309; Hetherington, 2005, p. 15). Trust in the political institutions could therefore, according to Zmerli et al. (2007, p. 41), be referred to as a middle-range indicator of public support. Follesdal (2011, p. 206) also suggests that sufficient levels of trust in the EU regime institutions are essential, because without trustworthy and well-functioning EU regime institutions, it becomes easier for Eurosceptics to increase the

levels of public scepticism and opposition towards the EU within the member states. As Arnold, Eliyahu and Zapryanova (2012, p. 33) also suggested, “trust in governing bodies of the EU helps build legitimacy for the process of European integration and decreases concern about a deficit of democracy”.

Therefore, trust in the EU regime institutions is in this study considered “a central concern in the process of European integration” (Kaltenthaler, Anderson & Miller, 2010, p. 1262). If the levels of trust in the EU regime institutions are high or increasing, then this indicates that the general public participating in the European political community are satisfied with the workings of the EU regime, providing what Scharpf (1999; 2013) referred to as output-legitimacy for the EU regime. However, when the levels of trust in the EU regime institutions are low or declining, then this indicates that the general public are turning increasingly dissatisfied with the functioning and performance of the EU regime institutions, which might transfer to opposition, over time, towards the existence of the EU. This kind of orientation towards the EU is commonly referred to as a hard form of Euroscepticism (Lubbers & Scheepers, 2005, p. 224). The levels of trust in the EU regime institutions within a member state could therefore be used as an indication of how the EU regime institutions’ current performance are being evaluated within a member state (Harteveld et al., 2013, p. 544). This is primarily because “explicit measures of institutional trust have been a key concern in quantifying public support for the EU institutions, with public trust in EU institutions and their ability to produce certain outcomes seen as important cornerstones of popular support for the EU in general” (Heinrich, 2016, pp. 73–74). In the following section, the focus shifts to another separate element of the EU regime component, EU regime processes.

EU regime processes

In this section, the EU regime processes are presented as a separate element of the EU regime component. De Wilde (2011, p. 560) and Hobolt (2012, p. 100) have argued that the politicisation of European

integration has meant that the importance of decision-making processes within the EU regime, in terms of being considered as democratically legitimate, has also increased. Scharpf (2010, p. 158) also argues that the EU regime now increasingly relies on sufficient levels of public support for EU regime processes, so that the output from the EU regime can be considered as being democratically legitimate. Hence, according to Norris (1999), public support towards EU regime processes reflects public attitudes towards how policy-processes function within the EU regime. Norris therefore argues that it is directly related to public attitudes on how democracy works at the EU regime level. Public attitudes towards the EU regime processes are further perceived to be of vital system importance, because if there is a growing dissatisfaction with the EU regime's processes within a member state, then there is an overwhelming possibility that this type of public dissatisfaction will also start to affect public attitudes towards the most system important element of the EU regime, i.e. the EU regime principles. This is mainly because the EU regime's authority has been mainly legitimised by the perceived outputs and benefits for the European public provided through EU membership for the member states (Scharpf, 1999).

According to Norris (2011, p. 44), public attitudes towards the regime processes within a country are reflected by "judgments about the workings of the regime, including satisfaction with the democratic performance of governments, and approval of decision-making processes, public policies, and policy outcomes within each nation-state". As the EU regime has been more democratised over time, following an increase in the decision-making powers of the European Parliament (EP), public attitudes towards the democratic performance of the EU regime have also grown in importance as a result. The member state levels of public support for the democratic part of the EU regime's processes are usually measured by public attitudes measuring the levels of public satisfaction with the democratic performance of the EU regime (Norris, 1999). There is also an on-going, mainly academic, debate regarding the so-called "democratic deficit" within the EU

regime's governance structure. The main argument being that national decision-making powers have been transferred to the EU level without corresponding democratic control also being established at the EU regime level (Follesdal & Hix, 2006). There are also those who argue that this does not constitute a problem and that it would be unnecessary for the EU regime to become more democratic. Therefore, it has also been suggested that the EU regime is already as democratic as it needs to be to fulfil its political function (Majone, 1998; Moravcsik, 2002). With regard to this discussion, Schmitter (2003, p. 79) also suggests that "the notion of a "democratic deficit" is largely the creation of academics and intellectuals". However, if the EU regime should be granted to take on even more decision-making powers from the member states in the future, the result of such a strategy would most likely contribute to increased public demands for more direct public participation and insights into the decision-making processes of the EU regime itself.

In this thesis, the country levels of public support for EU regime processes are considered as being connected to a general performance evaluation of how the EU regime is currently functioning. However, the focus is on the democratic aspect of the functioning of the EU regime, as it is argued that the levels of trust in the EU regime institutions reflect the member state levels of public attitudes towards the more general political performance of the EU regime. As the EU has developed into a more state-like political system, the need of public support for democratically legitimising this development has also increased. Hence, the country levels of public attitudes towards both types of EU regime performance will be accounted for in this study. In the following section, the focus shifts to the final separate element of the EU regime component, EU regime principles.

EU regime principles

In this section, the EU regime principles are presented as the most system important element of the EU regime component, towards which the country levels of public attitudes are directed. The levels of public support are reflected by member state levels of public support for the

underlying values that constitute the foundation of the EU regime (Norris, 1999, p. 75). As the EU regime is guided by liberal democratic principles and values, public attitudes towards the EU regime principles constitute a deeper and more affective kind of support towards the EU for what it has contributed to within the EU area. Sufficient levels of public support for this element of the EU regime component are therefore more important in terms of the long-term system persistence capabilities of the EU than public attitudes towards the EU regime institutions and processes. As public opposition towards different kinds of policies is constitutive of a democratic process (Norris, 2011), public opposition towards the underlying principles of a regime directly questions the democratic legitimacy of a political regime (Easton, 1965). As public attitudes towards the EU regime institutions and processes in this study are used as a reflection of the more specific kind of support for the EU regime, public attitudes towards the underlying EU regime principles more directly reflect the more diffuse kind of support for the EU regime.

According to Norris (2011, pp. 26–28), the adherence to normative regime values and principles reflects the extent of public beliefs about the legitimacy of the constitutional arrangements and formal and informal rules upon which a regime is founded. Dalton (2014, p. 87) also emphasised the importance of shared values within a political community, because “values identify what people think are – or should be – the goals of society and the political system. Shared values help define the norms of a political and social system, while the clash between alternative values creates a basis for competition over public policies to reflect these different values”. Lipset (1959, pp. 86–87) also suggested that the public “will regard a political system as legitimate or illegitimate according to the way in which its values fit in with their primary values”. The founding fathers of the EU also acknowledged the need of mutually accepted European values for a general acceptance of European integration to emerge over time within the European political community. Since the 1950’s, the EU member states have therefore also institutionalised what is commonly regarded as

liberal European values within the guiding EU treaties. As such, the European political community should also be considered as a value-based political community, as it has enabled what Easton (1965) referred to as the authoritative allocations of values within a political community. Signs that the promotion and acceptance of mutual liberal European values have been considered a necessity for the EU's functioning and long-term system persistence capabilities can also be found in the first (§ 1) and second (§ 2) paragraphs of the Lisbon Treaty:

1. The Union's aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples.
2. The Union shall offer its citizens an area of freedom, security and justice without internal frontiers, in which the free movement of persons is ensured in conjunction with appropriate measures with respect to external border controls, asylum, immigration and the prevention and combating of crime.

Within the context of European integration prospects, Haas (1958, p. 6) argued that "if group conflict is one central characteristic of political community, so is the existence of a commonly accepted body of belief". Haas further argued that a widespread public attachment to European values was the only really unifying factor for the part of the European public in favour of a more integrated Europe. The promotion and adaption of shared European values has therefore been crucial for the, in many regards, successful development of the EU (Kaina, Karolewski & Kuhn, 2016, p. 4).

According to Lehning (2001, p. 25), the perception of shared European values should also generate a sense of European political community, and thereby also provide the European public with a sense of European solidarity necessary for the long-term persistence of the EU. Also, shared European values seem to be a significant source for the development of a European identity (Kleiner & Bucker, 2016, p. 211). Also as Dalton (2014, p. 87) argued, "shared values help define the norms of a political and social system, while the clash between

alternative values creates a basis for competition over public policies to reflect these different values". However, for the ordinary European, the importance of shared values might not be as important as researchers believe, because as Huntington (1996, p. 192) noted "many more people in the world are concerned with sports than with human rights". Shared European values are one thing, and in general Europeans have been in favour of democracy as a system of governance (Norris, 2011), but adherence to democratic values is not the same as adherence to European solidarity nor European unification. However, as a value-based Union, the EU regime's legitimacy is challenged when its underlying values are being questioned. As De Wilde (2011, p. 565) also suggests, the politicisation of European integration could "function as a centrifugal mechanism, stressing unbridgeable differences between the interests, norms and values of the peoples of Europe, ultimately jeopardizing the stability of the EU polity".

Country levels of public support for the EU regime principles could also be perceived as being reflected by public attitudes towards EU membership, as EU membership also forces hesitant countries to accept these principles as binding; at least in theory. The country levels of public support towards the EU regime principles could hence be argued to reflect the most system important kind of public attitudes towards the EU regime, following Niedermayer and Westle (1995) and Norris (1999). If the country levels of public support for the EU regime principles declines and stabilizes at low levels within a member state for a longer period of time, EU membership will sooner or later become more openly questioned within that member state. As there are only 28 member states within the EU, the EU regime could be argued to stand on an unstable foundation, as it does not take many countries starting to question the benefits provided by EU membership for the purpose and existence of the EU to also be questioned. This is especially apparent if there would be a public majority in a number of member states expressing a concrete desire to leave the EU. As Nicholson and Reynolds (1967, p. 26) also argued, the "lower the level of accepted norms and values within a society, the smaller the likelihood of

agreement on demands". In this section, the most important separate element of the EU regime from a system persistence perspective has been presented, and with this the final element of the EU regime component.

Summary

The theoretical assumption for the relationship between these separate elements is that the country levels of public support towards the EU regime institutions are the least important element from a system persistence perspective. This is because the European public can be critical towards the EU regime institutions without directly questioning EU membership. However, longer periods of public dissatisfaction with the EU regime institutions will also affect public attitudes towards the EU regime processes, over time, and, in the end, also public attitudes towards the EU regime principles. In the following section, the final component of the EU as a political system is presented, i.e. the European political community. According to system support theory, this system component is also the most important for the persistence capabilities of a political system in the long-term perspective. In the following section, it will also be argued that public attitudes towards the European political community reflect the most diffuse kind of support, which is considered essential for the EU to withstand longer periods of system stress.

3.2.3 The European political community

We have made Europe, now we have to make Europeans.

Massimo d'Azeglio, Italian statesman⁴¹

In this section, the European political community is presented as a system component of the EU as a political system, towards which public attitudes are directed. As EU membership has also rendered the member states into becoming part of a shared European political

⁴¹ Quoted in Cederman (2001, p. 139).

community, the system support theory suggests that public evaluations of the political community should also be accounted for. The theoretical assumption is that public attitudes towards the European political community can function as a reserve of public support that the EU can rely on during longer periods of system pressure. The country levels of public support for the European political community are therefore assumed to reflect the extent of the more diffuse kind of support for the EU within the EU area. Therefore, if the EU is to withstand inevitable future system crises, there is a need for a reserve of the most diffuse kind of support. In this section, it is further argued that the European political community component should be divided into two separate elements, one reflecting the mutual identification, e.g. European identification, within the political community aspect and the other reflecting the sense of belonging to that political community, e.g. EU attachment. After a short introduction, this section will focus on these two kinds of public attitudes, both, however, reflecting the most diffuse kind of support.

The main reason for the academic interest in public orientations towards a political community is because it has become widely assumed that a political regime can function effectively only within political communities where antagonism within the population is not too great (Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970, p. 26). According to Scheuer (1999, p. 25), this is because a demos is first created when the members of the political community actually start to perceive themselves as being members of that political community. Also as Laffan (1996, p. 95) has suggested, public attitudes towards political communities are therefore not just based on rational calculations, but on deeper held sentiments related to mutual identification and attachment. Therefore, Wessels (2007, p. 303) also argues that public “orientations toward the political community have a special position in the hierarchy of political objects. They are the first-order level of support; the necessary basis for any political system”. According to Wessels, public attitudes towards the political community are important for the persistence capabilities of a political system in two specific ways. First of all, any political

system is embedded within one or many political communities, and because political communities contain an element of membership and identification that goes beyond any formal role as a citizen.

Easton (1965, p. 177) defined a political community as an “aspect of a political system that consists of its members seen as a group of persons bound together by a political division of labor”. Important for the perspective of a European political community, Easton (1965, p. 177) further noted that “the members of a political system who are participating in a common political community may well have different cultures and traditions or they may be entirely separate nationalities”. However, Easton (1965, p. 179) also suggested that in order to avoid any uncertainty regarding who is and who is not a part of the political community, each political system should develop its own criteria regarding membership. These criteria could be based on, for instance, territorial presence, legal definitions, blood, subjection, kinship or shared values. In reference to an international political community, Niedermayer and Westle (1995, p. 41), in reference to Easton, defined an international political community as “that aspect of international governance which consists of its members seen as a group of countries and their peoples, bound together by a political division of labour”.

According to Huntington (1996, p. 20), cultural identities are “what is most important to most people” and the most important distinction between people, according to him, is not political, ideological or economical, but cultural. Huntington further argued that economic integration, in the end, also depends on cultural commonalities between the members cooperating, because commonalities between countries breeds trust. That was also suggested by Deutsch (1953), who argued that the “similarity balance,” expressed through religion, ethnicity or language, usually functions as the glue that keeps countries together. One of the most common arguments against European integration is also that perceived cultural differences between the member states constitute an obstacle for further enlargement and any deepening of the EU area (Hobolt, 2014). Also, as suggested by Piris (2010, p. 4), “if a union composed of between six and fifteen Member

States that were relatively homogeneous in their economic development had not been able to become a federal State, then a greater number of Member States, with a lesser degree of homogeneity, would make it impossible". That is why it is always crucial for emerging states to try and create a common history, memories and myths that can help to foster some form of collective identities over time (Deutsch, 1953; Smith, 1992, p. 75). That is also perceived to be a significant obstacle for the EU, because in a European context, not many similarities can be found in a shared history of European countries (Offe, 2003, p. 439). McCormick (2014, p. 24) still argued that there is much that unites the histories of the European countries, but the problem is that there is even more that divides them. Another problem for the EU is mainly that the shared history of Europe does not work in favour for European integration, because it is a history of centuries of warfare between the member states. In the Berlin declaration from 2007, adopted to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Rome Treaty, the notion of a shared European history was also emphasised: "With European unification, a dream of earlier generations has become a reality. Our history reminds us that we must protect this for the good of future generations" (quoted in Piris, 2010, p. 29).

Membership in the European political community is based on territorial presence, as citizenship in one of the 28 member states simultaneously also provides the individual with an EU citizenship. That also guarantees equal rights within the whole European political community for its members (Welge, 2015, p. 59).⁴² The European political community post-Lisbon Treaty should therefore be considered as a civil and not as an ethnic political community (Kohler-Koch, 2011, p. 107). Viewed from the outside world, the EU is also often considered as constituting a European political community based on common values, democracy, security and wealth (Kaina et al., 2016, p. 4), created

⁴² European citizenship was established in the Maastricht Treaty, although the Amsterdam Treaty (1997) modified the Maastricht Treaty clause so that it included the phrase "citizenship of the Union shall complement and not replace national citizenship" (Weiler, 1997, p. 495).

through the rejection of fascism (Keating, 2004, p. 370). This resembles what Anderson (1991) referred to as an “imagined community”. However, as Kaina and Kuhn (2016, p. 221) argue, “in large collectives with millions of members, however, group members must assume that their anonymous fellows share precious commonalities. Accordingly, people’s sense of belonging together and their belief of sharing a common fate cannot derive from certainties in terms of individual experiences with most of the other group members. In lieu of knowledge, presumptions of closeness, similarity and commonality among the members of the collectivity justify the imagination of a community”. This argument is also supported by Risse (2005, p. 297) who argues that “an imagined community becomes real in people’s lives when they increasingly share cultural values, a perceived common fate, increased salience, and boundedness. The EU is certainly very real for Europe’s political, economic and social elites”. In modern history, political communities have mostly been formed as a direct consequence of nation-building projects (Scheuer, 1999, p. 25), but it is also clear that the EU has been in the business of community building during the last four decades to create and nurture the more diffuse support for the European political community. According to De Vries (2018, p. 43), diffuse support is often taken for granted in nation states, but with regard to the European political community, diffuse support is considered to be more fragile.

The European political community consists of the participating member states of the EU regime, including the over 500 million EU citizens participating in this shared political structure of supranational governance (Boomgaarden et al., 2011, p. 244; Niedermayer & Westle, 1995, p. 41). Easton (1965, p. 117) suggested that “a group of persons who are drawn together by the fact that they participate in a common structure and set of processes” constitutes a political community, which is undoubtedly the case with the area over which the EU has jurisdiction. Over time, the EU has therefore established a national anthem (Beethoven’s Ode to Joy), a flag, citizenship and a passport, a capital (Brussels) and at least tried to establish a European constitution.

As Polyakova and Fligstein (2016, p. 61) noted “these symbols of belonging are usually associated with nation states, not economic associations”. Why then the need of creating an artificial identity for an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991), and does it even make sense to use concepts such as citizenship and identity beyond the borders of the nation state (Lehning, 2001, p. 239)? Even though Easton argued that the broader the inclusiveness of a political community, the lower the degree of political cohesion and integration is needed, the system importance of the more diffuse kind of support for the European political community has been argued for some time. For instance, Laffan (1996, p. 95) noted that “the importance of the affective dimension of integration will be accentuated if the Union moves to a single European currency and a European system of central banks”. Also, Kaina (2006, p. 116) argues that the more the EU regime develops, “the more its durability will depend on an extensive reservoir of citizen’s diffuse support”.

The European political community is an artificial construction, but some also argue that all modern states are “imagined communities” (Laffan, 1996, p. 96). Nevertheless, as the EU has transformed itself into a more state-like political system, it has also become more dependent on the most diffuse kind of support (Kaina, 2006). Easton (1965, pp. 325–327) argued that the most effective way for a political regime to create public support for the political community was by promoting some kind of “sense of political community” or “mutual political identification” within the political community. Easton (1965, p. 332) describes the sense of political community as the existence of a “we-feeling” among a group of people, not just as a group but as “a political entity that works together and will likely share a common political fate and destiny”. Easton (1965, p. 325) further suggested that “where their sense of community is high, we can say that they are putting in considerable support for the political community. Where it is low, the level of support deteriorates accordingly”. Easton (1965, p. 176) also argued that “underlying the functioning of all systems, there must be some cohesive cement – a sense of feeling of community amongst the

members. Unless such identity emerges, the political system itself may never take shape or if it does, it may not survive”.

The diffuse kind of support is therefore considered to be based on a history of specific support, and it has been argued that “successful political and economic development generates a reservoir of goodwill (diffuse support) that can be used to cover up minor or temporal setbacks in the system’s ability to produce outputs” (Linde & Ekman, 2003, p. 406). Nevertheless, as Easton (1965, p. 312) stated, “if the feeling were to prevail that the regime itself militated against the public interest, in time continued acceptance of the regime as right and proper could not be taken for granted”. That is mainly because a “decline of support at the regime level, if it persists for a long enough period, readily spills over into the community and adversely affects attachment to it” (Easton, 1965, p. 321). Therefore, it is possible to argue that longer periods of declining levels of specific support should also, over time, start affecting the more diffuse kind of support for the European political community. As Easton suggested, there are, however, two ways for a political regime to create diffuse support, through promoting a sense of political community and mutual political identification. These two concepts are presented more thoroughly in the following sections in relation to the European political community as a system component.

Mutual European identification

EU citizenship for all citizens within the EU area holding a national passport from a member state has been introduced through EU law, legally defining a community of Europeans sharing the same status irrespective of nationality (Welge, 2015, p. 59).⁴³ However, legal status as an EU citizen does not directly transform into diffuse support. Nevertheless, many studies have suggested that identity considerations have become a crucial factor when forming EU attitudes

⁴³ “Citizenship of the Union is hereby established. Every person holding the nationality of a Member State shall be a citizen of the Union. Citizenship of the Union shall be additional to and not replace national citizenship” (§ 20:1 in the Treaty of Lisbon).

(Carey, 2002; McLaren, 2002; Hooghe & Marks, 2005; Kuhn, 2015). An identity, in the social sense, is an affective state of belonging to a social group and is assumed to generate social preferences through emotional evaluations (Luedtke, 2005, p. 87). The extent of mutual identification within a political community should therefore be regarded as a reflection of whether there exists a shared sense of “we-feeling” within a political community (Kaina, 2006, p. 118). However, Cram (2012, p. 71) noted that mutual identification “was not a precondition for the emergence of political regimes,” but it was, however, used to support the development and maintenance of political regimes. In an increasingly globalised world, citizens already have multiple identities (Smith, 1992, p. 59), but already Guetzkow (1955, p. 54) argued that there are two routes for identities to emerge, a process that he referred to as the “spreading of loyalty”. The first is that the new object of loyalty can substitute for the old object or a quasi-identity may be established between the old and the new object, which is a condition often achieved through overlapping symbolisation of the loyalty objects.

When a new state is created, a new political system of governing is simultaneously created, and all new regimes have been aware of the need to create a new mass political identity for the community to withstand internal and external pressure (Bruter, 2003, p. 1149). Brubaker and Cooper (2000, p. 21) also suggested that “as a product of social or political action, “identity” is invoked to highlight the processual, interactive development of the kind of collective self-understanding, solidarity, or “groupness” that can make collective action possible”. While Scharpf (1997, p. 20) argued that the success “of the majority rule to create legitimacy depends itself on a pre-existing sense of community – of common history or common destiny, and of common identity – which cannot be created by mere fiat”. Scharpf (2012, pp. 15–16) also suggested, in reference to the EU, that “in the absence of a strong collective identity, the peoples of the 27 member states do not constitute a political community that could legitimate a regime of Europe-wide majority rule on politically salient issues”.

According to Lehning (2001, p. 240), a “European identity is the disposition of different nationals to consider themselves, their compatriots and their foreign fellow-Europeans as equal members of the European community”. Lehning (2001, p. 278) further argued that “it is reasonable to suppose that a union based merely on a *modus vivendi* – one in which pan-national identification, tolerance and solidarity do not develop – will remain inherently unstable”. However, identities are not exclusive and EU citizens can still identify with both the European and their respective national political communities without having to choose some primary identification (Citrin & Sides, 2004; Risse, 2005, p. 295). Nevertheless, exclusive national identities are often used to motivate and mobilise the public against European integration (Hooghe & Marks, 2004).

However, this scenario has been anticipated and prepared for by the EU, and since the 1970’s the EU has tried to counter the possibility of the EU’s *raison d’être* being questioned during crises by increasing the EU’s input legitimacy (from the people) through creating a European demos. Börzel and Risse (2010) and Caporaso and Kim (2009, p. 24) have also suggested that having a European identity does not force people to choose between Europe and their nation states, and that identification with Europe should be more regarded as an identification with civil liberties, rule of law and democracy, e.g. EU principles. It is also important, as argued by both Lehning (2001, p. 262) and Mitchell (2014, p. 606), to acknowledge the fact that the European public already had, prior to the emergence of the EU, multiple identities simultaneously, ranging from villages, cities, regions or nations. Therefore, a European identity would theoretically only add another object with which to identify, and develop affective sentiments towards over time. The understanding that the EU needs to create a mass European identity for the emergence and persistence of a well-functioning European political community is something that has been acknowledged for a long time within the EU’s institutional apparatus and has also been actively promoted by the EU since the 1970’s

(Kolvråa, 2012, p. 747).⁴⁴ As described by Kolvråa (2012, p. 752): “Already in 1973, a “Document on European identity” had been issued by the Council (Bulletin of the European Communities 12; 118–127, 1973). And it was soon followed by the Tindemans report containing a number of suggestions as to how the Community might win the favour of the by now seemingly disenchanted populations, thereby reinforcing its somewhat waning legitimacy”. This process has been conducted through the promotion of different kinds of symbols for the purpose of making the EU a part of everyday life, which in theory would, over time, increase the extent of European identification. The argument is that this would make the European public more acceptable towards European integration policies, and that is why the EU, in addition to an economic project, is also partly perceived to be a political project of identity construction (Polyakova & Fligstein, 2016, p. 61).

In short, a widespread mutual European identification should gradually contribute to the emergence of a sense of European political community within the EU area (Kaina & Karolewski, 2013). Kleiner and Bucker (2016, p. 211) also suggested that when “understood as a social identity with consequences for people’s political behavior in the EU, European identity means identification with the EU’s political community”. This suggests that European citizens recognise that they are members of a larger collective of Europeans and that they assign both meaning and emotional value to this group membership (Mitchell, 2015, p. 331). Mutual European identification has also been argued by Lehning (2001, p. 273) to be a “necessary precondition to generate some sense of solidarity to stimulate positive integration,” and Fligstein et al. (2012, p. 120) also suggested that the lack of widespread European identification within the EU area has prevented national governments from implementing European integration policies that have gone too far against public opinion. Another argument for the need of mutual

⁴⁴ The “Copenhagen Declaration on the European identity 1973” officially and formally introduced the concept of a European identity into the European community context. According to the declaration, a European identity was characterised by adherence to principles of representative democracy, the rule of law, social justice and respect for human rights (Obradovic, 1996, pp. 210–211).

European identification is that without the emergence of a shared mass European identity, European citizens will lack the necessary will to sacrifice some of the national advantages for the good of the European Union (Armingeon & Baccaro, 2012, p. 275), thereby also decreasing the legitimacy of the EU during crises (Scharpf, 2012, p. 15). These types of arguments also go back to the pan-European movements of the 1930's, when already Mitrany (1930, p. 472) suggested that in order to "integrate these divided nations into a new Continental nationalism, two elements are needed above all: first a sense of common outer danger, and then a sense of inner community".

In this thesis, European identification is interpreted as constituting a form of diffuse support for the European political community in the "Eastonian" sense of the concept (Kaina, 2006). However, the emergence of widespread levels of European identification should, according to Huyst (2008, p. 288), not be interpreted as something that directly transfers into democratic legitimacy for the EU, but more as a component that may contribute to the strengthening of the EU's long-term legitimacy, which will contribute to strengthening the EU's system persistence capabilities. Research has also suggested that stronger national identification, combined with weak European identification, is connected to higher levels of Eurosceptic sentiments (Carey, 2002; Hooghe & Marks, 2005; Kuhn, 2015). The main difference between the national and European "mutual kinds of identification" is that the European identification is still considered to be of the more evaluative nature (Schild, 2001, p. 349), while an individual's identification with the particular nation state over time has become more affective. This is because, as Deutsch (1953, p. 7) argued, "no person can be born at more than one spot on the map," and national identities are still the primary identities for most EU citizens.

Therefore, according to Bruter (2003, p. 1155), a European identity should best be understood as an "individual's perceptions that fellow Europeans are closer to them than non-Europeans". In the context of diffuse support, this implies that the emergence of widespread European identification might not transfer into diffuse support for the

political system of the EU, in the way that national identities are perceived to do for nation states. Still, many have argued that it is the diffuse kind of support that the EU as a political system will be dependent on during crises, and that a shared sense of European community is a necessary condition for a more diffuse kind of support to emerge over time (Schild, 2001; Bruter, 2003; Risse, 2005; Kaina, 2006; Kaina & Karolewski, 2013).

Habermas and Derrida (2003, p. 293) suggested that only the awareness of a shared political fate and prospect of a common future can halt minorities from the obstruction of majority will. Implying that the citizens of one European nation must regard the citizens of another European nation as “one of us” for European integration to succeed over time. Throughout history, national identities are something that has been created after the institutionalisation of a state as a way of increasing the identification with the newly created political entity (Bruter, 2003, p. 1149), which is also something crucial to take into consideration regarding the emergence of a shared European identity (Habermas, 2001, p. 15). Polyakova and Fligstein (2016, p. 64) suggested that “since the majority of people who live in Europe have predominantly a national identity, it should not be surprising that many European political issues end up being framed to national as opposed to European wide interests. This means that as issues confronting Europeans are discussed within national media, they are more likely to be filtered through national debates and self-images as European ones”.

Also, Huntington (2004, p. 25) noted that “in order to know what “our” interests are “we” have first to know who “we” are”. Who “we” are from the perspective of Europeans has long been a widely discussed topic, and what “Europe” and “European” signify is therefore always dependent on the context or topic (Roose, 2016, p. 45). As illustrated in Figure 4 (see page 124), it is relatively clear, however, that the general public within all of the 28 member states differ extensively between EU citizens and non-EU citizens when it comes to immigration, which at least seems to point to the fact that “we” as Europeans are starting to

come to an understanding of “who we are not”.⁴⁵ This should be perceived as an important pre-condition for the emergence of mutual identification within the European political community (Bruter, 2003).



Figure 4. Public attitudes towards EU and non-EU immigration 2014–2017. Source: Eurobarometer surveys 2014–2017 downloaded from Gesis ZACAT.⁴⁶

Schild (2001, p. 335) also suggested that deeper European integration, if it is to be accepted as democratically legitimate by the European public, is dependent on a sense of mutual European identification within the EU. This is mainly because output-legitimation becomes increasingly difficult to achieve with each

⁴⁵ See Appendix Table 17 page 326 for overview of member state values.

⁴⁶ Eurobarometer survey question: “Please tell me whether each of the following statements evokes a positive or negative feeling for you: Immigration of people from other EU member states (Black line) / Immigration of people from outside the EU (Grey line)”. Chart shows respondents answering “Very positive” or “Fairly positive”.

round of further deepening and widening of European integration, without also a deeper degree of input-legitimation provided by the more diffuse kind of support. He argues that there are primarily two main reasons for this:

“- The frequent use of the majority rule in the Council of Ministers. If the populations of member states are to accept the fact that their national government is more and more often overruled on specific topics, there must be a minimum sense of European identity in the populations of the member states. If the European polity is to be accepted by citizens as legitimate, then the national frame of reference should not be the only one to which citizens refer when they evaluate the costs and benefits of European policies.

- The second reason why European identification is important is the distributive character of some European policies, especially the most expansive ones – agricultural, regional and cohesion. It is no easy task for politicians to legitimize distributive policies mobilizing important financial resources without any reference to feelings of solidarity with citizens of poorer regions in other European member states. This kind of solidarity implies a certain sense of community or of common destiny”.

EU citizens who identify to some extent as Europeans have also been empirically shown to be more in favour of both democracy and cultural diversity, and generally supporting liberal values (Polyakova & Fligstein, 2016, p. 62). Mitchell (2016, pp. 179–180) has also established an empirical connection between a European identity and EU positive attitudes. She concluded “that in the EU as in other political systems, a sense of we-feeling and community identification is an important source of sustenance for the political system during times of crisis: European identity has a highly significant association with EU support, even when controlling for material variables”. Through this connection, Mitchell argues that it should be considered a valid assumption that increasing European identification will contribute to higher levels of public support for further European integration. Verhaegen (2018) has further shown that Europeans with a stronger European identity were also more likely to support more financial

solidarity with member states in economic crises. While Diez Medrano (2012) and Fligstein (2008) have shown that citizens identifying as Europeans will support European integration policies to a greater extent than citizens holding exclusively national identities. Kuhn and Stoeckel (2014, p. 637) also suggested that “exclusive nationalists are less likely to endorse European economic governance”.

Kuhn and Stoeckel (2014, p. 638) argued that in order to “endorse European economic governance, one has to at least weakly identify with Europe. This suggests that the elusive concept of “European identity” does have behavioural consequences in daily life”. EU citizens identifying solely with their nation states have also been shown to be significantly more likely to oppose specific economic policies such as the TTIP, Eurobonds and financial transaction taxes (Kanthak & Spies, 2017). Luedtke (2005) also showed that exclusive national identification was the strongest individual predictor for opposing EU control of immigration policies within EU-15. Karp and Bowler (2006) have shown European identification to correlate with generally supportive attitudes towards both the deepening and widening of the EU area. Marks and Hooghe (2004) also suggested that identity is a stronger predictor for support for European integration than economic rationality, while Wessels (2007, p. 288) showed that a European identification serves as a buffer against Eurosceptic sentiments. Wessels (2007, p. 289) explicitly argued that “considering identity is in line with the conception of political support proposed by Easton (1965)”. Carey (2002, p. 391) argued that national identities are related to “an individual’s intensity of positive attachment to his/her nation,” and this widely shared perception is also why European identification has become widely used as a sign of positive attachment towards the EU, in particular, and European integration policies in general.

After this extensive discussion regarding the system importance of mutual identification within a political community, the focus now shifts to the other important kind of attitudes towards the European political community for the long-term system persistence capabilities of the EU as a political system. This is what Easton referred to as the

sense of belonging within a political community, and what will here be referred to as EU attachment.

EU attachment

In this section, EU attachment is presented as a separate element reflecting the “sense of community” within the EU area, and it is also the most system important element, for the future system persistence capabilities of the EU, included in this study. The theoretical assumption is that longer periods of mutual European identification should also, over time, transform into higher levels of EU attachment, hence these two forms of diffuse support are considered to be mutually related. The system importance of community attachment was considered vital by Easton (1957, p. 391), who suggested that “if the members of a political system are deeply attached to a system or its ideals, the likelihood of their participating in either domestic or foreign politics in such a way as to undermine the system is reduced by a large factor. Presumably, even in the face of considerable provocation, ingrained supportive feelings of loyalty may be expected to prevail”. As Easton described, the diffuse support therefore makes people less inclined to work against the political system. However, Easton (1965, p. 321) further suggested that a “decline of support at the regime level, if it persists for a long enough period, readily spills over into the community and adversely affects attachment to it”. Wessel (2007, p. 290) used similar argumentation and argues that continued scepticism towards the EU regime will develop into diffuse scepticism directed towards the European political community. As the EU has become an increasingly more political union, it is therefore assumed that the healthy functioning and long-term viability of the EU will depend on the European public developing a shared sense of European political community (Klingemann & Weldon, 2013, p. 457).

Schmitt and Thomassen (1999) perceived the sense of political community as a durable form of democratic legitimacy, and as a presumption for the development of higher levels of the more diffuse kind of support among EU citizens towards European integration

policies. This kind of more affective public sentiment could also be referred to as “system affect” (Almond & Verba, 1963). The system importance of widespread emergence of a shared “sense of community” among the members participating in a political community was emphasised by Easton, and he also argued (1965, p. 176) that there must be some cohesiveness for any political system to develop to begin with. Easton (1965, p. 184) also suggested that these kinds of “feelings of community will indicate the extent to which the members support the continuation of the existing division of political labor, that is, of the existing political community”. The existence of a European political community does not require that all Europeans are aware of its existence, but the more strongly such a sense of European political community is developed within the EU area, the greater the EU’s stress-reducing capabilities should develop as a result (Scheuer, 1999, p. 29). Börzel and Risse (2018, p. 102) also argue that the Eurocrisis turned into a community crisis, as the different nationalities within the European political community started to question “how much solidarity members of the community owe to each other under which conditions”. That seems to indicate that the European public’s EU attachment is not yet sufficiently developed within the European political community to not be affected during crises. Hence, as European identification was considered to be of the more evaluative kind than national identities (Schild, 2001), also EU attachment should be considered to be of a more evaluative kind than what should be preferable with regard to diffuse support for the EU as a political system.

With the EU facing inevitable periods of turmoil, the members of the European political community will continuously be asked to make more and more sacrifices for the common European good, which will require “widespread trust and recognition of commonalities, if not affection, across 27 states and diverse peoples” (Caporaso & Kim, 2009, p. 20). A shared collective European identity and a general public sense of belonging to the European political community should therefore theoretically function as two types of affective sentiments “that holds a

political system together and serves as a precondition for its endurance for the long term” (Oshri, Sheaffer & Shenhav, 2015, p. 2). In this section, the European political community has been described as the most important system component of the EU as a political system. Public attitudes directed towards the European political community are therefore considered to be reflecting the most diffuse kind of public attitudes, and diffuse support is considered of vital importance for the long-term system persistence capabilities of the EU as a political system. According to the literature, there are two types of public attitudes that should be deemed important for the European political community, one type related to the extent of mutual European identification within the European political community, and the other related to the public sense of belonging to that European political community, i.e. EU attachment. These two types of public attitudes are used in this thesis to reflect the country levels of the most diffuse kind of public support for the European political community within the member states of the EU. The following section provides a summary of the main arguments presented in this chapter, before focusing on the contextual level determinants of EU support.

Chapter summary

In this chapter, the usefulness of the theoretical guidelines provided by the system support theory has been discussed. The main guidelines are that a political system needs to be divided into different system components, towards which public attitudes are primarily directed; and also that there are two different but interrelated kinds of support; specific and diffuse. The specific kind of support is determined by the perceived benefits provided by a system component, while the diffuse kind of support is determined by deeper held affective sentiments towards a system component for what it represents, not for what it does. Thus, levels of specific support are expected to decline during periods of system pressure, while diffuse support is expected to remain stable over time. Longer periods of high levels of specific support should, over time, also transform into more diffuse support, while

longer periods of declining levels of specific support should also, over time, start to affect diffuse support. Diffuse support is not, however, easily affected, and hence it is diffuse support that holds the political system together, even though specific support declines. In this theoretical framework, these two basic concepts are considered to be functioning on a support continuum, ranging from the most specific to the most diffuse kind of support.

The second part of this chapter has identified the main system important components of the EU as a political system. It has been argued in this chapter that it is of importance both for the future development and for the long-term system persistence capabilities of the EU as a political system, how the European public relates to these system components. How the European public relates to these components will in the empirical part of this study be measured by the country levels of public attitudes towards them. The three main system components are, in order of system importance, European integration policies, the EU regime and the European political community. There are also three kinds of European integration policy that have been presented, which are related to, in order of system importance, the widening, deepening and securing of European integration. The EU regime, as a system component, was also further divided into three separate elements, in order of system importance, the EU regime institutions, the EU regime processes and the EU regime principles. The final system component identified was the European political community, which was further divided into two separate elements; mutual identification and EU attachment.

As Kaina (2016, p. 250) argues, one should not confuse public attitudes towards the EU with the European public's will to belong together with other EU citizens. Still, one cannot either ignore Easton's guidelines that continuous disappointment with the EU will undoubtedly also affect the will of the European public to participate in a common European political community. In Easton's (1965, p. 312) words: "If the feeling were to prevail that the regime itself militated against the public interest, in time, continued acceptance of the regime

as right and proper could not be taken for granted". However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the general European public "might like the policies, but disapprove of the system that produces them, and vice versa" (De Vries, 2018, p. 206). Wood and Quassier (2008, p. 2) have therefore argued that the main objective of the EU is to generate identification with and high levels of trust in the EU, which they assume will, in turn, encourage solidarity and cooperation amongst the member state political elites and the general public. This has become increasingly important, over time, as the EU has been taking in new member states. Trusting the EU on the individual level has also been shown by Kleiner and Bucker (2016, p. 212) to have a statistically significant effect on the levels of European identification, and their results show that trusting the EU regime institutions positively influences European identification. Hence, EU positive attitudes towards one element of the EU as a political system should also be connected to EU positive attitudes towards the other elements.

Within empirical studies, it is necessary to distinguish between the different elements of the EU as a political system, as it makes it possible to also distinguish between the different types of public support. Hence, it should be more alarming from a system persistence perspective when the more diffuse kind of support starts to decline than when specific support declines. The effects of contextual level determinants are also expected to differentiate between the different types of public support, as negative economic performance might predict higher levels of support for some European integration policy, while simultaneously predicting lower levels of support for some element of the EU regime. In short, EU support is a multifaceted phenomenon, and this needs to be accounted for in empirical studies. Following Easton's guidelines, the contextual-level factors used for explaining the variations in public support are assumed to be either related to the intra- (internal) or the extra (external)-societal environments of the member states. As such, contextual-level factors related to these two main categories will be presented in the following chapter.

4. Explanations for EU support

When making up their minds about politics, citizens tap into the political information available to them.

De Vries, 2013, p. 444

After identifying the main system important elements of the EU from a system perspective, towards which public attitudes are directed, this chapter will focus on the main findings from the literature regarding how the country-level variations in public support for these elements have been explained. Country-level variations in public support have been shown to be derived from national contextual-level factors, i.e. factors related to either the internal- or external environments of the member states. Internal and external contextual-level factors hence constitute the two main categories from which the variations in public support are assumed to be derived. Hence, “contextual variables are those variables that make up the environment of the core subject” (Pennings et al., 1999, p. 46). The categorisations of the contextual-level factors are derived from Easton’s differentiation between two types of environments of importance for attitude formations. As previously noted, according to Easton, changing levels of public attitudes are either primarily derived from the intra- (internal) or the extra (external)-societal environments. According to Easton (1965, p. 22), the intra-societal environment is related to events and structures within the same political community, such as economic, cultural and social structures and developments. The extra-societal environment, on the other hand, relates to those events and structures outside the same political community.

When the political system is under pressure, caused by declining levels of public support, the reason behind it can be traced to events within these two environments, as these two environments, according to Easton, constitute a political systems total environment. Each of the two main categories will further include two different types of national contextual-level factors in order to account for the multidimensionality of EU attitudes. Internal factors are divided into economic

performance, reflecting the macroeconomic character, and democratic culture, reflecting the institutional character of the countries. External factors are divided into external pressure, reflecting the demographic character, and EU-relation, reflecting the character of the relation between the country and the EU. Before focusing on the contextual-level factors, this chapter starts with a general discussion regarding the varying country levels of EU support.

Much of the literature regarding EU attitudes has focused on three different approaches for understanding variations in EU attitudes: utilitarian, identity and cue-taking approaches. Utilitarian considerations are based on a cost-benefit analysis, and hence support towards an object is given when it is perceived that the object of support provides more benefits than costs (Gabel, 1998). Hence, the kind of support derived from utilitarian considerations results in the more specific kind of support. Identity considerations have also become more important as the EU develops, and identity considerations have been shown to influence EU attitudes (Carey, 2002; McLaren, 2004). Hence, the relationship between these two approaches resembles the relationship that Easton described between the specific and diffuse kinds of support. These two approaches focus on the interplay between utilitarian and identity considerations for forming EU attitudes, but the main interest in this study is the underlying contextual-level factors affecting the country-level variations in specific and diffuse support. Therefore, the cue-taking approach provides the necessary guidelines for identifying the proxies that the public uses as reference points when forming their EU attitudes. The causal logic of this is straightforward, as the national contexts are assumed to contain the necessary information for individuals about the most important issues, which in turn will affect the basis from which the general public within the EU area form their EU attitudes (Rohrschneider & Loveless, 2010, p. 1042). By identifying these national level proxies, it will become possible to empirically explain both the within and between countries variations in public support for the different system important elements of the EU,

and the respective effects of different national contextual-level factors on public support.

As the European public is generally expected to have more pressing issues to worry about than politics, the European public is prone to use proxies or “cues” when asked to evaluate political issues. This is simply because most people do not have enough knowledge, interest or time to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the current political situation or development when asked by survey conductors. This is especially the case when the European public is asked to respond to survey questions about the EU or European integration policies, of which the European public has limited knowledge, understanding or interest (Anderson, 1998). The EU and European integration are therefore issues where the national structures, processes and politics have been shown to be of crucial importance as a benchmark from which the EU attitudes are formed (Marks, Wilson & Ray, 2002, p. 586; Armingeon & Ceka, 2014, p. 104). Hence, “the cues that appear most relevant to European integration arise in member states” (Hooghe & Marks, 2005, p. 425). Similar to Eichenberg and Dalton (1993; 2007), the main research interest hence lies in identifying the contextual-level factors explaining the variations in EU attitudes at the macro-level. The theoretical assumption is that public attitudes towards the different system components of the EU “presumably varies as a function of factors that are felt at the national level” (Eichenberg & Dalton, 1993, pp. 509–510), and different kinds of national contextual-level factors thereby influence public attitudes towards the EU in different directions (Rohrschneider & Loveless, 2010, p. 1031).

According to De Vries (2018, p. 204), “public opinion represents a kaleidoscope that closely reflects the national conditions in which people find themselves. In other words, people’s attitudes toward the EU are framed by the national circumstances in which people live and their evaluations of these conditions”. De Vries further suggests that both support and scepticism are relational concepts linked to evaluations of events at the national level, and that they are both multidimensional concepts that directly relate to evaluations of these

events. This is something that De Vries refers to as the benchmark theory of European integration, and the theory's essence is that the public relies on benchmarks, or proxies, to compensate for the information shortfalls about the EU and European integration. This is also a theory that closely resembles the "cue-taking" theory previously mentioned. De Vries (2018, p. 37), furthermore, argues that the general public uses the country levels to form expectations about how well their country would manage if the country were to leave the EU. De Vries (2018, p. 37), hence, argues that "people are expected only to be willing to take this risk when they perceive the benefits of the alternative state to be greater than the status quo of membership, even if slightly so".

However, it is crucial at this point to note that public attitudes towards all system components, and elements, of the EU are not associated to the same national contextual-level factors across the EU area, and that the relationship is determined by the national contexts (Otjes & Katsanidou, 2017, pp. 314–315). Hence, as this study has identified eight system important elements of the EU as a political system, these are perceived to be linked to different explanatory factors. This was also suggested by Vasilopoulou (2013, p. 3), who explicitly suggested that "public opinion on integration does not follow national, cultural or geographical patterns. We cannot say with certainty that specific cultures or nation-states are more likely to oppose the EU than others". However, as Norris (2011, p. 46) argues, public attitudes "need to be compared in a wide range of social and political contexts," and most researchers include a large set of explanatory contextual-level variables when conducting statistical analyses.

The national level is therefore the natural place for researchers to start when trying to explain country-level variations in public support (Gabel & Palmer, 1995, p. 3; Munoz, Torcal & Bonet, 2011, p. 553). Logically then, one of the most commonly asked questions for researchers interested in these kinds of questions is: which are the national contextual-level factors that could be used as proxies by the European public when they are asked to form opinions about the EU? Therefore, in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture regarding

the national contextual-level determinants of public support, the following subchapters will present what is known regarding the explanatory effects of these national contextual-level factors, starting with the internal factors category.

4.1 Internal factors

This subchapter will focus on the two types of internal factors that have been suggested in the literature to explain country-level variations in public support for the different system important elements of the EU. The perception that EU attitudes are not stable, and instead prone to fluctuate over time, have become well established within the EU literature (Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970; Eichenberg & Dalton, 1993; 2007). Based on that perception, Haas (1976, p. 204) argued that the future of the EU will ultimately depend of the EU's ability to improve all kinds of public services, and Schmitter and Lefkofridi (2016, p. 3) further suggested that the EU is not likely to perish as long as these key functions are considered to be fulfilled by the European public. However, according to Hobolt (2012, p. 89), "the quality of national institutions functions as a benchmark for public evaluations of EU institutions," and the importance of national characteristics as central factors for explaining public support is something that has become apparent over time. Deflem and Pampel (1996, p. 138) argued that this is true both regarding positive and negative public orientations towards the EU. Hence, the variations in public support for the EU within the EU area are largely expected to be independent of what the EU actually produces or provides. This causal relationship between internal national contextual-level characteristics and public support has been well described by Kritzinger (2003, pp. 236–237):

"The findings show that the nation-state is the main actor in increasing or decreasing support for the EU: it determines the factors that lead to attitudinal changes. In other words, the domestic level constrains evaluations of the EU because attitudes are developed in the national cultural context. National political and economic behavior both seem to be the reason why citizens support for

integration is flexible over time. We can argue that support for the EU depends strongly on the performance of the nation-state. Citizens do not yet distinguish between the two levels and do not assess the performance of the European and national level separately. This means that national factors condition assessments of the European factor and citizens therefore do not form them autonomously. Citizens are not yet fully aware of the new political system and they lack knowledge regarding the EU. Thus, the integration process has not resulted in independent assessment and citizens still use national proxies when expressing attitudes towards the EU. Because these attitudes are not founded on stable and unconditioned ground, they are more likely to be exposed to change”.

Within the EU literature there have been two broad groups of national contextual-level factors that have been widely used for explaining the variations in public support. The focus will now shift to these two groups, starting with the economic performance and characteristics of the member states.

4.1.1 Economic performance

This section will focus on the causal relationship between economic performance and EU attitudes. Already Easton (1965, p. 275) suggested that “if the danger signals go up and it is recognized that discontent with the regime or community is increasing, the first, easiest, and most direct response which may be taken to cope with the situation is to make some effort to improve the adequacy of the outputs,” and economic performance indicators have been used to understand the variations in public support ever since. Since Easton, it has therefore been “widely acknowledged that system outputs – also commonly referred to as system performance – are key to understanding why public support for the political system fluctuates” (Anderson & Tverdova, 2003, p. 92). The so-called *performance hypothesis* explains variations in public support for the EU within countries as something first and foremost determined by national economic performance. This hypothesis has been the dominant approach for understanding

country-level variations in EU attitudes (Eichenberg & Dalton, 1993; Gabel & Whitten, 1997; Duch & Taylor, 1997; Garry & Tilley, 2009). This has especially become apparent after the Eurocrisis, which has been shown to have had a strong negative impact on EU attitudes (Armingeon & Ceka, 2014; Braun & Tausendpfund, 2014).

However, the causal direction of this relationship has also been argued to vary within the EU area based on national level characteristics. According to Kritzinger (2003) and Munoz et al. (2011), EU attitudes are expected to be formed either through the congruence or the compensation model, originating from the widespread assumption that the European public lacks the necessary knowledge about the working and functioning of the EU to form opinions. The congruence model, or the equal assessments model (Kritzinger, 2003), emphasises that public attitudes towards national politics will spill over to the EU level, and therefore domestic economic performance is used as a proxy when evaluating the EU, creating congruence in public attitudes across the multi-level political spectrum. This has been especially argued with regard to trust in the EU and trust in the national level parliaments, as “most Europeans either trust both their national government and the EU or neither of them” (Armingeon & Ceka, 2014, p. 99). The compensation model, or the different assessments model (Kritzinger, 2003), emphasises the notion that the European public are likelier to form more negative attitudes towards the EU the better their opinions are about national level politics, or more positive attitudes towards the EU the worse their opinions are of their national level politics.

Sánchez-Cuenca (2000, p. 169) therefore suggested that “the worse citizens opinions of national institutions and the better their opinion of supranational ones, the stronger their support for European integration”. Basically, there seems to be an agreement within the literature that the perceived and/or actual performance of national level politics are in some way used as a proxy for forming EU attitudes (Anderson, 1998). Nevertheless, the direction and effect of this relationship should be expected to vary across the EU area, and also

between the different system components and elements of the EU. In the following section, the relationship between economic performance and public attitudes towards European integration policies is discussed.

European integration policies

A prevalent argument has been that the perceived costs of transferring decision-making powers to the EU should be lower within “bad performing” member states, and therefore public support for different types of European integration policies should presumably be higher the worse the performance of the country (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000). This argument has also been supported by empirical studies that have shown that the country levels of public support towards European integration in general was significantly higher, and more stable, within the so-called post-communist countries prior to the start of the global recession in 2008 (Harteveld et al., 2013). Looking at policy-specific support, attitudes towards a common European defence policy have earlier been argued to be related to general support for European integration policies (Gabel & Anderson, 2002). This explains why contextual-level factors that have been used to explain public support for other elements of the EU also “should go a considerable way toward explaining support for or opposition to common policies in defence and foreign affairs” (Schoen 2008, p. 7). Also, Carubba and Singh (2004, p. 229) have shown that “the more an individual is supportive of EU membership, the more likely that individual is to support forming an EU common defense”.

Another integration policy where national economic performances have been shown to have an impact are regarding public attitudes towards the proposal of a future enlargement of the EU area (Karp & Bowler, 2006; Hobolt, 2014). Karp and Bowler (2006, p. 372) showed that “voters use assessments of EU institutions and their performance to shape evaluations of more specific policies and developments,” such as attitudes towards EU enlargement. They also showed that the population within poorer member states were more negative towards further enlargements, which they suggested could be because “voters,

attuned to the benefits of EU subsidy, now understand they may lose something of value via enlargement" (2006, p. 386). Hobolt (2014, p. 678) further showed that citizens living in member states experiencing economic growth were more likely to support deeper integration but not further enlargements, and that the national contextual-level "factors that shape attitudes towards deepening and widening are conditioned by the national economic and political context".

Before the start of the global recession in 2008, the single European currency was perceived to be a remarkable success based on the superior performance of the eurozone members in comparison to the non-eurozone EU member states during the period of 2000–2008 (Wood & Quaisser, 2008, p. 31). This however changed after the start of the Eurocrisis, when the single European currency instead was blamed for much of the economic hardships that fell upon the eurozone countries. Prior to the start of the Eurocrisis, Banducci et al. (2003) suggested that the public in countries that were performing economically worse were prone to be more positive towards the single European currency than the public from economically better performing countries. In a more recent study, Banducci, Karp and Loedel (2009) showed that individuals already living within the eurozone, with a positive assessment of their national economy, were far more likely to support the single European currency than those who were pessimistic about their national economy. Banducci et al. (2009) also showed that indicators measuring national economic performance were closely connected to the member state levels of public support for the single European currency within the eurozone. However, within the non-eurozone countries they found little evidence that national economic performance had any effect on public support for the single European currency. They also noted that there are significant cross-country variations, largely derived from the distinction between eurozone and non-eurozone countries. Furthermore, they also suggested that "citizens who express their support for the euro thus provide the basis of support for the larger EU project," and that "when the currency is strong and general EU support is high, there will be a considerable

support for the common currency” (2009, pp. 577–78). Hobolt and Wratil (2015) reached similar conclusions after they showed that public support for the single European currency remained stable within the eurozone, while it declined within non-eurozone countries, during the period of 2005–2013.

To summarise, public support for European integration policies related to the widening of the EU area through EU enlargement and the deepening of the EU area through more European integration within defence policies seems to be generally related to the economic developments within the countries. On the other hand, the relationship does not seem to be as clear with regard to public support for the single European currency. In the following section, the focus now shifts to the effects of economic developments on public support for the EU regime elements.

The EU regime

Scharpf (1999) has argued that the EU has been politically legitimised through the economic benefits provided through European integration policies. The positive economic benefits provided through EU membership were therefore assumed to provide the EU with what Scharpf refers to as “output-legitimacy”. Because the EU has still not been able to create the more diffuse kind of input-based legitimacy, both the short- and long-term system persistence capabilities of the EU are therefore, at least to some extent, determined by the economic performances within the countries. The main argument goes that if the quality of life is visibly improving within a country, and things are turning to the better without having to sacrifice more than some aspects of the national sovereignty through the transferring of decision-making powers to Brussels, there are presumably no rational reasons to be sceptical, or even hostile, towards the EU. However, when the economic situations within countries are getting noticeably worse, simultaneously as the country is obliged to send money to other EU countries, it becomes more challenging to stay positive towards the EU. As Schmitter and Lefkofridi (2016, p. 3) therefore also argue, “the EU is

not likely to break as long as it successfully fulfills key functions for the Union's economy and society as a whole, but it can and will break if it does not".

The basic assumption within studies related to explaining EU attitudes has therefore been that positive economic performances within countries creates higher levels of public support for the national level politics, which will transfer into higher levels of support for the EU regime (Anderson & Kaltenthaler, 1996; Anderson, 1998). This is primarily because the EU regime has been, and is still by many, perceived as a vehicle to advance both individual and national economic interests. The empirical relationship between national economic performance and trust in the EU regime institutions (Roth et al., 2011) and satisfaction with EU democracy (Karp & Bowler, 2005) has also been firmly established within the EU area. The primary selling point of European integration has also historically been the economy, framed within the fact that EU membership will contribute to widespread economic prosperity for all member states through access to the common European market (Anderson & Kaltenthaler, 1996, p. 177). Hence, the country levels of public support for the EU regime elements are generally expected to increase during favourable economic periods, and decline during economic downturns.

During the first decades of the European Economic Community (EEC), Inglehart and Rabier (1978, p. 40) also noted that there was a remarkable growth in public support towards the EEC, which led them to the conclusion that "public evaluations of membership in the community seem linked with economic growth or decline". This statement was derived from the significant economic performances within the EEC during that period. Eichenberg and Dalton (2007, p. 134) also noted that the OPEC oil shocks of 1974 seemed to have had a negative effect on public support for European unification, and that public support again started to increase as the economies within the EU area started to grow again during the 1980's. The relationship between economic performance and country levels of public support for the EU has also been established in two studies by Eichenberg and Dalton

(1993; 2007), covering the period of 1973–1988 and the period of 1973–2004. However, they focused on two specific periods when the EU area consisted of half the number of member states than it does post-2004, and they only focused on one type of EU attitude related to EU membership.

Especially after the start of the global recession in 2008, many studies have shown that the European public has become more critical towards the EU as a result of declining country levels of economic performance (Roth, Nowak-Lehmann & Otter, 2011; Armingeon & Ceka, 2014; Braun & Tausendpfund, 2014; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015). Many of these studies have focused on the declining levels of trust in the EU regime institutions, as trust is generally considered as a performance-based indicator. Since 2008, the levels of trust in the EU regime institutions have declined significantly in many of the member states that were also the most severely negatively affected by the global recession (Dotti Sani & Magistro, 2016, p. 3), such as Greece, Spain and Italy. Hartevelde et al. (2013) have also shown that trust in the national political institutions is the strongest predictor for trust in the EU regime institutions, and they concluded that the European public seem to trust or distrust the EU regime institutions for reasons largely unrelated to the actual workings of these institutions. Armingeon and Ceka (2014, p. 104) have also argued that if trust in the EU regime institutions is declining in a specific member state, it will more likely be because of the policies of the national government and developments in the national economy than the actual performance or behaviour of the EU regime institutions. This is further supporting the argument that country levels of trust in the EU regime institutions are largely a reflection of how the national political institutions are perceived to be performing (Anderson, 1998). As Kaina (2006, p. 117) has argued, “trust replaces knowledge”.

The most pessimistic scholars have even compared the development in the levels of trust in the EU regime after 2008 with the development in Weimar-Germany during the 1920's (van Erkel & van der Meer, 2016, p. 177). However, Torcal (2014) argues that the declining levels of trust in the EU regime institutions after 2008 cannot

be solely attributed to the global recession. Torcal argues the decline could also be traced to an increased understanding that the EU regime is unresponsive to the demands of the European public. The determinants of the decline may be unclear, but most do agree that declining levels of trust in the EU regime institutions should at least constitute reasons for concern (Harteveld et al., 2013, p. 543).

Some researchers have therefore also connected the success of Eurosceptic political parties within the EU area to economic developments within these countries (Serricchio, Tsakatika & Quaglia, 2013). As has been previously suggested, this is presumably because the European public “see sacrifices and advantages only in relation to the national level and they do not consider the European level” (Kritzinger, 2003, p. 237). Indicators of national economic performance should explain much of the country-level variations of public support for the EU regime, but “national contexts may change, or the character of integration varies which, in turn, may alter the criteria that publics use even within countries” (Rohrschneider & Loveless, 2010, p. 1042). Presumably then, the effects on the levels of public support for the EU regime are also altered by other national contextual-level factors. To summarise, the country-level variations in public support for all three elements of the EU regime should, to a large extent, be explained by indicators related to the economic performance of the countries. In the following section, the focus is on the relationship between economic performance and public support for the European political community.

The European political community

According to the theoretical guidelines provided by Easton, longer periods of declining levels of the specific kind of support will also have an effect on the more diffuse kind of support over time. For the context of country levels of public support for the European political community, this can be translated as longer periods of declining public support for the EU regime, based on the negative economic performances within the member states, which might presumably also contribute to lower levels of mutual European identification and EU

attachment within the EU area. This is a difficult causal assumption to make at the EU level, as the diffuse kind of support should not be easily affected by short-term developments. However, there is no time-limit for how long the European public should be able to tolerate declining country levels of economic performance without it also starting to affect the more diffuse kind of support directed towards the European political community. This is especially so with regard to diffuse support for the European political community that is, so to say, still under construction and of a more evaluative nature than the national levels of diffuse support.

As such, it is difficult to empirically explain the country-level variations in something as abstract as public attitudes towards the European political community based on the economic performances of the member states. However, there have been a few studies looking at the relationship between national economic performance and diffuse support for the European political community. Polyakova and Fligstein (2016, p. 78), for instance, found evidence of a direct effect of the global recession on the levels of European identification. They explicitly showed that individuals “in countries worst hit by the crisis were most likely to become nationalists”. Still, their analytical timeframe was limited to survey data from the period of 2007–2009, and the more long-term effects of the economic crises on the levels of European identification have, to this author’s knowledge, not been analysed empirically.

Summary

The economic performance of countries should have affected public support for all of the three system important components constituting the political system of the EU. However, the effects of economic performance are altered by other types of national contextual-level factors. Mungiu-Pippidi (2015, p. 122) therefore argues that no long-term solutions for the problems facing the EU can work without basic economic progress within the countries, and if the EU as a political instrument fails to deliver what has been promised to the European

public, not even the traditionally EU-positive political elites can save the EU. However, it is not as clear how much economic performance factors are able to explain the cross-country variations in public support. The cross-country effects of economic performance variables should also vary based on the other kinds of national contextual-level indicators, as well as on the system element of the EU that is being evaluated by the European public. The economic performance of the countries will be measured in this thesis by two types of macroeconomic performance indicators, one related to the short-term and the other related to the long-term performance. National unemployment rates will be used to reflect the short-term performance, as unemployment rates are directly related to the short-term developments within the national economies, or “economic hardships” (Eichenberg & Dalton, 1993, pp. 512–513). National debt rates will be used as an indication of long-term developments, as higher levels of debt indicate that there has been a negative development for a longer period of time. These two performance indicators have been shown to explain variations in public support, especially towards the EU regime elements (Anderson & Kaltenthaler, 1996; Kritzinger, 2003; Karp & Bowler, 2006; Rohrschneider & Loveless, 2010; Roth et al., 2011; Serrichio et al., 2013). In the following section, the focus shifts to the other category of internal contextual-level factors that have been used to explain country-level variations in public support for the EU. This broad category of indicators has been labelled democratic culture.

4.1.2 Democratic culture

In this section, two types of internal contextual-level factors, related to the broader group of indicators connected to the democratic cultures of the member states, will be presented. This relates to another crucial aspect of the performance hypotheses of public support, besides the economic performance, connected to the institutional quality across the EU area. As De Vries (2018, p. 40) argued, “people consider non-economic benefits as well,” and the economic performance cannot simply explain all of the variations in public support for all system

important elements of the EU. Especially during the 1990's, there was much speculation that European integration would, for instance, contribute to higher levels of economic inequality within the EU area, an assumption that was also empirically confirmed by Beckfield (2006) in a study comprising 13 of the pre-2004 member states (Finland and Portugal excluded). Hence, higher levels of economic inequality within countries might presumably not be something affecting EU attitudes in a more positive direction, and Simpson and Loveless (2017) have also, furthermore, shown that individual level concerns with economic inequality contribute to lower levels of public support for deeper European integration.

It is therefore to be expected that the institutional quality and other cultural characteristics of a country also provides "citizens with cues on how to think about and act upon various societal phenomena" (Baur, Green & Helbling, 2016, p. 4). In particular for the cross-country analyses within the empirical part of this study, it is crucial to include also other types of contextual-level performance factors in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of why the levels of public support vary between countries. Also as Sánchez-Cuenca (2000, p. 159) argued, the "national differences in attitudes towards Europe fundamentally depend on a variety of features of the state and the domestic political system". In the following sections the focus is on the effects of institutional quality on public support, starting with European integration policies.

European integration policies

The causal relationship between national level institutional performance and country-level variations in public support for European integration policies is not something that has been studied more extensively. Nevertheless, Sanchez-Cuenca (2000, p. 148) argued that "the worse the political system works at home and the better at the supranational level, the smaller the risk involved in transferring national sovereignty to a supranational body". Based on that logic, the country levels of public support for European integration in general

should be higher within countries with worse performing political institutions. Sanchez-Cuenca (2000) also showed that higher levels of corruption within a member state directly increase public support for European unification (which Sanchez-Cuenca used as a dependent variable). Sanchez-Cuenca further also showed that the more a country spends on welfare services, the lower the levels of public support are for deeper European integration. Arnold et al. (2012, p. 32) reached similar conclusions, and they further suggested that within countries with higher levels of institutional corruption, it is perceived by the public that the costs of ceding sovereignty to supranational entities through European integration are lower than in countries with well-functioning political institutions.

The EU regime

Country levels of public support for the EU regime are also presumably affected by the institutional performance, and the quality of the national political institutions have been shown to be of significance when explaining country-level variations. According to Rohrschneider (2002, p. 472), this is because the public “evaluations of the EU are indirectly shaped by the quality of national institutions,” and they further argued that this is because citizens judge new institutions with their experience of the ones that are being, so to say, replaced. Munoz et al. (2011, p. 566) also suggested that “transparency in the working of national institutions sets a standard against which the EU institutions are compared”. Hence, higher the levels of institutional quality within a country, the higher the levels of trust in the national political institutions. However, lower the levels of institutional quality within a country might also, according to the compensation argument, be connected to higher levels of trust in EU regime institutions (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000). Hence, the levels of institutional corruption within a member state, mostly measured by the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) provided by Transparency International, have been regularly included as an explanatory contextual-level factor in many models seeking to explain cross-country variations in public support for the EU

regime elements (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000; Munoz et al., 2011; Serricchio et al., 2013; van Erkel & van der Meer, 2016). Obydenkova and Arpino (2018) have shown that prior to the great recession of 2008, the compensation theory could largely be confirmed. Their analysis showed that the general public within countries with higher levels of corruption were more likely to have a better opinion of the EU. However, during the period after the start of the global recession until 2013, this relationship disappeared. Hence, Obydenkova and Arpino (2018, p. 608) reached the conclusion that “after the start of the crisis, people in these countries transferred the effect of national corruption to the supranational level”.

Nevertheless, Munoz et al. (2011) found no empirical evidence for the claim that coming from a country with a stronger welfare system was connected to lower levels of support for the EU. Although, they did find evidence for the claim that living in a corrupt country fosters trust in the EU regime institutions, supporting Rohrschneider’s (2002) claim. Interestingly, Arnold et al. (2012) presented results indicating the contrary, namely that the public from member states with stronger welfare systems were more likely to trust the EU regime institutions. Rohrschneider and Loveless (2010), however, showed that welfare spending within countries did not have an effect on how the democratic performance of the EU regime was perceived by the European public, which in this thesis relates to public support for the EU regime processes. Simpson and Loveless (2017, p. 1079) also showed that “as government effectiveness increases across countries, the mean level of support for the EU and its expansion decrease”. It has also been considered important to consider the political heritage of countries when explaining the cross-country variations in public support, especially regarding whether a country has a post-communist political heritage or not.

It has been widely argued that there are significant differences between these two halves of the EU area, in terms of public attitudes towards the EU regime elements (Ilonzski, 2009; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015). Harteveld et al. (2013, p. 560), for instance, showed that the levels

of trust in the EU regime institutions were higher and more stable within post-communist countries, arguably because the EU membership, at least before the start of the global recession in 2008, has been perceived as providing an economic shelter. Historical factors might also help to explain why higher levels of public support for the EU do not develop to begin with, as perhaps is most clearly shown in the case of the United Kingdom, with its history as a global power. Furthermore, Hobolt (2012) also showed that the quality of national political institutions explains much of the cross-country variations in public support for the EU regime processes, measured by satisfaction with EU democracy. Hence, it is important to also account for differences in institutional quality within the EU area when analysing cross-country variations in public support for the EU regime.

The European political community

The causal relationship between public attitudes towards the European political community and the institutional performances of countries has, to this author's knowledge, not been more extensively analysed. However, Scharpf (1997, p. 20) suggested that the "we-feeling" between Europeans is presumably also influenced by the historical contexts of the countries, and hence presumably the historical contexts not only affect how the European public orient themselves towards European integration policies and the EU regime, but also how the European public orient towards the European political community. The national framing of European integration is therefore considered to be heavily influenced by the country-specific histories, and the emergence of a "we-feeling" is also perceived to be derived from shared experiences (Marks et al., 2002). Oshri et al. (2015) also showed that the more democratic a country is (using Freedom House ratings), the higher are the levels of public support for democratic values within a country. Therefore, as a value-based European political community, public support for the European political community should arguably be higher within countries with higher levels of institutional quality. Even though not much has been written regarding the connection

between institutional quality, reflecting the democratic culture, and variations within and between countries in public support for the European political community, this is an interesting relationship to analyse empirically.

Summary

National contextual-level factors related to the institutional performance and quality of countries should be accounted for when explaining the cross-country variations in public support, and this especially towards European integration policies and the EU regime elements. The institutional performance and quality will for this purpose be measured by two indicators related to this broad group, one reflecting the institutional quality, corruption levels, and the other reflecting the institutional performance of countries, levels of income inequality. This section has presented the main findings from the literature regarding the relationship between internal contextual-level factors and country-level variations in public support for different system elements of the EU. This overview has shown that most of the research has focused on explaining public attitudes towards the EU regime elements, and most of the research seems to have reached the conclusion that the economy matters. Nevertheless, with regard to public attitudes towards specific European integration policies and towards the European political community, the connection is not as straightforward. Also, national contextual-level characteristics related to the institutional performance of countries should explain more of the cross-country variations with regard to public support for European integration policies and the European political community than towards the EU regime elements. This chapter continues in the following subchapter with the national contextual-level factors related to the external environment of countries, divided into two groups of contextual-level factors; external pressure and EU-relation.

4.2 External factors

This subchapter will focus on national contextual-level factors outside of the internal environments of the member states, hence the category is argued to constitute, in a wider sense, external factors. This category, hence, includes two groups of contextual-level factors considered to, in an Eastonian sense, cause stress on the member states from the outside. According to Easton (1965, p. 22), the extra-societal environment includes systems outside the given national level political community itself, such as international political, economic or cultural systems. However, in reference to the multi-level political structure of the EU, it is quite challenging to define what constitutes internal and external factors affecting EU attitudes within the countries' total environments. Nevertheless, broadly defined as a category of external factors, the two groups within this category try to capture the effects of the changing demographics within the EU area, specifically caused by immigration, as well as the separate EU-relation of the countries. These two groups could be considered as constituting external factors in the wider sense that they include factors that are affecting the levels of public support from outside the national political communities. In the following section, the focus will be on the relationship between demographic developments and public support.

4.2.1 External pressure

In this section, the focus will be on two types of external level factors related to the demographic transformations occurring within the EU area. These factors relate to a crucial aspect of the changing compositions of the national level political communities within the greater European political community through the process of immigration. First and foremost it should be noted that immigration has been an EU-level concern since the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951. However, during that period, intra-EU immigration and migration were confined to nationals from six countries within a regional European labour market (Caviedes, 2016, p.

553).⁴⁷ Since then, the EU has grown and now the common European labour market includes 28 countries (before Brexit). Especially during the previous two decades, the EU area has significantly changed demographically. This is mainly attributed to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the conflicts in the Middle East and increased levels of globalisation (Kentman-Cin & Erisen, 2017, p. 4). This development has increased the pressure on the EU area in terms of social cohesion. Therefore, it has become more accepted that “European integration is connected to the issue of immigration” (Otjes & Katsanidou, 2017, p. 305).

During the height of the migration crisis in 2015, immigration issues became the main political topic within many countries. This related to the fact that EU membership also enables the free movement of people within the EU area, which makes it possible for non-EU immigrants to travel more or less freely within the EU area once they are inside. During the most severe parts of the migration crisis, the system persistence capabilities of the EU were severely challenged as a result of the freedom of movement for people principle, constituting one of the EU’s four freedoms set out in the Treaty of Rome 1957. This contributed to the solidarity within the EU area becoming openly questioned, as some countries (Germany, Sweden) were forced to take the main share of the burden during the crisis, while other countries simply refused to participate in shared EU efforts of solving the crisis (Hungary, Poland). To provide a clearer understanding regarding the effects of the migration crisis in 2015, Figure 5 (see page 154) presents data regarding the development with regard to the total number of refugees seeking asylum within the EU during the period of 2008–2017.

⁴⁷ The Coal and Steel Treaty of 1951 also forbade discrimination against coal and steel workers who were nationals of the other member states, setting the general guidelines of free movement that were subsequently adopted by the Treaty of Rome in 1957 (Caviedes, 2016, p. 556).

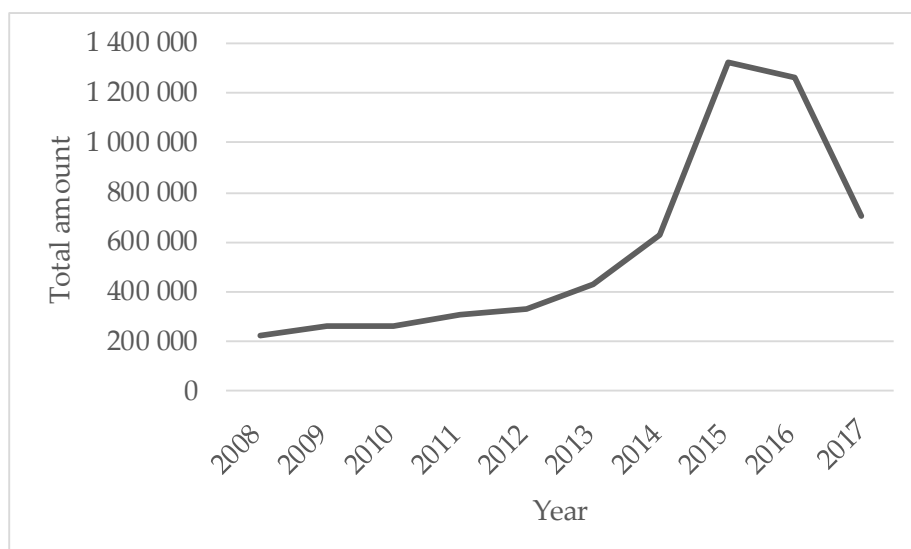


Figure 5. Asylum and first-time asylum applicants, annual aggregated EU-28 data. Source: Eurostat.

Since the beginning of the 2000's, Europe has witnessed a large amount of high-profile terrorist attacks (Madrid 2004, London 2005 and Paris 2015). This has also contributed to an increased public awareness that an attack on one of the member states increases the perceived threat levels also within the other members of the EU, because of the free movement within the EU area. This has presumably led to a growing sense of insecurity within the EU area, which especially political parties on the radical right have been able to capitalise on during elections. However, already during the mid-1990's, Laffan (1996, p. 82) noted that "there has been a resurgence of political nationalism in some European states because of the growing salience of immigration". Anti-immigration sentiments have also been shown to function as a key factor when explaining EU attitudes, as the EU, over time, has become publicly perceived as a vehicle for sparking immigration (De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2005). The logic for this connection is that when immigrants are perceived as a threat, EU attitudes become more negative, since the EU is connected to the open border policies that enable the immigrants to move to one's country. Immigration attitudes therefore play a significant role in shaping

attitudes towards European integration (De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2005; Boomgaarden et al., 2011; Toshkov & Kortenska, 2015). Moreover, Lubbers and Scheepers (2005) also showed that there is an empirical connection between voting for radical right-wing parties and Eurosceptic attitudes at the individual level. According to Kentman-Cin and Erisen (2017, p. 20), the empirical connection between anti-immigrant sentiments and Euroscepticism has now become firmly established within the literature. Therefore, as Luedtke (2005, p. 84) has argued, “immigration is a crucial political issue in 21st century Europe”. However, according to Kentman-Cin and Erisen (2017, p. 4), over 12 per cent of the EU-27’s (excluding Croatia) total population aged between 24 and 54 are first-generation immigrants, while another 5 per cent are second-generation immigrants with at least one parent who is not an EU citizen. Nevertheless, there are significant variations within the EU area regarding the percentage of immigrants within the respective populations.

Much of the literature related to this topic has focused on the attitudinal connection between EU and immigration attitudes, or the connection between immigration attitudes and radical right-wing voting (Werts, Scheepers & Lubbers, 2012; Baur et al., 2016). The connection between supporting a radical right-wing party and Eurosceptic attitudes is derived from seeing the EU as a threat to the national sovereignty, cultural heritage and cultural homogeneity within countries, as well as something encouraging globalisation and multiculturalism (Vasilopoulou, 2018, p. 125). Furthermore, Werts et al. (2012, p. 3) suggest that this might be explained by the ethnic competition theory, which holds that “ethnic groups sharing similar economic interests are in competition for scarce resources, which induces perceived ethnic threat and intergroup antagonistic attitudes”. In their study, Werts et al. also found empirical support for that argument, showing that the higher a country’s immigration rate, the more likely the public in that country were to vote for a radical right party.

McLaren (2002, p. 564) also noted in her study that “attitudes toward the European Union tend to be based in great part on a general hostility toward other cultures”. Highly educated individuals are, however, less likely to see immigration as a threat (Fietkau & Hansen, 2017). Nevertheless, as the issue of immigration is a relatively new perspective within the EU support literature, not much has been written regarding the connection between actual immigration rates and public support for the different system important components of the EU. It is, however, also crucial to distinguish between the two types of demographic developments under discussion, since there are two different issues involved; one related to general immigration and the other to refugees.

European integration policies

Unfortunately, to this author’s knowledge, not much have been written with regard to the connection between public support for European integration policies and immigration rates. This is probably because the costs and benefits provided by European integration policies have not been expected to be altered by immigration rates. Nevertheless, there is one concrete European integration policy that immigration levels might presumably have an effect on, namely the country levels of public support for future EU enlargement. This is based on the assumption that within countries with higher levels of immigration rates, more enlargements might be expected to increase the amount of immigration to such an extent that it becomes unsustainable. McLaren (2007) argued that the more immigrants there are in a country, the more opportunities the public will have to observe cultural differences, suggesting that higher levels of immigrants might, over time, contribute to higher levels of opposition towards further EU enlargement. Therefore, one could expect the levels of public support for future EU enlargements to be lower in countries with a higher proportion of immigration, and also that the levels of support for enlargement would decline as the number of immigrants increase.

The EU regime

According to Otjes and Katsanidou (2017, p. 304), “the EU is perceived as the reason for the influx of immigrants as it is a common labour market and this limits the ability of Member States to regulate immigration in their country”. They also showed in their study that in so-called net-immigration countries, the citizens who are negative towards immigration are more likely to become Eurosceptic than citizens with the same anti-immigration attitudes from countries with lower levels of immigration. Citizens who feel threatened by immigrants are also more likely to oppose further European integration and to evaluate the EU regime elements more negatively (De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2005; Boomgaarden et al., 2011; Toshkov & Kortenska, 2015). However, members of minority groups (including immigrants) have themselves been shown to be more likely to have positive attitudes towards the EU than the general public within countries (Dowley & Silver, 2011). Nevertheless, not much is known about the empirical connection between actual country levels of immigration and variations in public support for the EU regime elements, as most of the literature seems to have focused on establishing the relationship between anti-immigration and Eurosceptic attitudes.

The European political community

Similar to European integration policies, not much has been written regarding the connection between immigration levels and public support for the European political community. Therefore, immigration levels are not expected to be of empirical importance for explaining country-level variations in the most diffuse kind of public support. However, higher levels of immigration might possibly, over time, be connected to higher levels of EU attachment, as the influx of immigrants contributes to more multi-cultural societies that changes the traditional compositions of national communities. Social communication theories have for long emphasised that contacts between nationalities should increase the feelings of participating in a

shared political community (Mitchell, 2014, p. 615), through a so-called socialisation process (Inglehart, 1967). The effect might also be the complete opposite, presumably depending on the prevailing public attitudes towards immigrants within the countries, as well as on the types of immigrants (asylum-seekers, refugees, labour immigrants etc.).

Summary

The connection between national levels of immigration rates and public support for the different system important components of the EU is still quite clearly something understudied. This makes it even more important to also consider the demographic developments within the EU area when explaining country levels of public support, as immigration has become one of the most widely discussed political topics within Europe, and this especially during the last decade. Kentman-Cin and Erisen (2017, p. 19), furthermore, noted that the “academic disinterest is surprising since it is widely reported that the EU is experiencing the biggest refugee crisis since the World War II”. As this is a quite uncharted territory within the EU literature, this thesis will try to make a small contribution for filling that gap. The country levels reflecting the external pressure will be measured by two indicators, one accounting for general immigration and the other accounting for explicit refugee immigration. In the following section, the focus will be on a relationship that has been more thoroughly studied, namely the EU-relation of the countries.

4.2.2 EU-relation

In this section, the focus will be on the bilateral relationships between the EU and the member states. The relationship between the member states and the EU should have become more important as the EU has become more influential, hence “its policies have become increasingly more likely to affect the everyday lives of its citizens” (Karp & Bowler, 2006, p. 372). Therefore, country levels of public support have also been

shown to be explained by contextual-level factors related to the specific relationship between the member state and the EU regime (Hix & Hoyland, 2011; Armingeon & Ceka, 2014). First of all, it should however be noted that the last two decades have changed the composition of the EU area significantly, as the number of member states have more than been doubled since the Maastricht Treaty. In Table 4, a timeline for this enlargement process is presented.

Table 4. EU enlargement timeline.

Year of accession	Country
1952	Belgium, The Netherlands, Luxembourg, France, Italy, West Germany
1973	Denmark, Ireland, United Kingdom
1981	Greece
1986	Spain, Portugal
1990	East Germany
1995	Austria, Finland, Sweden
2004	Republic of Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia
2007	Bulgaria, Romania
2013	Croatia

According to the socialisation hypothesis, the European public should, over time, become more accustomed to the thought of being part of a greater European political structure. Hence, the general public within the member states should, over time, become socialised into Europeans, indirectly providing the EU with the more diffuse kind of support. Hence, the timespan of a member state's EU membership, in years, is regularly included in studies (Karp & Bowler, 2006; Braun &

Tausendpfund, 2014). However, the socialisation process should presumably not happen overnight, and as has been proven by Brexit, the success of the socialisation process is determined by other national contextual-level factors. As there are also 13 member states that have not been EU members for more than 15 years, the socialisation process is difficult to test within these cases. There are, however, other aspects related to the connection between the EU-relation and EU attitudes, within and between the member states, which can be both empirically measured and statistically tested.

The country levels of public support for the EU have for long been expected to be higher within so-called net recipient countries (Eichenberg & Dalton, 1993; Anderson & Kaltenthaler, 1996; Hooghe & Marks, 2005; Munoz et al., 2011). These are the countries that receive more funds from the EU-budget than they contribute, hence receiving direct economic benefits through EU membership. Another important element of the EU-relation is whether the country is one of the core-members of the EU area or not. The core-members, being the countries that are deeper integrated within the eurozone, to date comprise 19 countries. There is also an agreement within the literature that the creation of the eurozone has contributed to a multi-speed Europe, where the extent of European integration differ within the EU area. These two aspects of the EU-relation are important to account for in this type of study, as much of the country variations in public support within the literature have been traced to these factors. In the following sections the focus is on the effects of the EU-relation on public support.

European integration policies

As noted, much of the research focus with regard to the EU-relation has been related to the economic relationship between the member states and the EU. Karp and Bowler (2006, p. 382), for instance, showed that the public in net contributing member states were less likely to favour European integration policies intended to deepen European integration, but more likely to favour more EU enlargements. This is based on utilitarian considerations derived from the thinking that

taking in more member states might lessen the economic burden for the net contributors. This, however, seems to have changed over time, as Hobolt (2014), for instance, showed that the public within net contributing member states seem to have become more likely to support deeper integration but oppose further enlargements. This development is seen especially within the eurozone countries, which constitute the “EU-core”. Banducci et al. (2009) also showed that levels of public support for the single European currency were much higher within countries that were actually using the euro as a currency, albeit this was prior to the start of the global recession in 2008. Nevertheless, Hobolt and Wratil (2015) more recently presented similar results when they showed that the levels of public support for the single European currency remained stable within the eurozone area, while support declined within the non-eurozone countries during the period of 2005–2013.

The EU regime

Whether a member state is a net recipient or a contributor to the EU budget is also often included as an explanatory contextual-level factor in studies explaining variations in the levels of public support for the EU regime. Earlier findings suggests that the European public within net recipient member states should be more supportive of the EU because of the direct economic benefits provided by their membership, supporting the so-called utilitarian approach for explaining EU attitudes (Eichenberg & Dalton, 1993; Hooghe & Marks, 2005; Rohrschneider & Loveless, 2010; Kuhn & Stoeckel, 2014; Armingeon & Ceka, 2014). Bringer and Jolly (2005, p. 177) also established this connection empirically in a study and suggested that “citizens seems to recognize when their countries are benefiting economically from Europe, resulting in more positive feelings towards Brussels”. According to Baute et al. (2018, p. 3), concerns about the national financial contributions to the EU budget have become more prevalent within net contributing member states over time. These concerns are also likely to increase as the second largest net contributor to the EU

budget, the United Kingdom, is leaving the EU. It has also been shown that the public within the eurozone countries were more supportive of EU membership than the public within non-eurozone countries prior to the global recession (Karp & Bowler, 2006).⁴⁸ Hobolt (2014) also further showed that “these divisions between eurozone insiders and outsiders and creditor and debtor states are also reflected in public attitudes towards the future of European integration”.

The political influence within the EU regime institutions is also a factor that has been assumed to have gained in importance over time, especially as an effect of the EU enlargement processes during the 2000’s (Rohrschneider & Loveless, 2010). Especially the number of votes in the Council of the European Union has been proposed as an indicator to capture the institutional powers of a country within the EU machinery (Arnold et al., 2012; Hobolt, 2014, p. 673). The assumption is basically that if a country is able to “punch above its weight” and have a disproportionately high influence, it could result in higher levels of public support for the EU. Another contextual-level factor that over time has become almost forgotten within comparative studies of public support for the EU is the extent of intra-EU trade (Eichenberg & Dalton, 1993; 2007; McLaren, 2004; Belot & Guinaudeau, 2017), reflecting whether the country has a trade surplus within the EU area or not. It is, however, not within the scope of this thesis to also account for these two factors, and as there is presumably only a small proportion of the European public that actually knows about the kind of institutional power their country has in the Council of the European Union or whether the country exports more than it imports to other EU member states.

The European political community

Not much has, to this author’s knowledge, been written regarding the relationship between the EU-relation and public support for the

⁴⁸ The eurozone consists of the following 19 member states: Austria, Belgium, Republic of Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain.

European political community. Nevertheless, Polyakova and Fligstein (2016) showed that the public living inside the eurozone are more likely to identify as Europeans, hence providing some evidence to the argument of a socialisation process taking place within the eurozone. It is also possible to argue that the public within countries that are net contributors to the EU budget should also develop higher levels of public support for the European political community, as they are actually directly paying to be a part of it. In this way, they should perhaps become more affectively involved with the European political community.

Chapter summary

This section provides an overview regarding the main arguments presented in this chapter. The main purpose with the chapter was to present the main findings from the literature regarding how the varying country levels of public support for the three main system components of the EU has been explained. Through this literature review, it was possible to identify the four groups of national contextual-level factors that should be accounted for within the statistical part of this study. To summarise, the internal factors category includes two groups of factors related to the economic performance and the democratic culture of the member states, both groups being related to the performance of the countries. The external factors category includes two groups of factors related to the external pressure and the EU-relation of the member states. External pressure relates to demographic development, and the bilateral EU-relation directly relates to the relationship between the EU and the member states. The main argument for including this many national contextual-level factors is to show that the country-level variations towards the different system elements of the EU are, presumably, not explained by the same types of factors. This also needs to be accounted for in this thesis, as it constitutes one of the main contributions with this study. Hence, as Peters (1998, p. 109) suggested, researchers “should look at a variety of explanations in order to gain that more complete explanation”.

One of the main arguments presented in this chapter is that different types of EU attitudes are differently affected by the same national contextual-level factors. Indicating that one type of contextual development might predict higher levels of public support for one type of system element, while simultaneously predicting lower levels of support for another system element. What has become apparent through this literature review, however, is that the country-level variations towards all system elements of the EU should be somehow connected to the economic performances of the countries. The economic performances thereby seem to function as a national proxy from which all other types of EU evaluations are, to a varied extent, derived. The factors related to the democratic culture of the countries should, based on this overview, also explain some of the variations regarding public support for European integration policies, this especially between countries. The effects of external pressure factors related to immigration are more difficult to project, and hence their importance for explaining country-level variations might be limited. The EU-relation of countries should be important for explaining country-level variations towards the EU regime elements, as countries that benefit economically have been shown to be more supportive of EU membership.

The following chapter will present the comparative research method and design of the study, hence shifting focus to the more empirical section that will guide the remaining part of this thesis.

5. Research method

To be sure, one may engage in comparative work for any number of reasons; but the reason is control.

Sartori, 1991, p. 244

This chapter will focus and be structured around the comparative research method and design guiding the empirical part of the thesis. The chapter begins with a discussion regarding the comparative research design, presenting why a comparative design is deemed appropriate. The second part of the chapter presents and discusses the dependent variables used to measure EU attitudes and the survey data that will be used within the statistical analyses in order to compare member state levels of public support for the separate system elements of the EU. The third part of this chapter presents and discusses the independent variables and the contextual-level data that will be used within the statistical analyses to discover what makes it possible to connect contextual-level developments to country-level variations in public support. In the final part of the chapter, the statistical method is presented, from which the results for this thesis have been derived. The chapter concludes with a discussion regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this kind of research design, as well as a summary of the main arguments presented in the chapter.

5.1 Research design

In this subchapter, the focus is on the comparative research design guiding this thesis. The main research purpose of the thesis is to explain the country-level variations in public support for the EU from a system perspective, focusing on both the variations within and between the member states of the EU. The research design has been created based on the notion that it matters what the European public think about different system components of the EU that have been identified for this explicit research purpose. However, as Grande and Hutter (2016, p. 18) and Schimmelfennig (2010, p. 220) have suggested, the EU area

should still be considered a community of communities more than a community of individuals. Nugent (2016, p. 433) also argued that “like all federal and federal-like systems, the EU must retain the confidence of its constituent units (the member states)... It is a voluntary organisation, so retaining the confidence of members is vital. If member states were to feel their needs and preferences were not being reasonably accommodated within decision-making settings, they could become highly disruptive members and could even come to question the value of membership”. Following the logic that public opinion within a country should reflect a country’s stance on the different system elements of the EU, it is deemed empirically sufficient to focus on the aggregated country levels of public support.

It has also been suggested that EU attitudes are not associated with the same issues across the EU area (Otjes & Katsanidou, 2017), but by including a wide range of potential national contextual-level proxies (or cues) it should be possible to identify similarities within the EU area. The empirical assumption is that it is possible within this kind of research design to obtain empirically-based results regarding the development and persistence capabilities of the EU from a system perspective through this kind of macro-level approach. The purpose of this is to provide answers to the three guiding research questions of this thesis: (1) how have the member state levels of public support for the different system components of the EU as a political system developed over time? (2) To what extent can contextual-level factors explain the variations within countries in public support for the different system components of the EU as a political system? (3) To what extent can contextual-level factors explain the variations between countries in public support for the different system components of the EU as a political system? Since comparative approaches involve the development of theories to explain variations within a group of countries that are similar (Peters, 2013), it is also possible to use, test and develop theories regarding political systems through this kind of research design (Denk, 2002, p. 19).

As the research purpose with this thesis includes both a cross-sectional (between countries) and a longitudinal (within countries over time) research question, a comparative research design is the only adequate approach. According to Ragin (1987, p. 6), comparative knowledge “provides the key to understanding, explaining and interpreting,” hence, most comparative research focuses on macro-level phenomena, which are most usually defined at the country levels (Pennings et al., 1999, p. 49). As the general research aim of this thesis is to be able to generalise the findings in a system persistence and system development perspective, the sole focus of the empirical part of this thesis will also be on aggregated country-level data. However, as Peters (1998, p. 80) argued, “if comparative analysis is to be at all meaningful, then we must be sure that the same terms mean the same things in the different contexts within which the research is conducted”. Therefore, all measures used in this study are collected on the same basis and therefore directly comparable (Newton & van Deth, 2016, p. 383).

A country is, however, not a homogenous unit and there are significant variations within countries, both regarding public attitudes and contextual-level characteristics and developments that will not be controlled for in this thesis. Hence, when generalising a country as being generally supportive towards a system component of the EU, the statement is not necessarily valid for all parts of that country. As an example, there are significant differences regarding EU attitudes between the former West Germany and East Germany, as the general public in the former East Germany are significantly more negative towards the EU than the general public in the former West Germany.⁴⁹ Therefore, although there are significant regional cleavages within the countries that should be acknowledged and controlled for if possible, they do not fit into the scope of this thesis, and remain as areas for future research to consider. Furthermore, as Lijphart (1975) noted, the “traveling dilemma” of concepts is also an important aspect to consider

⁴⁹ Within the Eurobarometer survey data, they also still differ between respondents from the former West Germany and the former East Germany.

within the comparative design of this thesis. However, as all of the 28 member states share similar kinds of political, social and economic systems, there are no significant restrictions in the use of independent variables. Hence, the national contextual-level data regarding the 28 cases should be both reliable and valid for macro-level comparisons.

As the main research interest lies in explaining the variations in public support within the EU area, it is also natural to include all of the current 28 member states of the EU within the empirical part of this study. These 28 countries together constitute the main units of observation, and the aggregated member state levels of public support for the different system elements of the EU within these 28 countries constitute the units of analysis. There was also a possibility of including a number of non-EU countries within this study, however the main research puzzle would then have to be changed. Hence, the focus is only on explaining the current, not including possible future, member state levels of public support. Therefore, the selection criteria is that the country in question needs to have been a member state of the EU during the period of 2004–2017. This is also due to data availability, as there is survey data available for all of the 28 countries from 2004 and onwards (this includes also Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia that became member states of the EU later than 2004). It is also crucial to include the post-2004 member states in this study, as it is insufficient to study country levels of public support for the EU and exclude almost half of the current member states. However, if the empirical part of this study would have been limited to include only the EU 15 member states, a slightly longer longitudinal perspective would have been possible. Hence, an even more longitudinal approach is sacrificed for the sake of the possibility of widening the number of member states included in the study, thereby making the results presented in this thesis more relevant for the current status of the EU.

Another important aspect that needs to be accounted for are the effects of economic crises (the global recession 2008, the Eurocrisis 2010) on public support, because of the significant effects these crises have been shown to have had on public support for some of the system

elements of the EU (Roth et al., 2011; Armingeon & Ceka, 2014). Therefore, 2004 constitutes a valid starting point for this study's analytical part. If the study had been limited to survey data from one point in time, there would have been a possibility to dwell deeper into that specific point in time, but that would also have limited the empirical part to a cross-national analysis of public support. However, by including longitudinal data, it becomes possible to also account for the differences within countries over time. Furthermore, it will also be possible to test whether the relationships between variables are more significant within countries than across countries. According to Blatter and Blumes (2008) definition, this study should resemble a co-vibrational approach, because it could be expected that this covariance should be visible over time and space. As previously mentioned, comparative approaches also involve the development of theories to explain variations within a group of countries that are similar (Peters, 2013), and this study could be broadly defined as a theory-developing study. In the following subchapter, the dependent variables are presented more thoroughly.

5.2 Dependent variables

Even if one knows the countries of interest, "the question remains of how to translate it into proper terms for empirical research" (Pennings et al., 1999, p. 43). In this subchapter, the theoretical guidelines from the literature are operationalised to enable the measurement of member state levels of public support for the system components of importance for the system persistence and development capabilities of the EU. As the country levels of a wide range of EU attitudes function as a measurement of public support for the EU within the EU area in this study, from a system perspective, it is apparent that a wide set of indicators is needed to measure the different kinds of public support (Weatherford, 1992, p. 149).⁵⁰ Furthermore, many attempts to adapt

⁵⁰ Democratic legitimacy in this context is defined as the idea that the existing political system of the EU is correct according to the European public, derived from Schmitt and Thomassen (1999, p. 9).

Easton's systems support theory have been conducted by scholars interested in public attitudes towards different aspects of the EU. However, Lubbers (2008) suggested that empirical studies of system support should account, at least, for difference between attitudes towards political, utilitarian and identity dimensions, and a number of studies have also shown that the European public is conflicted when asked to evaluate different system elements of the EU (Stoeckel, 2012; De Vries, 2013; De Vries & Steenbergen, 2013). Basically because the European public might be rejecting some aspects, while simultaneously approving other aspects of the EU (Hobolt, 2014, p. 678; De Vries, 2018, p. 40).

On the other hand, Boomgaarden et al. (2011) identified five dimensions of EU attitudes. (1) The first dimension represents emotional responses, representing the feelings of fear and threat by the EU. (2) The second refers to the sense of mutual European identification within the EU. (3) The third relates to the performance and the democratic and financial function of the EU regime institutions. (4) The fourth relates to general support for and benefit evaluations of the EU. (5) The fifth refers to strengthening of the EU through further European integration. Their study showed that these five attitudinal dimensions were related, while simultaneously reflecting attitudes towards distinct dimensions of the EU. However, they also argued that public evaluations of these dimensions were not of equal importance. One clear limitation with their study was that it only included a sample from the Netherlands, but the existence of different attitudinal dimensions also within the rest of Europe has also been confirmed more recently by De Vreese, Azrout and Boomgaarden (2018). At the individual level, attitudes reflecting support, or opposition, towards different elements of the EU are therefore rarely absolute (Taggart, 1998, p. 365), and this should become even more apparent at the macro-level. As many scholars therefore argue, it is crucial to clearly distinguish in a system support study between the different system elements of the EU that are important from a system persistence perspective, towards which public attitudes reflecting public support are primarily directed, as well as the

two different types of public support; specific and diffuse. This is in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding and picture of the varying levels of EU attitudes, which are of importance from both a system persistence and development perspective (Niedermayer & Westle, 1995; Norris, 1999; Boomgaarden et al., 2011; Hobolt & Brouard, 2011; De Wilde & Trenz, 2012).

In Easton's (1965) original framework, he identified three system components towards which public attitudes are primarily directed: the political authorities, the regime and the political community. Norris (2011), based on Easton, developed this further into constituting five evaluable system important elements within a political system of system importance for the long-term system persistence capabilities of the political system: 1) political community, 2) regime principles, 3) regime processes, 4) regime institutions and 5) political authorities. Thereby choosing to divide Easton's regime component further into three separate elements towards which public attitudes are primarily directed. Norris (2011, p. 23) argued that the regime constitutes the overarching constitutional arrangements, reflecting both formal and informal aspects of the regime, and a system support model should be able to account for these differences. The political community constitutes the most important element within system support theory and public attitudes directed towards the political community reflect the most diffuse kind of support, usually measured by indicators of a shared sense of belonging to, and identification with, the political community (Kaina, 2006, p. 118). For reasons earlier discussed within this study, the political authorities are not included as a system important element within this study's operational framework. Instead three types of European integration policies have been included, as well as two kinds of attitudes directed towards the European political community. How the theoretical guidelines from the system support theory have been adapted in order to analyse the EU from a system perspective in this thesis are summarised in Figure 6 (see page 172).

Comp.	System elements	Survey measures and operational indicators
The Europ. poli. com.	Attachment (most diffuse)	The emergence of public feelings of a shared sense of belonging to, and attachment with, the EU within the European political community.
	Identification	The emergence of mutual European identification within the European political community.
The EU regime	Principles	Public support for the liberal European values and principles upon which the EU regime is built, including public support for EU membership.
	Processes	Public approval of the processes within the EU regime through which the political decisions at the EU regime level are being made.
	Institutions	Trust in the political institutions of the EU regime responsible for the governing of the EU area.
European integration policies	Securing	Public approval of already implemented European integration policies such as the single European currency, the euro.
	Deepening	Public support for suggested European integration policies that would contribute to the deepening of European integration within the EU area.
	Widening (most specific)	Public support for the prospect of future EU enlargement, through the approval of EU-memberships to more countries.

Figure 6. Conceptualisation of the EU as a political system into three main system components (adapted model to the EU context by the author from Norris (2011) original conceptualisation).

Following Norris' interpretation of the system support concept as something that should be perceived as ranging on the support continuum from the most specific to the most diffuse element of a political system, the different system elements of the EU are here categorised according to the same logic. To recap, the specific kind of support is perceived as being the result of more rational evaluations of concrete interests and cost-benefit analyses, while the diffuse kind of support is based on more affective judgements (Niedermayer & Westle, 1995, p. 48). Simultaneously, this support continuum should also be perceived as ranging from the least important (most specific) to the most important (most diffuse) system element of the EU from a system

perspective. This categorisation should not be regarded as something absolute, but perceived more as a way of approaching the unique character of the EU, from a system perspective, empirically, while simultaneously making it possible to relate the findings to a larger system persistence and development perspective of a supranational political system. The three main system important components, European integration policies, the EU regime and the European political community, have been thoroughly discussed in chapter three, as has the respective evaluable elements of these main system components. However, this categorisation presented in Figure 6 needs to be more thoroughly presented.

Following Niedermayer and Westle (1995), European integration policies have been included as a main system component within the conceptual framework of this thesis. Within this study, the system component of *European integration policies* includes public attitudes towards the *widening, deepening* and *securing* of European integration policies, elements directly related to the development of the EU and indirectly also related to the system persistence capabilities of the EU. The least important element of the European integration policies component, and also according to the whole conceptualisation of the EU as a political system, relates to the widening of the EU area. The second element relates to the deepening of European integration within specific policy areas. The third element relates to the securing of already implemented, or continuing, European integration within a policy-area. The main argument for dividing the European integration policies component into three separate elements is because there are presumably different contextual-level mechanisms determining the variations in public attitudes towards these three elements. Hence, the underlying reasons for the public supporting a specific policy issue related to European integration varies across member states. This is because a proposed policy that might provide more benefits to some, might simultaneously provide more costs to the public within other member states. As such, public attitudes towards this element are not

based on affective consideration, but more directly determined by cost-benefit analyses, indicating the more specific kind of support.

What the European public think about these European integration policies, however, is important from a system development perspective also in the short term, as the public can indirectly force the elected national-level politicians to approve or oppose European integration policies. From a system persistence perspective, public attitudes towards European integration policies mainly matter for the long-term perspective, as declining levels of public support for European integration policies should also start affecting the levels of public support for the EU regime over time. In the empirical part of this study, public support for the widening of the EU area will be measured by indicators reflecting attitudes towards future enlargement (Hobolt, 2014), public support for the deepening will be measured by indicators reflecting attitudes towards a common European defence policy (Schoen, 2008) and public support for the securing will be measured by attitudes towards the single European currency (Banducci et al., 2009; Hobolt & Wrátil, 2015; Roth et al., 2016).

The *EU regime* component, following Norris (1999; 2011), has been further divided into three directly EU regime related elements: the *EU regime institutions*, *EU regime processes* and *EU regime principles*. Hence, public attitudes related to these system elements are used to measure the levels of public support for the EU regime. Starting with the EU regime institutions, Norris and others (Armingeon & Ceka, 2014) have argued that public support can be measured by the levels of trust in the EU regime institutions. Hence, the levels of public support are measured by indicators reflecting the levels of trust in the specific political institutions responsible for governing within the EU regime. The European public does not tend to differentiate widely between the different political institutions of the EU regime, indicating that if the levels of trust towards the European Parliament (EP) are at a high level, it is very likely that the levels of trust in the European Commission (EC) and the European Central Bank (ECB) are at a similar level. This largely creates congruence in the levels of trust between the different EU

regime institutions. Here, it is worth noting that the EP is the only political organ at the supranational level in the world with directly-elected national representatives. However, for a long time elections to the European Parliament have been perceived as second-order elections (Reif & Schmitt, 1980) and turnout during elections has been in, almost, constant decline since 1979. Nevertheless, the EP is the political institution at the EU regime level that the European public has a direct say in, as they are able to choose the composition of it. Hence, it is of vital importance that the EP is perceived as being democratically legitimate as a political institution. Member state levels of trust in the EP will therefore be used as a reflection of public attitudes towards the EU regime institutions (Roth et al., 2011; Munoz et al., 2011; Serricchio et al., 2013; Dotti Sani & Magistro, 2016).

The levels of public support for the EU regime processes are measured by indicators reflecting public satisfaction with the processes of governing within the EU regime (Rohrschneider, 2002; Hobolt, 2012; De Vries, 2018). Public support for the regime processes relates to evaluations of how democracy works at the European level, even though Norris (1999, p. 75) also noted that it is not an “ideal performance indicator”. Still, Norris proposed that questions regarding the functioning of EU democracy could be used to measure public attitudes towards the regime processes at the European level. In addition, the levels of public support for the EU regime principles are measured by indicators reflecting public attitudes towards the principles upon which the EU regime has been built. Norris (1999) has also suggested, in a study regarding public support for the EU regime, that public support for the EU regime principles could be measured by public attitudes towards European unification, EU membership and European co-operation, because these values lie at the core of the European integration project. Therefore, the levels of public support for the EU regime principles are reflected by public attitudes towards the basic guiding principles of European integration, such as adherence to the “four freedoms” on which the EU was founded as well as more direct public support for EU membership that has made these freedoms

possible.⁵¹ Public support for the EU regime principles also reflects the most diffuse kind of support for the EU regime, as sufficient levels of public support for the EU regime principles should be considered essential from a system persistence perspective. Public support for the EU regime principles will therefore be measured by the country levels of support for their country's EU membership (Anderson, 1998; Garry & Tilley, 2009; Arnold et al., 2012).

The *European political community* is defined as the geographical area over which the EU regime has jurisdiction, hence encompassing the geographical jurisdiction of all of the current 28 member states of the EU regime. Public attitudes related to this system component are, theoretically, used to measure the levels of public support for it, operationalised through indicators of mutual European identification and EU attachment (Börzel & Risse, 2018; Polyakova & Fligstein, 2016). These indicators are operationalised to reflect public attitudes towards both the territorial and affective aspects of the European political community (Niedermayer & Westle, 1995). The levels of public support for the European political community are the most difficult to empirically measure, as it could be regarded as quite misleading to translate the member state levels of European identification, for example, directly as corresponding to the member state levels of public support for the European political community. Nevertheless, according to system support theory, mutual identification within the political community created by the regime should function as a reserve of public support that the regime is able to rely on during periods of system pressure (Easton, 1965). Identity considerations have also been shown within the EU literature to alter EU attitudes and could, hence, be regarded as constituting something resembling the most diffuse kind of support for a European political community (Carey, 2002; Hooghe & Marks, 2004). Therefore, at least theoretically, from a long-term system persistence perspective, public attitudes towards the European political community constitute the most important kind of support, as they are

⁵¹ This relates to the free movement of goods, services, capital and labour within the EU area.

the most direct indicators of diffuse support for the EU from a system perspective. Hence, public attitudes towards the European political community reflect the most important kinds of public support for the EU from a long-term system persistence perspective (Wessels, 2007).

In the Eastonian sense (1975, p. 444), the levels of public support for the European political community should be expected to remain relatively stable within the member states. However, longer periods of dissatisfaction with European integration policies and the EU regime system elements should, over time, also start to affect the levels of public support for the European political community. On the other hand, according to socialisation theory, the European public should also, over time, become increasingly socialised into identifying with Europe (Inglehart, 1967). In the broadest terms of system support theory, the theoretical assumption is that higher country levels of mutual European identification and EU attachment within the European political community should provide the EU, as a political system, with enough input-legitimacy so that the EU will be able to withstand future crises (Scharpf, 1999).

Longer periods of high levels of public support for European integration policies and the EU regime elements should therefore, over time, also transfer into higher levels of mutual European identification and EU attachment within the European political community. Therefore, as Schmitt and Thomassen (1999, p. 261) argued, “successful EU policies might in turn be expected to strengthen feelings of identification with Europe”. High levels of public support towards the European political community should thereby provide the EU with a reservoir of public support that the EU can rely on during longer periods of system stress, without the EU’s legitimacy being questioned. After identifying the main elements of system importance for the EU from a system perspective, it is also necessary to identify the more concrete attitudinal indicators in the survey data that could be used to reflect member state levels of public support for these different system elements before starting to focus on the member state levels and variations in public support.

Even though this thesis focuses on national contextual-level factors relation to EU attitudes, something more needs to be said about the comprehensive research on individual-level determinants of EU attitudes. This is especially important since much of the research has had a tendency to mix individual level, contextual level as well as EU-related factors within empirical analyses, leading to mixed results depending on the operationalisation of the concept of public support for the EU. As previously mentioned, three broad theories have been used to explain why individuals develop certain types of attitudes towards the EU: the utilitarian, affective and cue-taking/proxy approaches. Within similar studies, the specific/utilitarian and diffuse/affective concepts have been used almost synonymously (Niedermayer & Westle, 1995), and as Boomgaarden et al. (2011, p. 244) also noted, there is an “evident overlap” between the terms of specific and utilitarian support and the terms of diffuse and affective support. The utilitarian approach explains individual attitudes towards the EU based on an individual cost-benefit analysis, largely based on economic rationality and utilitarian considerations, which has functioned over time as the primarily explanation as to why an individual chooses to exhibit positive or negative attitudes towards the EU (Hobolt, 2014, p. 666). The utilitarian approach is theoretically related to what Easton referred to as specific support, which is the kind of support that varies, with individual demands being fulfilled and where the fulfilment of demands functions as a *quid pro quo* for support (Easton, 1965, p. 268).

Hence, it has also been argued that individuals who assess their individual economic conditions more positively are more likely to support the EU (Dotti Sani & Magistro, 2016, p. 4). The argument goes that those who are to benefit personally from their countries’ EU membership are more positive towards the EU based on economic rational thinking (Gabel, 1998). This is because citizens at the individual level are not expected to support the EU and/or European integration without perceived personal gains, even though the nation as a whole would presumably be expected to benefit from more European integration (Gabel & Palmer, 1995, p. 13; Garry & Tilley, 2009, p. 362).

Those who are usually perceived to benefit the most from European integration are the highly skilled and educated, who can take advantage of the free movement of labour and the open market provided by their countries' EU membership (Hooghe & Marks, 2005; Hakhverdian, van Elsas, van der Brug & Kuhn, 2013). The so-called "winners of globalisation" have therefore been shown to traditionally also vote for political parties with a pro-EU agenda (Polyakova & Fligstein, 2016, p. 64; Hobolt & De Vries, 2016b, p. 3). Hobolt (2016) also suggests that the divide between the winners and losers of globalisation were one of the drivers for the voter choice during the Brexit referendum, while Goodwin and Heath (2016) have shown that public support for Brexit was stronger in areas with a lower-skilled and less-educated population.

As Hooghe and Marks (2004, p. 416) further noted, European "citizens who feel confident about the economic future – personally and for their country – are likely to regard European integration in a positive light, while those who are fearful will lean towards Euroscepticism". The so-called "losers of globalisation," those that are more likely to lose their jobs when their factory closes or moves to another country, and do not have enough education and/or are too low-skilled to take advantage of the opportunities provided by a common European market, have been shown to be more negative towards the EU. The argument goes that low-educated citizens cannot benefit from the opportunities created through European integration to the same extent, and they are also generally more dependent on national welfare services (Kuhn & Stoeckel, 2014, p. 628). The low-educated are therefore naturally more likely to also develop Eurosceptic attitudes and have been shown to be more likely to also cast a vote for a more Eurosceptic political party during national elections (Lubbers & Scheepers, 2010; Werts et al., 2012). Eurosceptic attitudes at the individual level have also been shown to correlate with lower levels of trust in national political institutions (Roth et al., 2011), higher levels of scepticism towards immigrants (Azrout, van Spanje & De Vreese, 2010; Baur et al.,

2016; Bakker & De Vreese, 2016) and more negative feelings towards minorities (McLaren, 2002).

However, as the EU has evolved over time into a more state-like political entity, indicators of the more diffuse kind of support for the EU have also become more emphasised within studies (Hooghe & Marks, 2008; Polyakova, 2016). The affective/identity approach states that individual-level attitudes towards the EU are also derived from individual level considerations related to an evaluation of the nation state, attachment to Europe and perceptions of people from other countries and cultures (Hooghe & Marks, 2008). The assumption derived from the literature is therefore that individuals identifying as Europeans are more likely to support European integration than those who identify only as their national group (Citrin & Sides, 2004; Hooghe & Marks, 2004; Serricchio et al., 2013; Mitchell, 2014). There is also evidence that there is a strong connection at the individual level between positive attitudes towards the euro and identifying as a European (Mitchell, 2014), and the likelihood of a positive evaluation of the EU has also been proven to be closely connected to one's individual human capital (Gabel & Palmer, 1995; Anderson & Reichert, 1995).

Research focusing on the development of a shared European identity therefore explains individual support for the EU by focusing on identity-formation at the supranational European level, e.g. European identification. That is what Easton would refer to as the development of the more diffuse kind of support for the EU. The opposite, implying exclusive national identification, has also been shown to be a strong predictor of Eurosceptic attitudes on the individual level (Serricchio et al., 2013). The cue-taking approach explains individual-level attitudes towards the EU as directly related to contextual developments and circumstances, as individuals use contextual factors as a proxy for forming EU attitudes, of which they usually have limited knowledge (Anderson, 1998). National contextual-level factors have also been shown to explain more individual level variations in attitudes towards European integration

than individual-level factors (Brinegar & Jolly, 2005). In the following section the survey data used for obtaining comparable indicators of public support is presented.

5.2.1 Data and categorisation

In this section the survey data used to operationalise member state levels of public support for the EU are presented. There are two options for researchers interested in measuring and explaining variations in the member state levels of public support for the EU longitudinally, while lacking the capacity or resources to conduct a survey of their own. A researcher can either decide to use the survey data provided by the European Social Surveys (ESS) or use the survey data provided by Eurobarometer (EB). ESS has compiled survey data every two years from 2002 onwards, and includes a wide set of questions reflecting attitudes towards different elements of the EU. However, the countries included in the data have varied between the surveys, and so have the questions that have been included, making it difficult to use the ESS survey data for this kind of longitudinal research approach.

On the other hand, the public opinion surveys provided by the EB are also conducted regularly on behalf of the European Commission, and for researchers interested in public attitudes from a large sample of EU countries, the EB surveys have over time become more or less considered as “the only adequate data source” (Braun & Tausendpfund, 2014, p. 243). During the last four decades, the EB has therefore naturally become a key source within comparative studies related to EU attitudes (Cram, 2012, p. 73). The so-called Standard EB surveys have been conducted biannually, more or less regularly, since 1973, and the sample of each survey includes 1000 respondents per member state, with the survey data gathered through face-to-face interviews.⁵²

⁵² With a few exceptions, as the EB sample from Malta, Republic of Cyprus and Luxembourg only includes 500 respondents per survey, and the survey sample from the United Kingdom and Germany, on the other hand, includes 1500 respondents each.

The EB survey data is provided by the European Commission data archive, which is available for researchers through the *GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences* and the surveys are conducted and presented by the European Commission’s Directorate-General Communication. According to Hobolt and De Vries (2016a, p. 417), one “distinct advantage” with using Eurobarometer data is that it allows for both cross-country and longitudinal studies regarding both policy and regime support. In addition, it is possible to use attitudinal indicators of public support for the European political community for similar purposes. The natural choice for this study is therefore to utilise the EB data available for measuring and comparing member state levels of public support, in line with many of the studies conducted with a similar research purpose.

However, many of the survey questions, as with the ESS, unfortunately change from survey to survey and EB has also been widely criticised for significant empirical shortcomings (Bruter, 2003; Cram, 2012; Mitchell, 2016). It is also important to consider that the implications of the survey questions have changed over time, as the EU has also developed extensively, when conducting longitudinal research (Eichenberg & Dalton, 2007, p. 132). By using the survey data provided by EB, it nevertheless becomes empirically possible to produce a comprehensive picture regarding the member state level developments regarding public support towards elements within the three main system important components of the EU. However, as the EU in 2004 transformed from including 15 to including 25 member states, survey data for the whole EU area is only available from 2004 onwards. Hence, 2004 will constitute the point of departure for the empirical analyses as well as for the descriptive overview.⁵³ During the period of 2004–2017, a total of 94 different EB surveys have been conducted, and of these 28 have been so-called “Standard Eurobarometer” surveys, focusing on public attitudes towards different aspects of the EU. It is therefore primarily survey data from the “Standard Eurobarometer” surveys that

⁵³ EB surveys from 2004 also include the member states joining later after 2004; Bulgaria (2007), Romania (2007) and Croatia (2013).

will be used within this study, although that has not been possible for all of the survey items of interest and, hence, also other EB surveys have been used to gather data for the empirical analyses.⁵⁴ The research approach picks the survey data that is the most appropriate, and for this research approach, the EB surveys are basically the only possible survey data available, taking everything into consideration.⁵⁵ In short, EB survey data will basically be used because “these constitute the only data source that allows for cross-national and longitudinal comparisons” (Hobolt & De Vries, 2016a, p. 416).⁵⁶

Since operationalising means the translation of theoretical concepts into travelling concepts (Pennings et al., 1999, p. 64), this study is therefore dependent on indicators of public support that have been included regularly over time, as well as across countries, in order to study the development of public support both longitudinally and cross-sectionally. Based on the survey items that have been used by other researchers for similar purposes, as well as on the interpretation by this author, the most relevant survey items were chosen to be included within the statistical analyses. However, some of the survey items previously presented provided the respondents with the possibility of grading their answers (very positive, fairly positive etc.) while some items only gave the respondents the possibility of answering “for”/“against” or “tend to trust”/“tend not to trust” (although also including the possibility of answering don’t know). As some of the survey items included also a “neutral” option, a higher proportion of positive or negative answers could be expected within categories that do not provide the option of being neutral. As Niedermayer (1995, p.

⁵⁴ Primarily in that sense that also other EB surveys have been included in order to measure public support for the EU regime principles and the European political community. Survey items reflecting EU attitudes have also been included sporadically within the so-called “Special Eurobarometer”-surveys (the surveys making up the rest of the total of 94 unique EB-surveys conducted during this period), and hence it is possible to obtain more time points for some of the public support indicators if also including these surveys when necessary.

⁵⁵ The ESS does not include samples from all EU member states in their surveys.

⁵⁶ The EB surveys have been conducted on behalf of the European Commission since 1973.

56) argued, “we have to be very careful about comparing the answers to questions which vary in the way they treat neutral responses”. Also, according to Niedermayer (1995, p. 56), “the comparability of the answers to questions with and without a neutral option is improved” by removing the “neutral” and “do not know” answers. For this research approach, it is enough to know whether the respondents are more positive than negative, or vice-versa, towards the element that is being evaluated, and the empirical focus here will be on the aggregated national amount of positive responses (Inglehart & Rabier, 1978; Handley, 1981).⁵⁷ Hence, to be able to compare public evaluations of the different system elements, all survey items have hence been recoded into dichotomous variables, indicating an “EU positive” option and an “EU negative” option, with the “don’t know” answers coded as “system missing”. Hence, using a Sartorian (1970) “either or” instead of the “more or less” logic.

As Peters (2013, p. 33) noted, it is good to have a dependent variable that varies extensively, and the intention is to use and analyse a number of dependent variables within the empirical part of this study. Dogan (1994) stated that with few exceptions, country comparisons use national averages. Over time this has changed, however, thanks to analytical developments, but the basis for generalising national level results is still derived from analysing national averages. Hence, national averages will be used for comparing and explaining the levels of public support within and between the 28 EU member states. Hence, when a survey item has been included by the EB more than once during a year, a mean value based on the aggregated country-level values from these surveys have been computed. Van der Meer (2010, p. 518) further argued, that in order to understand changes in one country, it is important to place that country into a broader perspective, which primarily means that it is essentially important to identify comparable indicators that could be used to measure country levels of EU attitudes

⁵⁷ Previously the concept of “net support” has also been used within similar studies, and the comparative number has been derived through subtracting the proportion of negative answers from the proportion of positive answers (Niedermayer, 1995).

within the EU area. In order to obtain the most longitudinal perspective possible, the following eight attitudinal variables will be included in the statistical analyses in order to measure public attitudes towards these eight system elements. The survey items included are summarised in Table 5.⁵⁸

Table 5. Dependent variables included in the statistical analyses.

	System elements	Variables	Times included in EB surveys, post 2004 (EU-28)
Comm unity	Attachment	EU attachment	12 (2006, 2007, 2012-2017)
	Identification	European identification	17 (2004, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2012-2017)
	Principles	Support for country's EU membership	20 (2004-2017)
Regime	Processes	Satisfaction with EU democracy	21 (2004-2007, 2009-2017)
	Institutions	Trust in the European Parliament	28 (2004-2017)
	Securing	Support for a common European single currency, the euro	29 (2004-2017)
Policies	Deepening	Support for a common European defence policy	25 (2004-2017)
	Widening	Support for future EU enlargement	27 (2004-2017)

Summary

This section has presented this study's comparative research design and operational data for the dependent variable(s). One of the main arguments in this section has been that it is crucial to include a maximum number of countries in order to make larger statements

⁵⁸ See Appendix Table 2 page 311 for summary and coding of the dependent variables.

regarding development and system persistence capabilities of the EU, and hence all of the 28 member states are to be included within the empirical part of this thesis. This even though Romania (2007), Bulgaria (2007) and Croatia (2013) have not been members of the EU during this whole period. Furthermore, as there are a great number of important events that have occurred within the EU area during the period of 2004–2017, including two major economic crises as well as a migration crisis, it is also crucial to analyse whether the empirical findings also hold over time. Hence, the longitudinal perspective is of vital relevance for the validity of the analytical results. As Dogan (1994) also suggested, single indicators of public attitudes are often misleading when measuring complex phenomena, and hence a wide range of attitudinal indicators have been included in order to account for the multidimensional character of the EU from a system perspective. In the following section, the independent variables, i.e. the national contextual-level factors, to be included in the analytical part are presented and categorised.

5.3 Independent variables

The national contextual-level factors used within the literature for explaining country-level variations in public support have been broadly divided into two main categories, consisting of internal and external factors. Internal factors are further categorised into two groups of contextual-level factors related to the a) economic performance and the b) democratic culture within the countries. Both groups including performance related factors. External factors, on the other hand, are further categorised into two groups of contextual-level factors related to c) the impact of changing demographics and immigration and d) the country-specific relations to the EU. What Lijphart (1975) called the “traveling dilemma” and Sartori (1991) “conceptual stretching,” implying that the same concepts might indicate different things in different settings, is also an aspect that has been considered when choosing which types of contextual-level factors to include within this study. However, as all of the 28 cases share similar kinds of political,

social and economic systems, characteristics of so-called liberal democracies, there are not any significant restrictions regarding the comparability of the independent variables. According to the literature overview in chapter four, there are a wide range of contextual-level factors that presumably could help explain, at least to some extent, country-level variations in public support for, all together, eight system elements of the EU.

The general argument behind including these contextual-level factors as explanatory variables in the statistical model is based on the widespread assumption that EU citizens are not particularly well aware about what is going within the EU. As Anderson (1998, p. 574–575) argued, that “given the generally low levels of awareness about the EU among citizens of the member states, attitudes about the advantages and disadvantages of integration may essentially reflect other, more firmly held and extensively developed political beliefs that are the result of citizens’ experiences with domestic political reality”. Even though both the public interest and knowledge about the EU has grown as the EU has evolved, “public opinion is still characterized by a high degree of uncertainty” (Hobolt & De Vries, 2016a, p. 416). Thereby, EU attitudes could still be expected to be affected and formed by national level developments, which the EU citizens should be more aware of.

Therefore it is clear that different types of contextual-level factors are needed to explain different types of public support. Hence, the statistical effect of all these contextual-level factors on the separate indicators of public support will be tested stepwise in the statistical analyses presented in chapter six. The number of independent contextual-level variables have also been limited to obtain more robust results, as too many independent variables might lead to almost uninterpretable findings because of the presumed multicollinearity issues associated with including similar contextual-level factors in statistical models. This is especially a factor to consider within statistical models containing more analytical levels. Nevertheless, most studies include a number of contextual-level factors to control and account for the effects other contextual-level factors might have on the

main independent variable. For this purpose, all together, eight contextual-level factors have been chosen for the empirical part of this thesis.

Starting with the category of internal level factors and indicators related to the macroeconomic performance of the countries, there have been a large number of indicators used within similar studies to measure the economic performance of countries. This is because there is a wide range of different measurements of economic performance available for researchers, and hence there is always a possibility of finding a connection that has not been established within the literature by, simply, changing the indicators. Nevertheless, there are a number of indicators that have become more or less regularly included within similar studies, although not in the same model, for reasons previously mentioned. The most usually included have been the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) annual growth rate⁵⁹, GDP per capita⁶⁰, annual unemployment rate⁶¹, annual inflation rate⁶² and annual national debt rate⁶³. As such, there were many possible indicators that could have been used to measure the economic performance of the countries included. However, from a longitudinal perspective, many of these are similar in character, and for the purpose of narrowing it down, the most sufficient for this particular research approach were chosen to be included; the national debt level and the unemployment level. The

⁵⁹ GDP growth rate has been included in studies by Karp and Bowler (2006), Hobolt (2014), Braun and Tausendpfund (2014), Lubbers and Scheepers (2010), Eichenberg and Dalton (1993; 2007), Roth et al. (2011), Hartevelde et al. (2013), Kuhn and Stoeckel (2014), Gabel and Whitten (1997), Serrichio et al. (2013) and Dotti Sani and Magistro (2016).

⁶⁰ GDP per capita has been included in studies by Anderson and Kaltenthaler (1996), Sanchez-Cuenca (2000), Polyakova and Fligstein (2016), Rohrschneider and Loveless (2010), Duch and Taylor (1997) and Kuhn and Stoeckel (2014).

⁶¹ Unemployment rates have been included in studies by Eichenberg and Dalton (2007), Polyakova & Fligstein (2016), Lubbers and Scheepers (2010), Eichenberg and Dalton (1993, 2007), Roth et al. (2011), Duch and Taylor (1997), Gabel and Whitten (1997), Serrichio et al. (2013) and Dotti Sani and Magistro (2016).

⁶² Inflation rates have been included in studies by Eichenberg and Dalton (1993; 2007), Lubbers and Scheepers (2010), Roth et al. (2011), Duch and Taylor (1997), Gabel and Whitten (1997) and Serrichio et al. (2013).

⁶³ National debt rates have been included in studies by Armingeon and Ceka (2014), Polyakova and Fligstein (2016) and Roth et al. (2011).

national debt level reflects the more long-term economic performance of a country, as does GDP per capita. The unemployment level relates more directly to the short-term economic performance of a country, as does GDP growth rates. Hence, the argument is that national debt and unemployment levels should function as sufficient contextual-level proxies for both the short- and long-term economic performance of the countries, which the public might use when they are asked to form their opinions about the EU.

Regarding the democratic culture group, this includes indicators related to the institutional performance and characteristics of the countries. A wide range of contextual-level factors have been used within similar studies that could be categorised within this category, such as welfare spending⁶⁴, corruption levels⁶⁵, political freedom⁶⁶, human development⁶⁷, governance quality⁶⁸ and economic inequality⁶⁹. As was the case with the economic performance indicators, many of these are also similar in character, both longitudinally and cross-sectionally, and for that purpose only two of these were chosen to be included in the empirical part of the thesis. These are corruption and economic inequality. Corruption levels are closely related both longitudinally and cross-sectionally to the governance quality, human development and political freedom measurements, as these broadly can be argued to constitute similar measurements of the same thing. Hence, if a country is becoming more corrupt over time, there is a large possibility that the country levels of political freedom, human

⁶⁴ Welfare spending as a percentage of national budget has been included in studies by Sanchez-Cuenca (2000), Armingeon and Ceka (2013), Arnold et al. (2012), Rohrschneider and Loveless (2010) and Brinegar and Jolly (2005).

⁶⁵ Corruption levels have been included in studies by Sanchez-Cuenca (2000), Hartevelde et al. (2013), Serrichio et al. (2013) and Arnold et al. (2012).

⁶⁶ Political freedom levels, measured by the Freedom House Index, have been included in a study by Karp and Bowler (2006).

⁶⁷ Human development levels, measured by the Human Development Index, have been included in a study by Mungiu-Pippidi (2015).

⁶⁸ Governance quality, measured by the World Bank's Governance Effectiveness Index, has been included in a study by Rohrschneider and Loveless (2010).

⁶⁹ Economic equality, measured by the GINI index, has been included in a study by Simpson and Loveless (2017).

development and governance quality also decline. Country levels of institutional quality will also be measured by the levels of income inequality within countries, as after the economic crises there is a greater number of people that “feel themselves to be at a heightened risk of economic adversity owing to the rising inequality and economic problems in both their country and the EU” (Simpson & Loveless, 2017, p. 1069).

Continuing with the external factors. The group labelled external pressure is perhaps the most difficult to operationalise in order to enable cross-sectional comparisons within the EU area, as the indicators included in this group have not been used very often within similar studies. In short, the mechanism that this group of factors tries to account for is how the demographic developments and characteristics are connected to the country-level variations in public support. The relevance of developments related to immigration should, especially in the post migration crisis era, become of vital concern, as the heavy influx of refugees since 2015 has been considered to have severely threatened the legitimacy of the EU (Otjes & Katsanidou, 2017). Still, it is challenging to produce comparable measurements that are able to account for the statistical effects of immigration, as there are significant variations within the EU area regarding the number of refugees and asylum-seekers that are accepted.

Therefore, the contextual-level factor related to the influx of refugees relates to non-EU immigration (Azrout et al., 2013; Kentman-Cin & Erisen, 2017). An issue that is likely to become even more important for the EU in the near future, considering the rise of nationalistic political parties during the last decade, parties which have gained a lot of their support from promoting anti-immigrant attitudes. However, as has also been shown, the European public differs between EU- and non-EU immigration, but there has also been a significant development regarding the size of the foreign population, including from other EU-countries, residing within the countries during the period of 2004–2017 that also needs to be accounted for. Hence, the size of the foreign population within the countries will also be controlled for as a

contextual-level factor (Werts et al., 2012; Otjes & Katsanidou, 2017). Therefore, the proportional amount of refugees and foreign population within the year-specific total populations within the countries will be included in the empirical analyses as reflecting the extent of external pressure on the countries. It is, however, acknowledged that it is extremely difficult to account for the impact of demographic changes on the levels of public support within this type of study.

The final group relates to the relation between the countries and the EU. Over time, there have been a number of contextual-level factors included to account for this relationship within similar studies. Political influence within the EU regime institutions⁷⁰, EU budget relation⁷¹, intra-EU trade balance⁷² and eurozone membership⁷³ are all factors that have been included within similar studies. When searching contextual-level factors that could be used as proxies for public attitudes, it is quite clear, however, that the EU budget relation, reflecting whether a country is a net recipient or net contributor to the EU budget, and the eurozone membership factor should be the two most relevant. Especially the EU budget factor should be very important, as it also reflects the difference between rich and poor countries within the EU area, as the rich countries are contributing more to the EU budget than they receive back. By using this in a longitudinal perspective, it is also possible to account for the longitudinal relative economic development of the countries, as some countries have started to pay proportionally more to the EU budget (Germany), while other countries have started to pay proportionally less over time (Hungary). On the other hand, the

⁷⁰ Political influence within the EU regime institutions has been included in studies by Hobolt (2014), Arnold et al. (2012) and Rohrschneider and Loveless (2010).

⁷¹ EU budget relation has been included in studies by Hobolt (2014), Stoeckel (2012), Eichenberg and Dalton (1993), Rohrschneider and Loveless (2010) and Kuhn and Stoeckel (2014).

⁷² The intra-EU trade balance has been included in studies by Eichenberg and Dalton (1993; 2007), Belot and Guinaudeau (2017), McLaren (2004) and Gabel and Whitten (1997).

⁷³ The eurozone membership factor has been included in studies by Braun and Tausendpfund (2014), Karp and Bowler (2006), Polyakova and Fligstein (2016), Belot and Guinaudeau (2017), Lubbers and Scheepers (2010) and Kuhn and Stoeckel (2014).

eurozone membership factor reflects whether the country is a member of the EU-core or not, as the eurozone countries are considered to be deeper integrated than the non-eurozone EU member states. National contextual-level factors for this group that have been previously used within the literature, as intra-EU trade balance and political influence within the EU regime institutions, are factors that the public are not particularly aware of and should, hence, function as insufficient proxies for different types of public attitudes. Therefore, EU budget relation and eurozone membership will be included as contextual-level factors in the statistical part of this thesis. In the following section, the data used for operationalising the contextual-level factors are presented.

5.3.1 Data and categorisation

The main part of the contextual-level factors included in this study in order to explain the variations in public support within and between countries are derived from the same source, Eurostat. Eurostat is officially referred to as a Directorate-General of the European Commission, responsible for providing statistical information that enables EU-wide comparisons within a wide range of topics. Eurostat was officially founded for this specific purpose as far back as 1953 (European Commission, 2018). Comparative data from Eurostat enables comparisons within and between countries related to all four groups of contextual-level factors. Some of the original Eurostat data have also been modified to enable more direct comparisons, especially data related to the measurements of country levels of foreign population, which have been modified to show the proportional amount of foreign population based on the total year specific population within the different countries.

The data regarding the proportional amount of refugees were derived from The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), and the data were also modified to show the proportional number of refugees based on the total year specific population within the different countries. By this kind of approach, it becomes possible to account for the cross-sectional effects of longitudinal developments in the

proportional amount of foreigners- and refugees within the population. For comparative data regarding non-corruption levels, the Corruption Perceptions Index, annually updated and presented by Transparency International, provides comparative data for all of the EU member states for the period of 2004–2017. This index has also been widely used in similar studies (Anderson & Tverdova, 2003; Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005; Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000; Arnold et al., 2012; Harteveld et al., 2013; Serrichio et al., 2013). The index ranks countries in terms of the pervasiveness of corruption, with the estimates derived from expert assessments and opinion surveys. It should, however, be noted that this index have been widely criticized, although for the context of the EU area it should be considered as a valid measurement for corruption levels (Charron, 2016).⁷⁴ The levels of economic inequality will be measured by the GINI index, which is widely used to measure the levels of income equality within countries. This index has also been used in similar studies related to EU attitudes (Simpson & Loveless, 2017).

In order to measure the EU budget relation, the member states operating budgetary balances are used, following Mattila (2006). These estimates are based on data from the European Commission that analyse the annual fiscal flows between the EU and its member states. Hence, the operating budgetary balance of each member state is calculated as the difference between the operating expenditure allocated to each member state and the national contribution of each member state. In short, this estimate reflects the difference between what a country receives from and pays into the EU budget. This estimate is also expected to vary significantly over time within countries based on the national economic developments. The contextual-level factors included in the empirical part are summarised in Table 6 (see page 194).⁷⁵

⁷⁴ See Anderson and Heywood (2009) for an extensive overview regarding the critique.

⁷⁵ See Appendix Table 1 page 310 for summary of the national level indicators and operationalisation.

Table 6. Contextual-level factors included in the statistical analyses.

	Category	Contextual factor	Source
Intern: factors	Economic performance	Debt	Eurostat 2004-2017
		Unemployment	Eurostat 2004-2017
	Democratic culture	Non-corruption	The Corruption Perceptions Index, Transparency International 2004-2017
		Economic inequality	The Gini Index, Eurostat 2004-2017
Extern: factors	External pressure	Foreign population	The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) 2004-2017
		Refugees	Eurostat 2004-2017
	EU relation	Eurozone membership	2004-2017
		EU budget relation	Eurostat 2004-2017

The empirical purpose with this thesis is to show how the contextual-level similarities and differences within and between 28 countries are connected to the variations in the levels of public support towards eight system elements of the EU. Hence, the variations in public support should be statistically connected to variations at the contextual-level within the four main groups. However, it is also now time to start focusing on the country level characteristics and longitudinal developments to connect the empirical guidelines derived from the literature to the period of concern for this study, 2004–2017. Therefore, member state specific values with regard to the eight contextual-level factors are presented in Table 7 (see page 195).⁷⁶ The table includes two indicator specific values, the mean value for the total period of 2004–2017 as well as net change value, comparing the value of 2004 with the most recent value from 2017. In this overview, both the general country level developments and characteristics become more visible. The values presented in the table show that there are significant variations both between and within countries during this period, of which the

⁷⁶ See Appendix Tables 4–10 on pages 313–319 for member state values 2004–2017.

developments within the countries most severely hit by the Eurocrisis (Greece, Spain and Italy) are perhaps the most interesting.

Table 7. Net change in member state values for contextual-level factors between 2004 and 2017.⁷⁷

Country	Economic performance				Democratic culture				External pressure				EU relation	
	Debt		Unemployment		Non-corruption		Economic ineq.		Foreign pop.		Refugee pop.		EU budget rela.	
	Change	Mean	Change	Mean	Change	Mean	Change	Mean	Change	Mean	Change	Mean	Change	Mean
Austria	14	76	1	5	-9	78	2	27	6	11	1.27	1.08	-0.1	-0.2
Belgium	7	100	-1	8	0	74	0	26	4	10	0.19	0.38	0.02	-0.30
Bulgaria	-11	21	-6	9	2	40	9	36	1	1	0.24	0.16	1.79	3.02
Croatia	38	61	-3	13	14	43	-2	31	0	1	-0.07	0.04	0.43	0.56
Republic of Cyprus	33	76	7	9	3	60	2	31	5	17	0.3	1.25	-0.22	0.19
Czech Republic	6	35	-5	6	15	49	-2	25	3	4	0.01	0.03	1.07	1.38
Denmark	-8	39	0	6	-7	92	4	27	3	6	-0.54	0.54	-0.13	-0.28
Estonia	4	7	-4	9	11	66	-6	33	-3	16	0.03	0.01	0.52	2.54
Finland	19	49	0	8	-12	91	0	26	2	3	0.22	0.28	-0.08	-0.20
France	31	82	1	9	-1	71	1	30	1	6	0.28	0.40	-0.02	-0.26
Germany	-1	71	-7	7	-1	80	3	30	2	9	0.53	0.91	-0.01	-0.35
Greece	76	145	11	17	5	42	0	34	-1	8	0.68	0.4	-0.06	2.31
Hungary	16	72	-2	8	-3	50	1	27	0	2	-0.01	0.11	2.42	2.87
Ireland	40	69	2	10	-1	75	-2	30	3	11	0.01	0.27	-1.26	0.36
Italy	32	116	3	9	2	46	0	32	5	6	0.55	0.17	-0.01	-0.23
Latvia	26	30	-3	12	18	49	-2	36	-8	17	0.04	0.01	0.26	2.65
Lithuania	21	30	-4	10	13	52	1	35	0	1	0.05	0.03	1.08	3.37
Luxembourg	16	17	1	5	-2	83	4	29	9	43	0.25	0.61	0.46	-0.20
Malta	-21	65	-3	6	-12	58	1	28	9	6	1.62	1.54	0.07	1.07
Netherlands	7	57	0	5	-5	86	0	26	2	4	-0.31	0.62	0.19	-0.36
Poland	6	50	-14	10	25	51	-6	31	1	0	0.02	0.04	1.2	2.07
Portugal	64	100	2	11	0	63	-4	34	1	4	0.02	0.01	-0.79	1.64
Romania	16	28	-3	7	19	39	-5	35	0	0	0.02	0.01	1.36	1.95
Slovakia	10	43	-10	13	10	47	-3	25	1	1	-0.04	0.03	0.66	1.57
Slovenia	47	49	0	7	1	62	0	24	3	4	0.01	0.02	-0.06	0.88
Spain	53	69	6	17	-14	63	3	34	3	10	0.1	0.03	-0.94	0.34
Sweden	-8	42	-1	7	-8	90	5	26	3	6	1.8	1.64	0.05	-0.33
United Kingdom	49	68	0	6	-4	80	-3	32	4	7	-0.27	0.38	-0.08	-0.23
EU-28	21	60	-1	9	2	64	0	30	2	8	0.25	0.39	0.28	0.92
Eurozone	25	66	0	9	0	66	0	30	2	10	0.31	0.42	-0.02	0.78

As this subchapter has shown, there are a large number of contextual-level factors to account for when trying to explain country-level variations in public support. The main argument, however, is that

⁷⁷ Gini index-values for a number of countries are missing for 2004 and 2017, and therefore the values for the closest year available are used as proxies here. These countries are Bulgaria (2006), Croatia (2010), Republic of Cyprus (2005), Czech Republic (2005), Germany (2005), Hungary (2005), Ireland (2016 values for 2017), Latvia (2005), Lithuania (2005), Malta (2005), Netherlands (2005), Poland (2005), Romania (2007), Slovakia (2005), Slovenia (2005) and the United Kingdom (2005 and 2016).

there are different types of contextual-level factors related to different types of public support. It is this complexity that the statistical model, presented in the following subchapter, will be able to account for.

5.4 Statistical analysis

He who knows only one country knows none.

Sartori, 1991, p. 245

The following subchapter will present and discuss the analytical design and method used for the statistical part of this thesis, and also explain thoroughly how the analytical method has been adapted for the specific empirical purpose of this thesis. The subchapter will start with a general discussion regarding the purpose of the analytical design, which was to find a statistical model that is able to account for variations within and between countries within the same model over time. Thereafter, follows a more concrete presentation regarding the concept of multilevel modelling, which constitutes the statistical method used, and Linear Mixed Models (LMMs), which is the specific type of multilevel modelling used within this thesis. As Norris (2011, p. 51) has noted, the “recent decades have witnessed a burgeoning array of approaches and indicators designed to evaluate the performance of the state and its core institutions,” and the statistical method used in this thesis has so far not been widely used within similar studies. According to De Vries (2018, p. 204), public attitudes “represents a kaleidoscope that closely reflects the national conditions in which people find themselves. In other words, people’s attitudes toward the EU are framed by the national circumstances in which people live and their evaluations of these conditions”. Identifying a statistical method that is able to account for and connect contextual-level factors with aggregated country levels of public support, both within and between countries over time, has therefore been the main requirement when choosing the statistical method. This method will be thoroughly presented in the next section.

5.4.1 The statistical method

Pennings et al. (1999, p. 43) noted that “the question of what to compare leads to the matter of how to compare”. As the “what to compare” is the levels of public support within and between member states of the EU over time, the questions of “how to compare” in order to answer the two explanatory research questions of this thesis remains. That is therefore what this section will focus on. Two of the main research questions for this thesis are related to explaining the member state levels of public support for the different system components of the EU as a political system. More explicitly the two research questions are:

- To what extent can contextual-level factors explain the variations within countries in public support for the different system components of the EU as a political system?
- To what extent can contextual-level factors explain the variations between countries in public support for the different system components of the EU as a political system?

Therefore, a statistical method that enables the accounting of both cross-sectional (between countries) and longitudinal (within countries) differences in public support were necessary. The basis for the analytical design was to identify a statistical method that makes it possible to statistically show whether, and to what extent, within and between-country variations in public support for the EU can be predicted by internal factors (economic performance, democratic culture) or external factors (external pressure, EU-relation). The basic guidelines for the analytical approach was, hence, to find a method that makes it possible to combine information about national contextual-level developments with aggregated country levels of public support for eight different system elements of the EU over time, within 28 separate countries. Based on this logic, each independent variable included in the model was created with the sole purpose of intercepting either the between or within-country effects on public support.

As the analytical design includes multiple independent variables, multiple countries as well as a time-component, the natural choice is to

conduct regression analyses. The goal of a basic regression analysis is to provide a statistical estimation of how some y will change when some x varies and, according to Fairbrother (2013, p. 916), “multilevel models have the merit of providing accurate estimates of statistical uncertainty and significance and of allowing for a richer range of relationships to be explored”. Multilevel data structures exist when some unit of analysis can be considered a subset of other units, and there is data available for both levels (Steenbergen & Jones, 2002, p. 218). A multilevel regression model could, hence, be regarded as a complex form of ordinary least squares (OLS)-regression, but is used to analyse the variance in an outcome of interest when the predictor variables are at different hierarchical levels (Woltman, Feldstein, MacKay & Rocchi, 2012). Multilevel models are appropriate when the research interest is connected to “the relationships of variables in data sets with some form of dependency introduced by a hierarchical design” (West, 2009, p. 208). Furthermore, by using a multilevel model, it is possible to analyse the statistical effect of a contextual factor that varies at multiple levels, such as unemployment levels, on public support. As argued by Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal (2008, pp. 114–122), the estimated between countries effect may differ from the estimated within countries effect, and the effects on public support do not need to be the same for a particular explanatory variable. This technique therefore allows a direct investigation regarding the determinants for the varying levels of public support without assuming that the relationship is the same both within and between the 28 member states of the EU, which is of crucial importance for this analytical design.

According to Fairbrother (2014, p. 125), using a multilevel model allows for both a between and within countries analysis, as “it provides a direct investigation of social change without assuming that the longitudinal relationship is the same as the cross-sectional one”. A multilevel model is therefore the most appropriate “for analyses of complex data structures where units are grouped, and a given unit’s expected value on the dependent variable depends on the group(s) to which it belongs” (Fairbrother & Martin, 2013, p. 353). Using pooled

time-series (within countries) that also acknowledges cross-sectional data (between countries), also makes it also possible to increase the number of observations (Plumper, Troeger & Manow, 2005, p. 329). According to Fairbrother, there has also been a discussion on how to adapt the multilevel modelling approach so that the model is able to distinguish between the cross-sectional and longitudinal relationships. However, according to Fairbrother (2014, p. 124), it should be manageable:

“The technical requirement for distinguishing between cross-sectional and longitudinal relationships is simple: calculating a mean, and subtracting that mean from the time-varying variable of interest x_{ij} . The technique thus group mean-centers the covariate. Separate longitudinal and cross-sectional associations between x_{ij} and y can be identified by calculating the mean of x_{ij} across all relevant years for each country. The coefficient on the country mean \bar{x}_j captures the effect on y of enduring cross-national differences in x_{ij} . To capture the effect on y of variation over time within each country, \bar{x}_j can then be subtracted from x_{ij} . The resulting longitudinal component x_{ijM} (a country-year level variable) is group mean-centered, and is orthogonal to \bar{x}_j , such that the two coefficients can be estimated separately”.⁷⁸

According to Fairbrother (2014, p. 125), the multilevel modelling method thereby allows for both a within and between countries analysis. That is also the main argument for using multilevel modelling for the statistical analyses.

For the analytical purpose with this analytical design, this study uses the *linear mixed model* (LMM) method, which is a statistical method that makes it possible to incorporate multilevel hierarchies in the data (Nakagawa & Schielzeth, 2013, p. 133). According to Garson (2012, p. 3), LMMs are able to “handle data where observations are not independent” and are also able to produce more robust results compared to the ordinary OLS-regressions. There are also other advantages using an LMM, the most important being perhaps that

⁷⁸ x_{ij} =country/years variable, y =dependent variable, \bar{x}_j =within countries variable.

missing data for a time-point, which is normal in longitudinal studies, does not constitute a problem as LMMs are able to accommodate also unbalanced data sets. Another important aspect is that LMMs allow the researcher to consider both time-invariant (mean) and time-varying (year-specific) covariates as predictors of a continuous dependent variable (West, 2009, pp. 208–209). Edwards, Muller, Wolfinger, Qaqish and Schabenberger (2008, p. 2) also argue that one of the main statistical advantages with using an LMM model is that the model not only specifies the mean structure, but also the time-varying structure in the data. This is also one of the main strengths with using this kind of two-level model, as the independent variable includes two parts, one that is specific to the country level (mean) and does not vary over time, and one that represents the difference between occasions (variation from mean by year). These two taken together represent the total effect of an independent variable on the outcome of interest (Bell & Jones, 2015, p. 137), in this case aggregated member state levels of public support for different system elements of the EU.

Following Söderlund, Wass and Grofman (2011, pp. 100–101), the country based contextual-level factors are modelled as a combination of (1) their mean values across time for each member state and (2) year specific values for each member state and measurement of public support (the variable is therefore cluster-mean centred, i.e. the deviation from the member state mean).⁷⁹ In the statistical models, the mean values account for the between countries variability, and the measurement-specific values account for within countries variability (or the public support measurement-specific deviation from the cluster mean). The model produces regression estimates that connect both the within and between countries variations in public support to the contextual-level factors included in the model. The rationale for including the cluster mean as a separate covariate is to more directly

⁷⁹ A random intercepts model is a statistical model in which intercepts are allowed to vary, and therefore, the scores on the dependent variable for each individual observation are predicted by the intercept that varies across groups (Garson, 2012, pp. 7–8).

analyse whether the between-member states and within-member states effects are different, which is necessary for this thesis.

This hence constitutes a basic two-level multilevel model, where the level 1 and level 2 predictors (time-specific and group-mean centred values of the independent variables) are included as fixed effects to predict both the within and between-country variations in public support. The country-mean values represent the differences between countries, and functions as a predictor for explaining the between countries variations in public support. The country mean variables are created as described here:

$$\text{Country-mean} = (\text{Value 2004} + \text{Value 2005} \dots + \text{Value 2017})/14$$

The year-specific variable is cluster-mean centred, indicating the deviation from the mean value during the period of 2004–2017. To be more specific, this is conducted in order to distinguish between the relative within and between countries effects when analysing the data in the same model, and the national level variables are, hence, entered in two ways (Enders & Tofighi, 2007). The mean-deviated variables compare changes within a country over time, and are calculated for each time point during 2004–2017 as follows:

$$\text{Group-mean centred} = (\text{Mean value} - \text{Year specific value})$$

This is a recommended approach when there are considerable between countries variations, and this kind of modelling allows the model to account for the different within and between countries effects (Snijders & Bosker, 2012; LaHuis, Hartman, Hakoyama & Clark, 2014). As this can be quite challenging to comprehend, the following section will present how the regression estimates that are used to indicate the within and between countries variations in public support have been derived through SPSS, strictly following the guidelines provided by West (2009).

SPSS

The dependent variable for this statistical method constitutes the indicator of public support of interest, reflecting the year-specific level of public support in each member state during 2004–2017, in total 14 time-points per member state for the main part of public support variables. Sixteen covariates were included in the model as explanatory variables: eight indicating the country mean of the independent variable, but also eight group-mean centred variables that reflect how the specific value varies from the mean value during the period of 2004–2017. The country mean and group-mean centred values were then also added as fixed effects in the model. In order to obtain country-specific values, a country ID was created so that SPSS could acknowledge the cross-country dimension of the data and this country-ID was therefore included as subjects in the model. As the analytical purpose is also to analyse how the variations in the contextual-level variable predict the variations in member state levels of public support over time, the model also included the intercept and subject groupings based on ID-combinations (country-dimension) as random effects. The intercept was included because it is expected that each country has different intercepts that need to be accounted for in the model, and hence the country-ID was also added to the combinations window so that the model was able to also account for the differences between countries. As there was no need to place any restrictions on the random effects in this model, and to allow for the estimation of variance, the covariance type was set at unstructured.

This indicates that the model includes a random effect associated with the intercept for each country, and as the covariance type was set at unstructured, the model allows for the estimation of the variance of the random effects (West, 2009, pp. 214–215). The model therefore constitutes a random intercept model, in which the intercepts are allowed to vary between groups (countries). SPSS then produced parameter estimates, which are used to indicate the predicted effects on the dependent variable within and between countries based on the variations in the contextual-level factor over time, with maximum

likelihood estimation (ML) as an estimator method. The ML method was used because it is able to handle unbalanced data and produces identical fixed effects estimates, while also being the most commonly used with longitudinal data (Shek & Ma, 2011, p. 58). The model hence produced sixteen parameter estimates, which function in the same way as normal linear regression coefficients.

Within multilevel studies, the explained variance (R^2) achieved by the model is also often accounted for, as the R^2 values provide valuable information regarding how much of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variables included in the model (Snijders & Bosker, 1994, p. 342). Within LMMs, the R^2 values are, however, not produced directly by the outputs in SPSS, as is the case with general OLS-regression outputs. Hence, the explained variance achieved by an LMM needs to be computed. Following the guidelines provided by LaHuis et al. (2014, pp. 434–436), so-called pseudo R^2 values were computed to indicate the explained variance on the outcome of the dependent variable(s) explained by the independent variables included in the models. The pseudo R^2 values obtained reflect how much of the variation can be explained on a scale from 0–1, with higher values indicating more of the variance explained by the model. According to LaHuis et al. (2014), it is possible to use these measurements for random intercept models. The formulas used to obtain the pseudo R^2 values are based on the logic that when predictors are added to the model, there should also be a reduction of the unexplained variance in the model. Hence, the formulas compare variance components from the different models. Following LaHuis et al. (2014), the coefficients for the within-country variance explained were obtained by comparing the residual variance (unexplained variance) component σ^2 from the full model (when contextual-level factors were added to the model) with the residual variance from the null model (without contextual-level factors included in the model). The within-country variance explained by the model could hence be calculated through the formula (see next page):

$$R_1^2(\text{approx.}) = \frac{(\sigma_{null}^2 - \sigma_{full}^2)}{\sigma_{null}^2}.$$

The coefficient for the between-country variance explained by the models were obtained by comparing the intercept component τ_{00} from the full model with the intercept component from the null model. The between-country variance explained by the models could hence be calculated through the formula:

$$R_2^2(\text{approx.}) = \frac{(\tau_{00/null} - \tau_{00/full})}{\tau_{00/null}}.$$

These measurements resemble what was recommended by Snijders and Bosker (1994, p. 342), namely to “treat proportional reductions in the estimated variance components as analogues of R^2 values”. According to LaHuis et al. (2014, p. 446), the measures for the within variance explained by the model usually show “accepted levels of bias, constituency, and efficiency across all conditions and models” while the between measurement used in this analysis is, according to them, “not an efficient estimator”. They therefore recommended using the within measurement of variance explained, while being careful with interpreting the results from the between measurement, as it does not always seem to produce a good reflection of the variance explained between groups. However, due to a lack of a better measurement option, the results for the between-countries variation explained will still be reported in the following chapter. Another negative aspect of using these measurements to explain variance in the model is related to the risk of producing negative values, either due to the way fixed effects and variance components are estimated or even as a result of model misspecification (LaHuis et al., 2014, pp. 435–437). Nevertheless, and even when taken this into account, these pseudo R^2 values still provide a useful summary of the magnitude of the effects, and “may be particularly useful in multilevel studies where unstandardized coefficients are reported often” (LaHuis et al., 2014, p. 446).

In short, the main argument for using this type of statistical analysis is that it is possible to obtain two types of regression estimates from the same multilevel model, one that indicates the between countries effect and one that indicates the within countries effect of a contextual-level factor on the member state levels of public support for different system components of the EU. However, to make the results more statistically robust for statistical analyses, it has also been argued here that it is necessary to also include all of the independent variables in the same analytical model. The pseudo R^2 values computed (through the author's own calculations) should also provide valuable information regarding the usefulness of the contextual-level factors for explaining public support for the different system elements of the EU. By adapting this type of statistical method for the analytical purpose in this thesis, it was also possible to obtain comparable regression estimates that will constitute the main findings of this thesis. In the following chapter summary, the main arguments and guidelines derived from this chapter are presented.

Chapter summary

Before moving on to the results, a short reminder regarding the purpose of this thesis will be given. Within the literature, a wide range of contextual-level factors have been identified as probable predictors of the developments in public support, both within and between the EU member states. These contextual-level factors have been broadly categorised into two categories, constituting internal- (economic performance, democratic culture) and external factors (external pressure, EU-relation). Two contextual-level indicators related to each of these groups have been included as independent variables in the models, taking into account that the indicators should not be measuring similar developments. Within this study, national level aggregates of public support for eight different system elements of the EU are used to measure different kinds of public support. The data used to reflect country levels of public support consists of observations derived from survey respondents (Eurobarometer) from the 28 member states of the

EU area during the period of 2004–2017.⁸⁰ In Figure 7, the general research design is broadly illustrated.

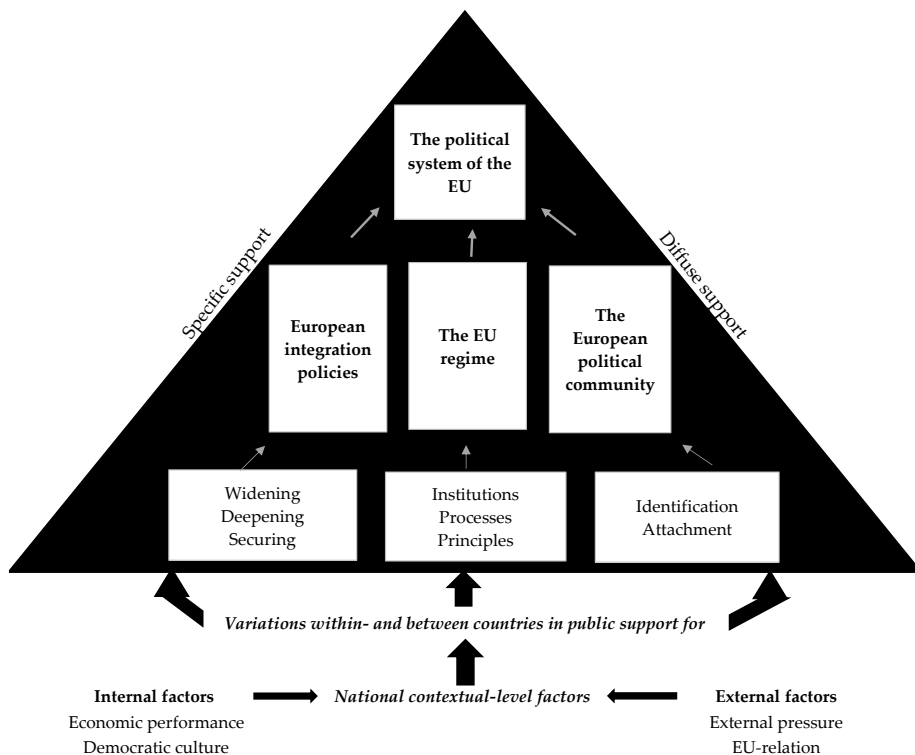


Figure 7. Summary of research design.

In order to capture the between and within-country effects in the same statistical model, two separate independent variables have been created for each contextual-level indicator. One country-mean variable in order to capture the between-country effects, and one group-mean centred, in order to capture the within-country effects. The analytical argument for using multilevel models is that it provides more statistically robust estimates, as the year specific observations are

⁸⁰ There is also a methodological discussion regarding the number of countries required to reliably predict the country-level effects, and Bryan and Jenkins (2016, p. 19), for instance, suggest that 25 countries could be used as a minimum level for linear models and 30 countries for logit models. Hence, the 28 countries within this study should be sufficient for a linear model.

clustered within countries. In the following chapter, the focus will be on presenting the empirical results derived from this thesis, starting with the longitudinal trends in public support for the different system elements of the EU within each member state during the period of 2004–2017. This is in order to more explicitly show that there are 1) significant variations between countries regarding the levels of public support for the different system elements of the EU, and that there are 2) significant fluctuations in the levels of public support within the member states over time (especially since 2008).

6. Results

Before we can embark on an analysis of the factors which affect support for integration, we must have an overview of the main trends in such support.

Niedermayer, 1995, p. 54

This subsequent chapter will present and focus on the empirical findings derived from this study. The chapter begins with a descriptive overview regarding the country-level trends in public support for elements related to the three main system components of the EU as a political system during the period of 2004–2017. As Eurobarometer (EB) started to include survey data from all of the current 28 member states in 2004 (EB 62), that is the year to serve as the natural starting point for this overview.⁸¹ The chapter begins by presenting descriptive data regarding country-level trends in public support for European integration policies, divided into public support for the widening (EU enlargement), deepening (common European defence) and securing (the single European currency) of European integration policies.

Thereafter, data regarding trends in public support for the EU regime, divided into public support for the EU regime institutions (trust in the EP), EU regime processes (satisfaction with EU democracy) and EU regime principles (EU membership support) will be presented. The EU regime principles category will also include survey data regarding public support for the free movement of people within the EU area, as it reflects public support for the founding principles upon which the EU was founded. In the final descriptive section, data regarding public support for the European political community is presented, which is divided into two kinds of affective attitudes; European identification and EU attachment. After introducing the descriptive part of this chapter, the focuses shifts to the more analytical

⁸¹ With the EU enlargement in 2004, the Republic of Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia became members of the EU. In 2007, Romania and Bulgaria became members and in 2013 Croatia became the latest member state. However, all of the 13 new member states have been included regularly in the EB surveys from 2004 onwards.

part, and the results from the statistical analyses will be presented stepwise. In the final part of this chapter, the results will be discussed together with the analytical limitations.

6.1 Trends in EU support

Aggregated levels of public attitudes towards separate system elements of the EU are used in this study to measure the country levels of public support within the EU area. The concept of public attitudes could be widely defined as “anything people have in mind with respect to a specific object” (Niedermeyer & Westle, 1995, p. 44), but within this overview the focus will solely be on attitudinal indicators reflecting public support for the different system elements. One of Easton’s (1965, p. 161) main arguments was that it is possible to estimate varying degrees of public support for different components of a political system, and through that approach be able to make projections about the health and status of a political system as a whole. The general purpose with this subsequent subchapter is, however, twofold. First of all, this overview will show that there are significant variations between countries regarding the longitudinal trends in public support, and that there are also significant variations within countries regarding public support for the different system elements of the EU. Hence, for instance, public support towards the EU regime institutions within a country during this period might have declined significantly, while simultaneously increasing towards the EU regime principles. The figures presented, constituting the descriptive data, show the aggregated amount of “EU-positive” responses within a given country, based on survey data from EB during 2004–2017.⁸² Furthermore, there are also data included reflecting the EU-28 and Eurozone averages during this period. When there has been more than one survey data point available for a survey item (EB usually includes survey items twice a year, during the spring and autumn editions), the mean values

⁸² A full overview regarding the specific EB-surveys used within this thesis is included on pages 363–367.

for that year are presented. The subsequent section now begins by presenting data regarding the trends relating to public support for European integration policies.

6.1.1 European integration policies

As has been noted earlier, there are large amounts of survey items within the survey data that measure attitudes towards a wide range of European integration policies. Many of these survey items have also been included regularly by EB over time, making it possible to also make longitudinal assertions regarding the developments in public support. This provides researchers with comprehensive data material regarding comparable member state levels of public attitudes towards specific European integration policies within the EU area. Starting with public attitudes towards the prospect of a future expansion of the EU, measured by member state levels of public support for the prospect of future EU enlargements, it should be clearly stated that this survey item does not particularly state which countries any future EU enlargement would concern, and the survey item therefore reflects public attitudes towards the general prospect of further EU enlargement. As the EU in 2018 proposed a timeline for when two aspiring candidate countries, Serbia and Montenegro, might be ready to become full member states of the EU (2025), the issue of EU enlargement will most likely develop into a hot topic in the near future. As late as during the mid-2000's, even Turkey's possible EU membership was also being discussed at the highest political levels in Europe. Specific member state levels of public support for EU enlargement are summarised in Figure 8 (see page 211).⁸³

⁸³ See Appendix Table 11 page 320 for member state level values 2004–2017.

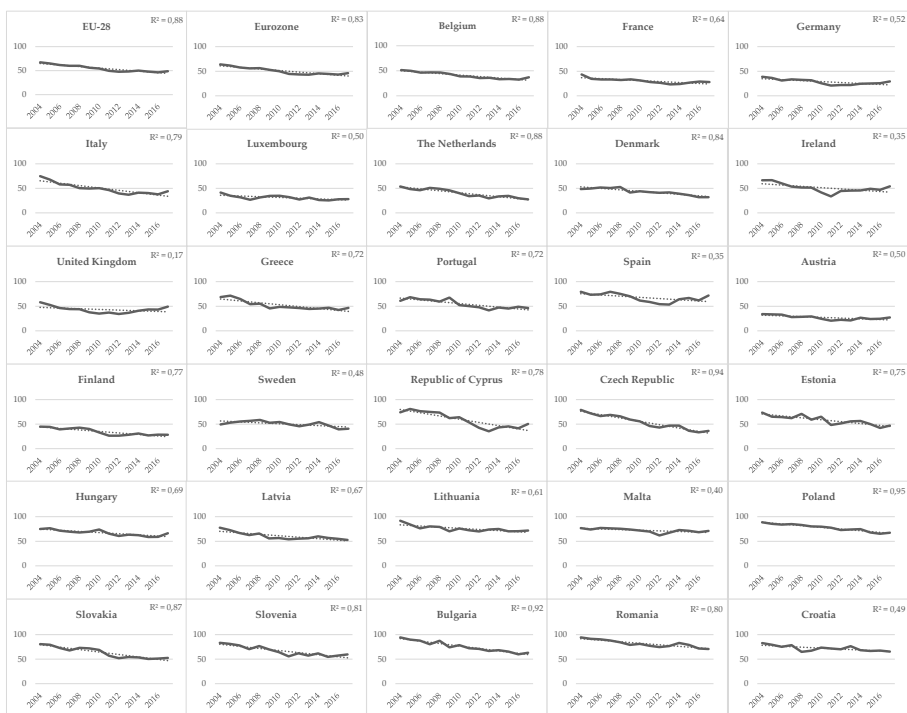


Figure 8. Public support for future EU enlargement 2004–2017. Source: Eurobarometer 2004–2017 downloaded from Gesis ZACAT.⁸⁴

When comparing the member state levels of public support from 2004 with the most recent data from 2017, there is a clear indication that public support for future EU enlargement seems to have declined within every single member state of the EU since 2004. The decline in levels of public support has been most notable in the Czech Republic with a 43-percentage point drop (36%), and in Bulgaria (63%) and Italy (44%) with a 31-percentage point drop. It should, however, be noted that Bulgaria was not even an EU member in 2004, and hence this question then indirectly also referred to EU enlargement to include Bulgaria. The lowest levels of public support for future EU enlargement, based on the most recent survey data, are found in the

⁸⁴ EB survey question: “What is your opinion of each of the following statements? Please tell me for each statement, whether you are for it or against it? Further enlargement of the European Union to include other countries in future years”. Chart shows proportion responding “For”.

Netherlands (27%) and Austria (27%). Hence, only one in four in these two countries were in favour of EU enlargement. In 2017, there was only a majority in 13 of the member states still supportive of the future expansion of the EU area, and of those only Ireland (54%) and Spain (72%) are pre-2004 member states.

Continuing this overview with public support for the future deepening of European integration, measured by public support for the prospect of a common European defence policy. This survey item has been included by EB since 1990 (EB 34), and the Maastricht Treaty (1992) already included paragraphs regarding the future development of deeper European cooperation within defence- and foreign policies. After the 2017 election of President Emmanuel Macron in France, there were also initial discussions regarding the possibilities of more serious attempts at increasing EU co-operation within defence- and security issues, as President Macron had openly called for the creation of an EU-army, as well as for a shared European defence budget.⁸⁵ Member state levels of public support for a common European defence policy are summarised in Figure 9 (see page 213).⁸⁶

⁸⁵ This during a talk at the Paris-Sorbonne University on the 26th of September 2017 (BBC).

⁸⁶ See Appendix Table 13 page 322 for member state levels of public support for a common European defence policy 2004–2017.

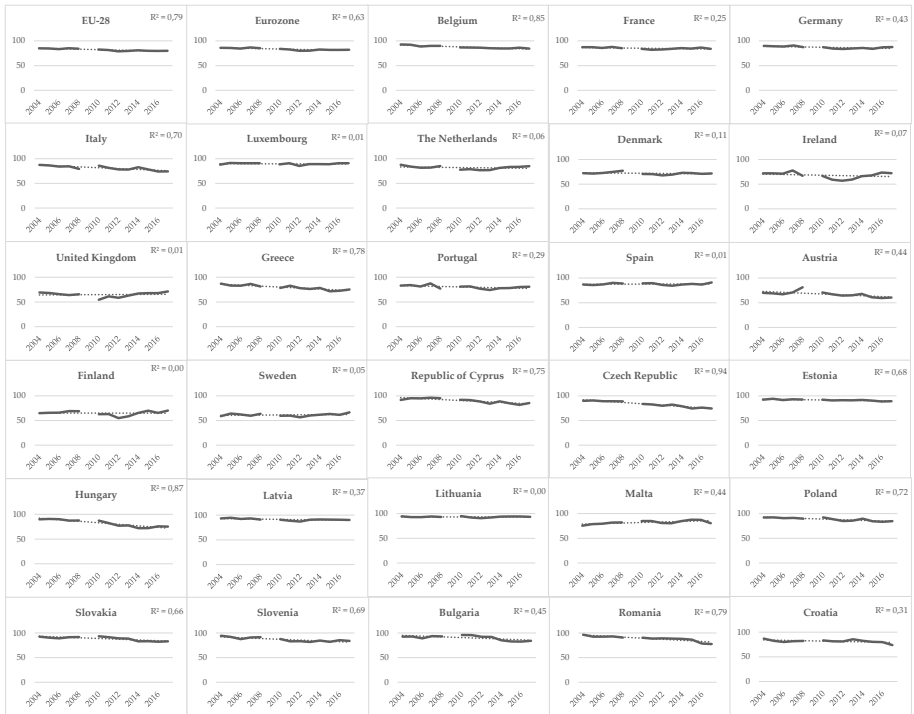


Figure 9. Public support for a common European defence policy 2004–2017. Source: Eurobarometer 2004–2017 downloaded from Gesis ZACAT.⁸⁷

When comparing the levels of public support for the deepening of European integration in 2017 with 2007, the year that public support for a common European defence policy peaked within the EU area, public support has declined within a majority of the member states. The downward trend is most noticeably in Romania (78%) and the Czech Republic (74%), where public support has declined by 15-percentage points, and in Hungary (75%) by 12-percentage points. However, public support for this proposal has also increased, most noticeably in Sweden (66%) and in the United Kingdom (71%) by 7-percentage points during this period. Also, according to the most recent survey data, there

⁸⁷ EB survey question: “What is your opinion of each of the following statements? Please tell me for each statement, whether you are for it or against it? A common defence policy among the Member States of the European Union towards other countries”. Chart shows proportion responding “For”. Survey item not included by EB during 2009.

is a significant majority within every member state still in favour of creating a common European defence policy, or at least in favour of deeper defence cooperation depending on how this question is interpreted. The levels of public support being the lowest in Austria (61%) and the highest in Lithuania (93%). Looking at the general trends within all of the member states, public support for this policy proposal does not seem to fluctuate heavily over time, indicating that the perceived benefits with this European integration policy do not seem to have changed during this period, at least not to any larger extent.

The final and most system important element of the European integration policies component, from a long-term system persistence perspective, relates to the securing of an already implemented European integration policy. Member state levels of public attitudes towards the securing of an already implemented European integration policy are measured by the levels of public support for the single European currency, the euro. The survey item used for measuring public support for the single European currency has been included sporadically by the EB (EB 34) since 1990, many years before it became a political reality. This is also perhaps the most widely discussed European integration policy during the last three decades, which has become especially apparent since the start of the Eurocrisis in 2010. In 2019, 19 out of 28 member states had adopted the euro as a currency, the only exceptions being the United Kingdom, Czech Republic, Denmark, Sweden, Poland, Croatia, Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania. Member state levels of public support for the single European currency are summarised in Figure 10 (see page 215).⁸⁸

⁸⁸ See Appendix Table 12 page 321 for member state levels of public support for the single European currency 2004–2017.

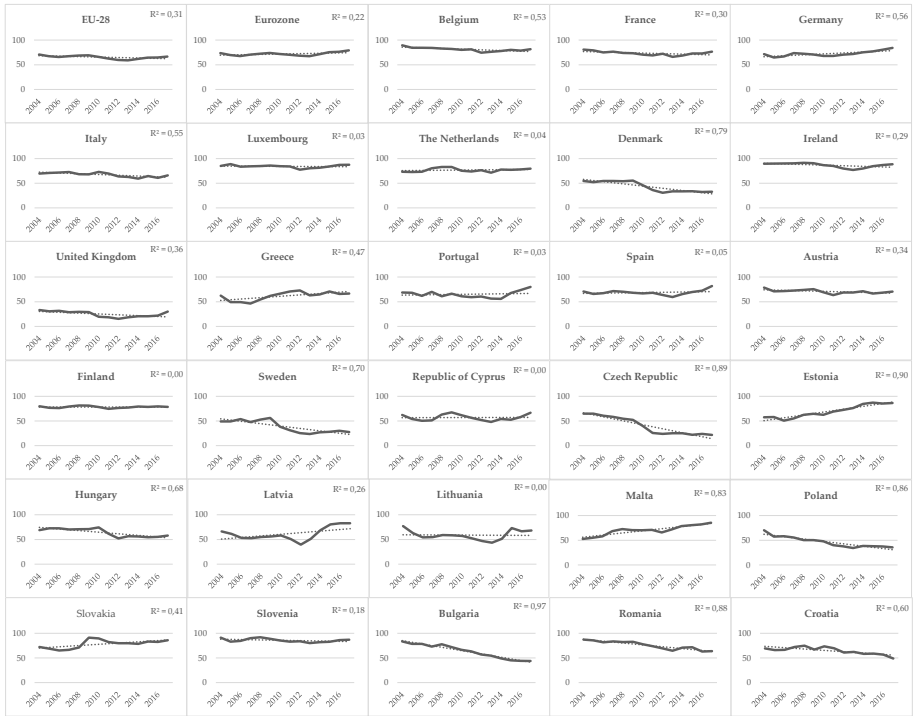


Figure 10. Public support for a single European currency 2004–2017. Source: Eurobarometer 2004–2017 downloaded from Gesis ZACAT.⁸⁹

Public support for the single European currency peaked within the EU area in 2004, when the mean value of public support within EU-28 was 71 per cent. However, based on the most recent data from 2017, public support was still as high as 67 per cent. There are, however, significant cross-country variations within the EU area regarding the levels of public support. When comparing 2004 with 2017, the levels of public support were, for instance, 43 percentage points lower in the Czech Republic (22%), 40 percentage points lower in Bulgaria (44%) and 35 percentage points lower in Poland (36%). However, during the same period, public support for the single European currency has increased by 33 percentage points in Malta (85%), by 29 percentage points in Estonia (29%) and by 16 percentage points in Latvia (83%).

⁸⁹ EB survey question: “What is your opinion of each of the following statements? Please tell me for each statement, whether you are for it or against it? A European Monetary Union with one single currency, the euro”. Chart shows proportion responding “For”.

The differences in public support for the single European currency between eurozone and non-eurozone countries should, hence, largely be explained by the eurozone membership factor, as the levels of public support are significantly higher within the countries that are actually using the single European currency. It should also be noted that the nine most negative member states towards the single European currency, based on the member state levels of public support, are all non-eurozone countries. When looking at the more supportive member states, over 75 per cent of the public supports the single European currency in 14 out of 28 member states, ranging from 76 per cent in France to 89 per cent in Ireland. Only within seven of the non-eurozone countries is there a majority of the population not supporting the single European currency, based on the country levels of public support from 2017.

From observing the longitudinal trends regarding the developments in public support for these three elements of the European integration policies component, it is possible to make a few initial general remarks. In countries such as Italy, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia and the Czech Republic, there is an apparent declining trend in public support for European integration policies since 2004, as the levels of public support have declined towards all of the three European integration policies within these countries, and in most cases the decline is also significant. However, when only focusing on public support for future EU enlargement, it is possible to argue that there has been an EU-wide general decline in public support. Regarding public support for a common European defence policy, there are more varied cross-country developments. Moreover, public support for the single European currency seems to be determined by whether the member state is a member of the eurozone or not, as public support for the single European currency within the eurozone seems to have remained stable, and also increased, in many of the member states over time. The development has, however, been quite the opposite within the member states outside of the eurozone. This overview, however, exemplifies why European integration policy issues should be treated

independently within empirical analyses, as there are significant variations within and between member states regarding the levels of public support towards these three elements. In the following section, the member state levels of public support for the three system elements of the EU regime component are presented.

6.1.2 The EU regime

In the subsequent section, member state level developments in public support for the three elements of the EU regime component will be presented, starting with public support for the EU regime institutions. Public attitudes towards the EU regime institutions are measured by member state levels of trust in the European Parliament (EP), and since 1999 a survey question measuring trust in the EP has been included by EB (EB 51). Delhey and Newton (2004, p. 4) noted that “there are good reasons for interpreting trust not so much as an individual property that people “have” or “carry around” with them, but as something based on how people evaluate the society they live in”. Country levels of trust in the EU regime institutions are also the best indicators of how the EU regime institutions have been, and are, being evaluated by the European public. Nevertheless, trust in the national parliament has been shown to be the best individual level factor explaining trust in the EP (Munoz et al., 2011) and this might to some extent indicate that the country levels of trust in the EP are a reflection on how the performances of national political institutions are being evaluated by the European public. Hence, the same contextual-level factors affecting public evaluations of the national parliament are also, at least indirectly, connected to public evaluations of the EP. From a system persistence perspective, there is also no way of knowing with certainty whether the stability of the EU is indeed threatened by declining levels of trust in the EU regime institutions, which is also true regarding the effect of declining trust in the national political institutions (Marien & Hooghe, 2011, p. 268).

The European Parliament (EP) is the only directly-elected political organ at the supranational European level, as well as the, still, only directly-elected supranational political organ in the world. Even though it is, at least theoretically, not as important what the general European public think about the EP as what they think about their national parliaments, the levels of trust in the EP do signalise what the European public think about the performance of the EP. Prior to the start of the global recession in 2008, the country levels of trust in the EU regime institutions were, however, largely perceived as a non-issue among scholars. This was mainly because the country levels of trust in the political institutions of the EU regime were significantly higher than trust in the national political institutions in most of the member states, and this especially within the post-communist states (Harteveld et al., 2013). Nevertheless, Harteveld et al. (2013, p. 544) have also argued that the aggregated member state levels of trust in the EU regime institutions could be regarded as a reflection of public support towards the functioning of the institutional structure within the EU regime. The relatively high levels of trust in the EU regime institutions prior to the global recession should, according to Scharpf (2013), be due to the EU regime enjoying a certain amount of output-oriented legitimacy during that period. Output-oriented legitimacy is, according to Schmidt (2015, p. 11), also a “performance criterion focused on policy effectiveness,” and in the period of 2000–2008, the eurozone countries were performing economically better than the non-eurozone EU member states (Wood & Quaisser, 2008, p. 31). During this period of time, this could then be used as an argument for the advantages of being deeper integrated. That argument has, however, seemingly disappeared since the start of the Eurocrisis in 2010.

Survey data regarding country levels of trust in the political institutions of the EU regime have been collected by EB since 1999, although longitudinal survey data measuring trust is only available regarding levels of trust in the European Parliament (EP), the European Commission (EC) and the European Central Bank (ECB). However, EB has also sporadically collected survey data regarding trust in other EU

regime institutions, such as the European Court of Justice, the European Committee of Regions, the Council of the European Union, the European Council, the European Ombudsman and the Economic and Social Committee of the European Union. In reality, the European public do not tend to differentiate much in their evaluations of the different EU regime institutions and the longitudinal trends regarding country levels of trust in, for instance, the EP and the EC are almost identical within countries. Therefore, researchers often tend to create trust indexes, including some of the EU regime institutions, when conducting empirical analyses (Arnold et al., 2012). Within this thesis, however, the focus is solely on trust in the EP as an indicator of public support for the EU regime institutions, as it is deemed sufficient enough for this empirical approach. The EP is, furthermore, the only directly-elected political chamber within the EU regime. Member state levels of trust in the EP are summarised in Figure 11 (see page 220).⁹⁰

⁹⁰ See Appendix Table 14 page 323 for member state levels of trust in the EP 2004–2017.

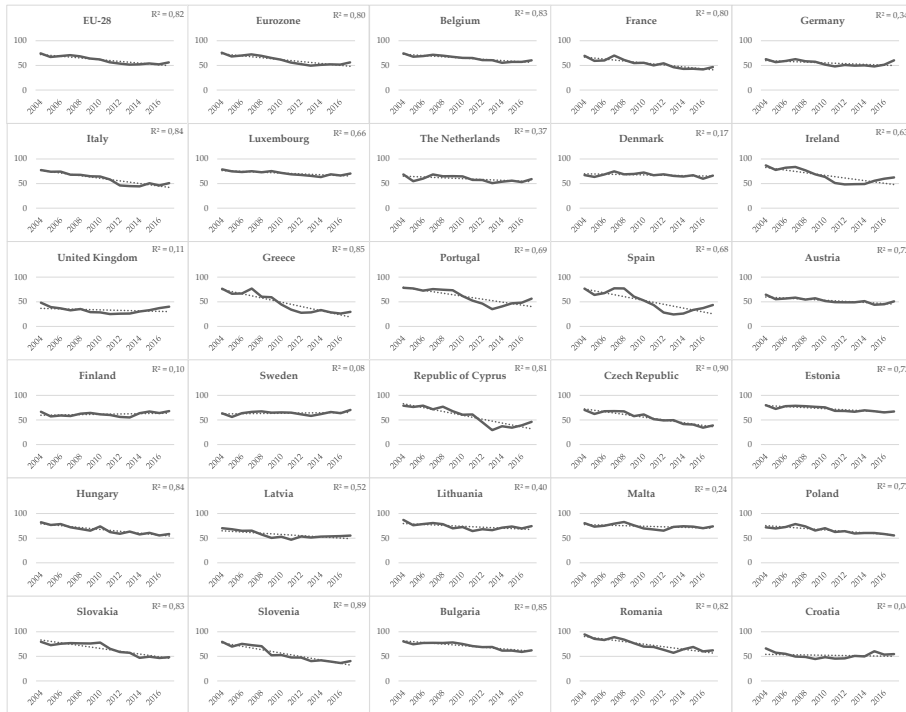


Figure 11. Trust in the European Parliament 2004–2017. Source: Eurobarometer surveys 2004–2017 downloaded from Gesis ZACAT.⁹¹

Trust in the EP peaked within the EU area in 2004, when the mean value of trust was over 74 per cent. Still, in 2008 country levels of trust in the EP within the EU area were 71 per cent. That was, however, prior to the start of the global recession. When comparing the country levels of trust in the EP from 2004 with the most recent from 2017, the member state levels of trust in the EP have declined in almost every member state. The only exceptions being Sweden and Finland, where the levels of trust have increased slightly. The levels of trust in the EP during this period have declined by 47 percentage points in Greece (30%), 39 percentage points in Slovenia (41%) and 33 percentage points in both Spain (43%) and the Republic of Cyprus (46%). However, there is still a

⁹¹ EB survey question: “I would like to ask you a question on how much trust you have in certain institutions. For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it. The European Parliament”. Chart shows proportion responding “Tend to trust”.

majority within a majority of the member states that tends to trust the EP, and the levels of trust are highest in Lithuania (74%), Malta (74%), Luxembourg (70%) and Sweden (70%). There has also been a significant shift in most countries since 2014, when the levels of trust in the EP reached their lowest point with a mean value of trust at 52 per cent within the EU area. Since then, the levels of trust have increased in 21 out of 28 member states, most noticeably by 17 percentage points in Spain (43%), 16 percentage points in Portugal (56%) and 13 percentage points in Ireland (62%). However, when comparing the levels of trust in 2007, prior to the start of the global recession, with the levels in 2017, the levels of trust are only higher in four countries in 2017 (Finland, United Kingdom, Croatia and Sweden).

The second element of the EU regime component relates to democratic processes within the EU regime. Member state levels of public attitudes towards this element of the EU regime component have been measured by the survey data through the member state levels of satisfaction with the EU's democratic performance since 1993 (EB 39). It is argued in this study that process evaluations reflect public attitudes towards the functioning and performance of the EU regime, and Boomgaarden et al. (2011), for instance, argue that performance, as a subcategory of specific/utilitarian/output-based support, largely relates to what Norris (2011) referred to as public attitudes towards the "regime processes". Country levels of public satisfaction with EU democracy could thereby be directly used to measure public support for the performance processes of the EU regime (Linde & Ekman, 2003; Karp & Bowler, 2006), and Rohrschneider (2002) went as far as to suggest that satisfaction with EU democracy also shapes public attitudes towards European integration in general, and this especially within well-functioning national political systems. According to Hobolt (2012, p. 100), "public evaluations of democratic processes are increasingly important to the integration process," and hence the country levels of public satisfaction with EU democracy could be argued to reflect public attitudes towards the democratic principles of the EU regime, as well as towards how the democratic processes

function in practice. Norris (1999, p. 75), however, argued that the emphasis on “how democracy works” indicates that it reflects public evaluations of the regime processes. It has also been widely argued that, at the individual level, satisfaction with EU democracy is closely related to satisfaction with the way democracy works at the national regime level (Hobolt, 2012, p. 89), as is the case with trust in the EU regime’s political institutions and trust in the national regime’s political institutions. Both Rohrschneider (2002) and Hobolt (2012) have also shown that the European public take cues from the national level when forming an opinion about the EU’s democratic performance, and that there appears to be a positive relationship between democracy satisfaction at the two levels. Armingeon and Guthmann (2014, p. 17) also noted that public satisfaction with democratic performance at the national level varies with perceived outcomes of governmental policies, and hence public satisfaction at the EU level is also here used as a performance-related indicator of public support for the EU regime. Member state levels of satisfaction with EU democracy are summarised in Figure 12 (see page 223).⁹²

⁹² See Appendix Table 15 page 324 for member state levels of satisfaction with EU democracy 2004–2017.

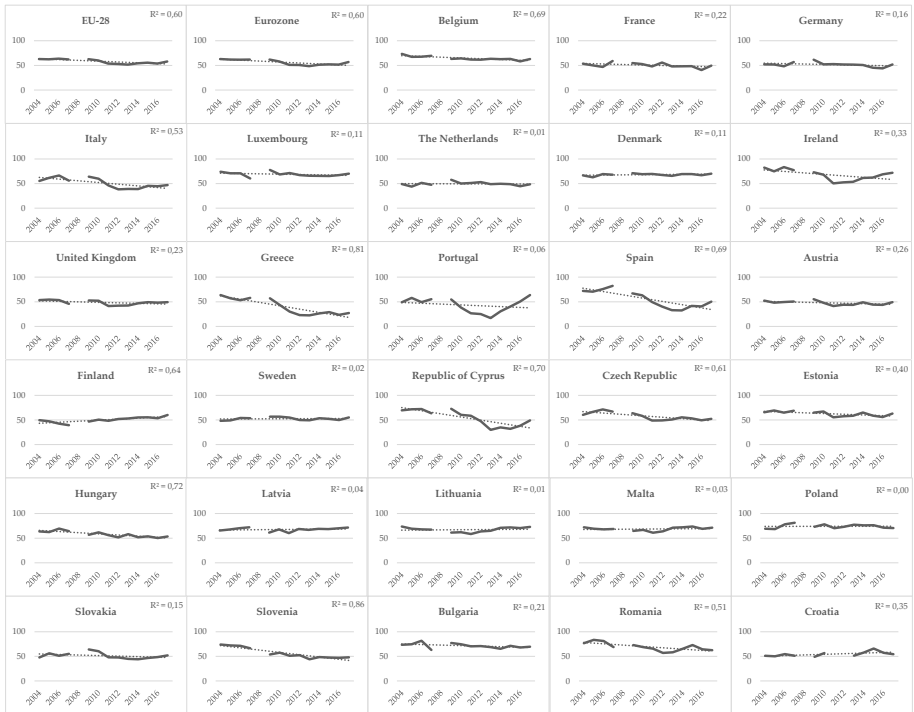


Figure 12. Satisfaction with EU democracy 2004–2017. Source: Eurobarometer 2004–2017 downloaded from Gesis ZACAT.⁹³

Country levels of satisfaction with EU democracy peaked within the EU area in 2006, when the mean value of satisfaction with EU democracy was 64 per cent, 1 percentage point higher than in 2004. Still, in 2009 the mean value of satisfaction within the EU area was 62 per cent.⁹⁴ Four years later in 2013, however, country levels of satisfaction with EU democracy had declined to 52 per cent within the EU area. Based on the most recent survey data from 2017, the mean value of satisfaction within the EU area was 58 per cent. When comparing the country levels in 2004 with 2017, public satisfaction with EU democracy was higher in 2017 in only nine countries, most noticeably by 15

⁹³ EB survey question: “On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in the European Community? Would you say you are...?” Chart shows proportion responding “Very satisfied” or “Fairly satisfied”.

⁹⁴ It should be noted that the survey item was unfortunately not included in any EB survey during 2008.

percentage points in Portugal (64%), 11 percentage points in Finland (60%) and 7 percentage points in Sweden (55%). On the other hand, during this same period public satisfaction with EU democracy declined by 37 percentage points in Greece (27%), 26 percentage points in Slovenia (48%) and 22 percentage points in Spain (50%). Nevertheless, when comparing 2017 with the lowest levels of public satisfaction with EU democracy in 2013, public satisfaction was higher in 2017 in all except three member states (Poland, Hungary and the Netherlands).

What is most notable here is Portugal, where public satisfaction had increased by 46 percentage points during this period, but also in the Republic of Cyprus and in Ireland the levels had increased by 19 percentage points. Also, country levels of public satisfaction with EU democracy were at over 50 percentage points in 21 out of 28 member states in 2017. In general, there has been an apparent decline in public support for the EU regime processes since the start of the global recession in 2008. However, the decline has not been as significant as with the country levels of trust in the EU regime institutions. There are, however, undeniable similarities between public attitudes towards these two elements, because the countries in which the levels of public support have declined the most towards the EU regime processes are mostly the same countries where trust in the EU regime institutions has also declined. This should also have been expected, as public attitudes towards both of these elements of the EU regime have been used to reflect how the EU regime is deemed to be performing according to the European public.

The final element of the EU regime component in this study is referred to as the EU regime principles, which is the most important element from a system persistence perspective. According to Norris (1999, p. 75), public support for the basic principles of the EU regime are commonly measured by public attitudes towards European unification, EU membership and European co-operation “since these values lie at the heart of the European project”. Country levels of public support for the EU regime principles have been measured by EB

through the “EU membership”-question since the start of EB surveys in 1973. This survey item has also been by far the most widely used to operationalise and measure public support for the EU within the extensive EU literature. However, the survey item is slightly problematic, because the object of the question is the respondent’s own country instead of the EU (Niedermayer, 1995, p. 54). There has also been a discussion on whether the question should be used to measure specific support (Rabier & Reif, 1987) or diffuse support (Handley, 1981; Niedermayer, 1995).

However, within this thesis, this survey item is used to measure public attitudes towards the principles of the EU regime, following Norris, and is further treated as constituting the most system important attitudinal indicator of public support for the EU regime. As the question has been regularly included by EB since 1973, it is also the most interesting survey item when looking at longitudinal trends in public support for the EU regime. However, for some strange reason, EB has not included the question in their “Standard Eurobarometer Surveys” since 2010, but has instead chosen to include it only within so-called “Special Eurobarometer Surveys,” which focus on different specific topics and are conducted a few times a year. Member state levels of public support for EU membership are summarised in Figure 13 (see page 226).⁹⁵

⁹⁵ See Appendix Table 16 page 325 for member state levels of public support for EU membership 2004–2017.

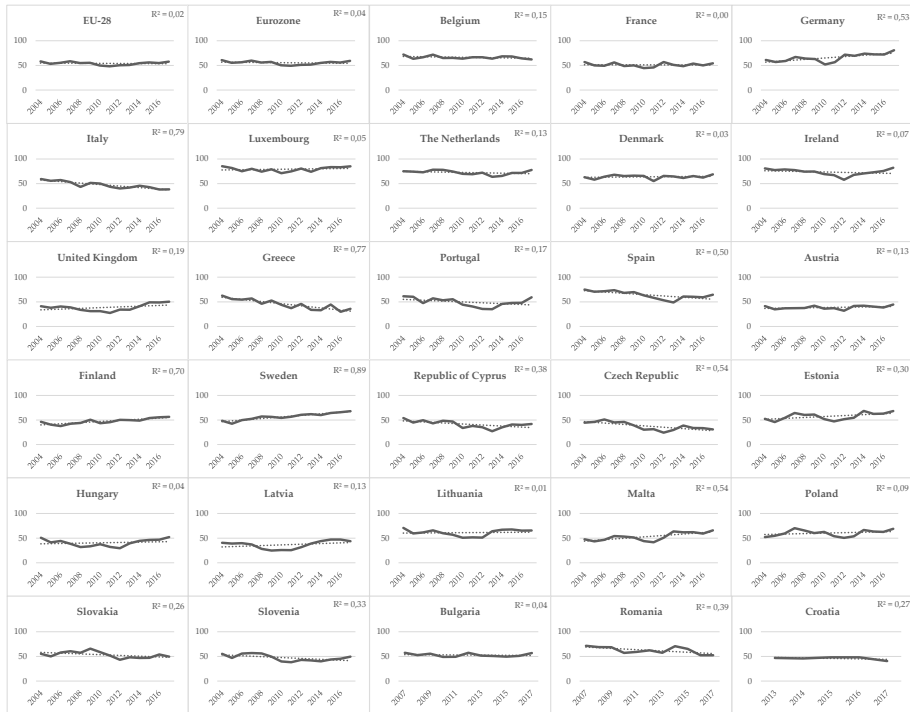


Figure 13. Public support for own country's EU membership 2004–2017. Source: Eurobarometer 2004–2017 downloaded from Gesis ZACAT.⁹⁶

It has been suggested within the literature that public support for EU membership in Europe might possibly have peaked in 1992, right before the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty (Citrin & Sides, 2004, p. 47). Be that as it may, it is not within the scope of this thesis to answer that question, but during the period of concern for this thesis, public support for the EU membership peaked in 2004 during the same year as the EU area increased from 15 to 25 member states over a night. Then the mean value of public support for the EU membership within the EU area reached 58 per cent.⁹⁷ In 2011 public support for EU membership fell to its lowest levels, when the country levels of public support had

⁹⁶ EB survey question: “Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY’S) membership in the European Union (in earlier versions referring to the European community) is a good thing, a bad thing or neither good nor bad?” Chart shows proportion responding “A good thing”.

⁹⁷ This survey item was not included in Croatia during 2004–2012, and not in Bulgaria and Romania during 2004–2006.

declined to 48 per cent.

When comparing the country levels of public support in 2004 with 2017, the levels of public support have increased in 17 out of 25 countries. This occurred most significantly by 20 percentage points in both Germany (81%) and Sweden (68%) and by 18 percentage points in Malta (66%). However, simultaneously the levels of public support have declined by 27 percentage points in Greece (36%), 21 percentage points in Italy (38%) and with 14 percentage points in the Czech Republic (31%). In 2017, there was also a majority supporting EU membership in all except eight countries, the highest being in Luxembourg (85%), Ireland (82%) and Germany (81%). On the other hand, only 31 per cent of the population in the Czech Republic, 36 per cent in Greece and 38 per cent in Italy expressed support for EU membership in 2017.

The survey item measuring public support for each respective country's EU membership constitutes a more diffuse kind of support for the EU regime than public support for the EU regime institutions and the EU regime processes. However, it does not directly reflect or measure public attitudes towards the more underlying principles of the EU regime in the direct meaning of the concept of EU regime principles, as the guiding principles of the EU regime relate to the four freedoms established in the Treaty of Rome (1957). These are the freedom of movement within the EU area for labour, capital, goods and services. It is, however, not possible to use survey data provided by EB, nor any other data source, to measure public support for these EU regime principles for any longer period. However, since 2014, EB has sporadically included five survey items that can be used to descriptively show that the country levels of public support for these freedoms are also at a high level within the EU area.

Since 2015, the EB has included a survey item measuring public attitudes towards the free movement of people within the EU area, which arguably comes closest to something resembling public attitudes towards the EU regime's guiding principles as they are more broadly defined in this thesis. Member state levels of public support for the

proposal of the free movement of people within the EU area are summarised in Figure 14.⁹⁸



Figure 14. Public support for the free movement of people 2015–2017. Source: Eurobarometer 2015–2017 downloaded from Gesis ZACAT.⁹⁹

Even though the survey question is framed as a proposal, as it is included within a battery of questions of other EU related proposals, it nevertheless reflects public support for something that has been implemented within the EU area since the 1950’s. However, the proposal of free movement of people within the EU area does have, according to the latest survey data in 2017, overwhelming levels of public support within every member state of the EU; the mean value of

⁹⁸ See Appendix Table 20 page 329 for member state values of public support for the free movement within the EU area 2015–2017.

⁹⁹ EB survey question: “What is your opinion on each of the following statements? Please tell me for each statement, whether you are for it or against it. The free movement of EU citizens who can live, work, study and do business anywhere in the EU”. Chart shows proportion responding “For”.

public support within the EU area being as high as 87 per cent in 2017. There are, however also clear cross-country differences, as the country levels of public support range from 98 per cent in Estonia and 97 per cent in both Latvia and Lithuania to 74 per cent in Austria and 75 per cent in Denmark. Hence, irrespective of how this data is interpreted, it indicates that the open borders policy within the EU area does have considerable support within the EU area. Since 2014, EB has also included a survey item regarding whether respondents think it is a good thing that EU citizens can live and work abroad within the EU area. This survey item has probably become included by the Eurobarometer in order to account for the pressure put on the internal cohesion within the EU area during and after the great recession and the Eurocrisis. Furthermore, this survey item could also be considered to reflect public support for the underlying principles of the EU, as the free movement of people within the European political community is perhaps the most essential freedom ingrained within the EU treaties. The member state levels of public support for the right to work and live freely within the EU area are summarised in Figure 15 (see page 230).¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ See Appendix Table 18 page 327 for member state levels of public support for the right to live and work abroad within the EU area 2015–2017.



Figure 15. Public support for the EU right to live and work abroad 2014–2017. Source Eurobarometer 2014–2017 downloaded from Gesis ZACAT.¹⁰¹

Also, according to this survey item, there is a majority within all of the member states that thinks it a good thing that people can live and work anywhere within the EU area. According to the survey data from 2017, public support for the EU right to work abroad was 76 per cent within the EU area, and towards the EU right to live abroad 78 per cent. There are, however, also here significant cross-country variations regarding both of these survey items. Country levels of public support for the EU right to live abroad in 2017 ranged from 91 per cent in Luxembourg and 90 per cent in Spain to 59 per cent in Italy and 63 per cent in Austria. Regarding country levels of public support for the EU right to work abroad in 2017, the percentages ranged from 92 per cent

¹⁰¹ EB survey question: “For each of the following statements, please tell me if you think that it is a good thing, a bad thing or neither a good or a bad thing. The right for EU citizens to live abroad / The right for EU citizens to work abroad”. Chart shows proportion responding “A good thing”. Black=Live abroad, Grey=Work abroad.

in Luxembourg to 59 per cent in Italy. Even though there are some significant cross-country variations in the levels of public support for these fundamental EU rights, there is, however, an overwhelming majority in favour of these EU regime principles within all member states.

Since 2015, EB surveys have also included a similar question asking what the European public thinks about the right for EU citizens to live and work in one's own country. This reflects a similar kind of attitude as the previous question, however it is slightly different in character as it reflects the public willingness to allow other, non-national, EU citizens the same opportunities in one's own country, which presumably could be considered as demanding more solidarity towards other EU citizens. The member state levels of public support for the EU right to live and work in the respondent's own country are summarised in Figure 16 (see page 232).¹⁰²

¹⁰² See Appendix Table 19 page 328 for member state levels of public support for the EU right to live and work in one's own country 2015–2017.



Figure 16. Public support for the EU right to live and work in own country 2015–2017. Source Eurobarometer 2015–2017 downloaded from Gesis ZACAT.¹⁰³

The survey data suggest that there are similarities here in relation to public support for the right to live and work abroad within the EU area, namely that there is also a widespread majority in all of the member states in favour of the right of EU citizens to live and work in one’s own country. According to the latest survey data from 2017, a mean value of 73 per cent supports the EU right to live in one’s own country and there is also a 73 per cent support for the EU right to work in one’s own country. There are also hear clear cross-country variations in the levels of public support. While 89 per cent in Spain and 87 per cent in both

¹⁰³ EB survey question: “For each of the following statements, please tell me if you think that it is a good thing, a bad thing or neither a good or a bad thing. The right for EU citizens to live in our country / The right for EU citizens to work in our country”. Chart shows proportion responding “A good thing”. Black=Live in our country, Grey=Work in our country.

Luxembourg and Ireland support the EU right to live in one's own country, the corresponding levels are only 52 per cent in Italy and 54 per cent in Croatia. A similar pattern emerges when looking at country levels of public support for the EU right to live in one's own country, as the country levels of public support range from 90 per cent in Luxembourg and Spain to 52 per cent in Italy and 53 per cent in Croatia. There is, however, a majority within all countries within the EU area expressing public support also for these basic EU rights.

In sum, it is interesting to note that public attitudes towards these three elements of the EU regime seem internally connected. Even though this was, to some extent, to be expected based on the literature. In this respect, Italy, Greece and the Czech Republic can be taken as the prime-examples of member states where the levels of public support have declined significantly towards all three system elements of the EU regime. However, it also becomes clear that the economic performance of the countries cannot explain all of the decline. The Czech Republic, for instance, has performed extremely well economically during this period.¹⁰⁴ More on that later. This overview regarding public support for the EU regime elements also broadly shows that member state levels of public support for the EU regime institutions, processes and principles broadly follows the same longitudinal pattern. In the following section, the focus will be on the most important system component of the EU as a political system, i.e. the European political community, based on the guidelines provided by the system support theory.

6.1.3 The European political community

Member state levels of public attitudes towards the European political community are indicators of the more diffuse kind of support for the EU, which is measured in this section by member state levels of European identification and EU attachment. Country levels of public attitudes towards these two elements of the European political

¹⁰⁴ According to Eurostat, the Czech Republic had, as an example, the lowest unemployment rates within the EU area in 2016 at 4 per cent.

community should thereby theoretically not be as easily affected by how the EU regime institutions and processes are evaluated, and even less by how the specific European integration policies are perceived by the European public. According to Kaina and Karolewski (2013, p. 26), the “relevance of a European collective identity has become more important as the supranational system of governance has developed, the problems of defining collective identity commonly hamper systemic inquiry on this subject”. The idea of a collective identity within a political community is intimately linked with the concept of citizenship (Scheuer, 1999, p. 25) and, according to Duchesne and Frogner (1995, p. 193), “the dream of the Community’s founding fathers was, ultimately, to see the emergence of a European identity”. Nevertheless, Duchesne and Frogner argued that it does not mean that this new European identity should directly replace the prevailing national identities, but that the European identity should, at least over time, become strong enough for Europe to develop as a real political entity. This kind of argumentation is, however, difficult to validate empirically.

An important step in this direction is the implementation of European citizenship into EU-law, first in the Maastricht Treaty and further established in the Lisbon Treaty. As history has shown that the emergence of mutual identification within political communities takes time (Scheuer, 1999, p. 27), it does, however, constitute a crucial milestone in this process of creating a “European people”. However, as Berg (2007, p. 28) has argued, “a person can have a general European attachment without wanting either deeper or wider European integration; as well, it is theoretically plausible that a person might not feel European, but still support European integration for purely functional or self-interested reasons”. Nevertheless, as also Kaina (2006, p. 128) argues, a “strong collective identity directly contributes to the endurance of political systems, since we-feelings of the community’s members encourage their “readiness or ability to continue working together to solve their political problems”. It is thus, again, necessary to clearly state that these two attitudinal indicators do not directly

transfer into public support for the EU regime, or anything vaguely defined as “the EU”.

There is, however, no “perfect indicator” to measure public attitudes towards the European political community, but the most widely used attitude used to operationalise European identification is to use the so-called “Moreno-question”.¹⁰⁵ The question has been included by EB occasionally since 1992, and has been widely criticised and even called “seriously unusable” by some researchers (Bruter, 2008, p. 281).¹⁰⁶ While acknowledging this critique, the survey item does provide the most longitudinal data regarding the extent of European identification within the member states of the EU, and will hence also be used within this study. As with the other survey items, the answers to this survey item have also been dichotomised to imply either solely identification with one’s own nation state or some identification as a European, following Polyakova and Fligsteins (2016) operationalisation of the survey item. The member states levels of European identification are summarised in Figure 17 (see page 236).¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ EB survey question: “In the future do you see yourself as a) Nationality (only), b) Nationality and European, c) European and nationality, d) European only or e) Don’t know.

¹⁰⁶ Even though, this survey item has been used by, among others: Schild (2001), Carey (2002), Citrin and Sides (2004), Hooghe and Marks (2005), Fligstein (2008), Caporaso and Kim (2009), Risse (2010), Wilson (2011), Kuhn (2012), Mitchell (2016) and Polyakova and Fligstein (2016).

¹⁰⁷ See Appendix Table 21 page 330 for member state levels of European identification 2004–2017.

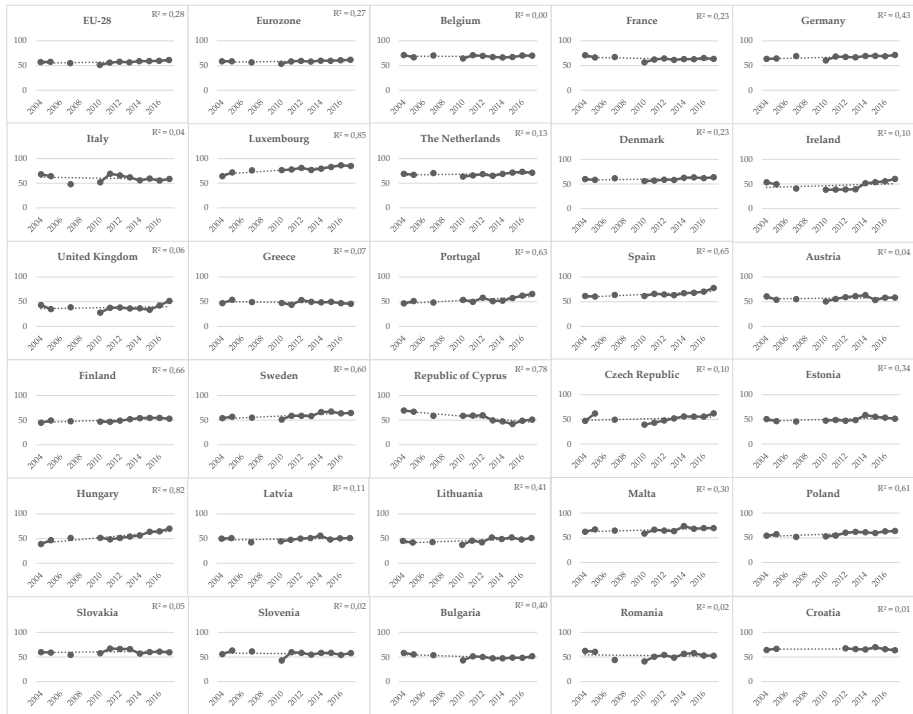


Figure 17. European identification 2004–2017. Source: Eurobarometer 2004–2017 downloaded from Gesis ZACAT.¹⁰⁸

Country levels of European identification within the EU area peaked in 2017, with 61 per cent to some extent identifying as Europeans within the EU area. Comparing the country levels in 2017 with the levels in 2004, the levels of European identification have increased within 19 of 28 countries. This has occurred most significantly by 31 percentage points in Hungary (70%), 21 percentage points in Luxembourg (85%) and 19 percentage points in Portugal (66%). However, the levels of European identification have simultaneously declined by 19 percentage points in the Republic of Cyprus (51%), 10 percentage points in Romania (53%) and by 9 percentage points in Italy (59%). When comparing the country levels of European identification during

¹⁰⁸ EB survey question: “In the near future, do you see yourself as...? (Nationality) only, (Nationality) and European, European and /Nationality), European only or None”. Chart shows pooled proportion responding either “Nationality and European”, “European and Nationality” or “European only”.

the midst of the economic crises of 2010 with 2017, the levels of European identification in 2017 were higher in all member states except two (the Republic of Cyprus and Greece). It should also be pointed out that during this period, the levels of European identification increased by 23 percentage points in the United Kingdom and in the Czech Republic and by 22 percentage points in Ireland. According to the survey data from 2017, there was a majority in all member states, except Greece, that identified, to some extent, as European. The highest country levels being in Luxembourg (85%) and Spain (78%).

Public attitudes towards the other element of the European political community are measured by the country levels of EU attachment, reflecting the most affective sense of belonging towards a political community. This survey item was first included by EB in 1991 (EB 36), and has since then, unfortunately, only sporadically been included in EB surveys.¹⁰⁹ That is also probably one of the reasons why this survey item has not been more regularly included in similar studies. The member state levels of EU attachment are summarised in Figure 18 (see page 238).¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ The second time it was included was in 2002 (EB 56.3& 58.1) and then again in 2006 (EB 65.2). Since 2012 it has, however, been included yearly within EB surveys.

¹¹⁰ See Appendix Table 22 page 331 for member state levels of EU attachment 2006–2017.

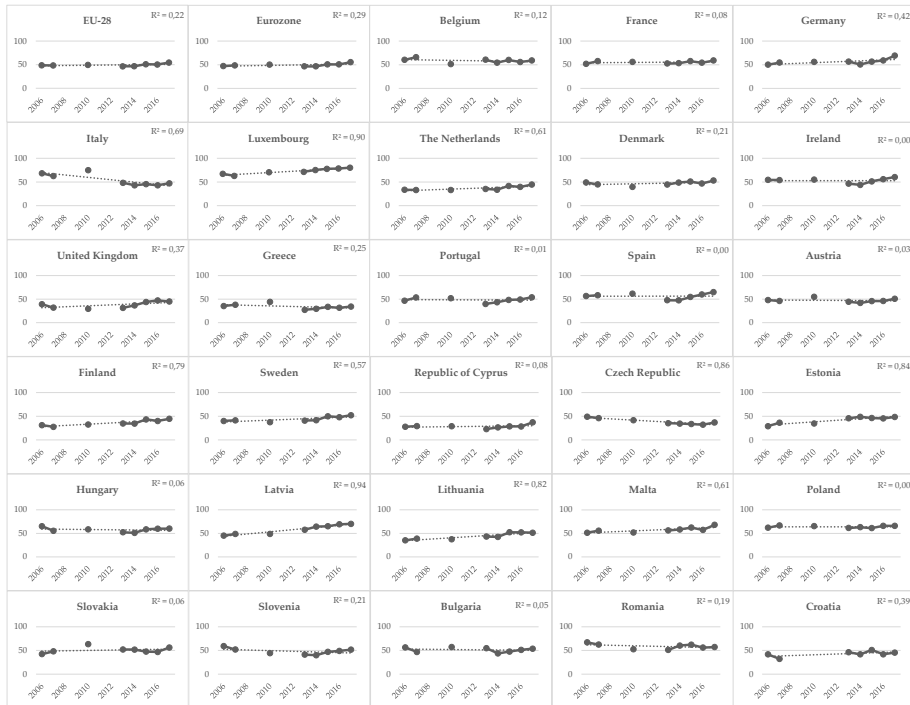


Figure 18. EU attachment 2006–2017. Source: Eurobarometer 2006–2017 downloaded from Gesis ZACAT.¹¹¹

Country levels of EU attachment peaked within the EU area in 2017, when 54 per cent expressed some level of EU attachment. The survey item Hungary was not included by EB in 2004 and 2005, but when comparing the country levels of 2006 with 2017, one can notice that the levels of EU attachment have increased in 20 out of 28 countries. Most significantly by 25 percentage points in Latvia (70%) and 19 percentage points in both Estonia (48%) and Germany (69%). However, the country levels of EU attachment have simultaneously declined by 21 percentage points in Italy (47%) and 12 percentage points in the Czech Republic (37%). According to the survey data from 2017, there was also a majority in the majority of member states that felt some EU attachment. The

¹¹¹ EB survey question: “People may feel different degrees of attachment to their town or village, to their region, to their country or to the European Union. Please tell me how attached you feel to: The European Union”. Chart shows proportion responding “Very attached” or “Fairly attached”.

highest levels of EU attachment being in Luxembourg (80%), Latvia (70%) and Germany (69%). On the other hand, in Greece (34%), the Czech Republic (37%) and the Republic of Cyprus (37%), only about a third of the public felt attached to the EU. There appear to be significant cross-country variations within the EU area also regarding the most diffuse kind of support for the European political community.

Even though the country levels of the most diffuse kind of support for the EU generally seem to have recovered to, and even surpassed, the levels before the start of the global recession, there are also more concerning signals within some member states from a system persistence perspective. This is especially the case within countries where the diffuse kind of support has declined. According to system support theory, indicators reflecting the more diffuse kind of support are not supposed to fluctuate heavily over time. However, longer periods of declining levels of specific support should, over time, also transform into declining diffuse support. On the other hand, longer periods of increasing specific support should also, over time, transform into higher levels of diffuse support for the EU. Within some member states, it is possible, based on this overview, to argue that the declining levels of public support for the EU regime also seem to have affected public attitudes towards the European political community negatively (Greece, the Czech Republic). While, on the other hand, the reverse could be said of some member states, where public support for the EU regime might be connected to increased levels of diffuse support for the European political Community (Finland). However, this descriptive overview does not tell anything behind the underlying reasons for these developments. How these developmental variations can be explained will be further presented in the subsequent subchapter. In the following section, the general conclusions derived from this section are first summarised, before shifting focus to the more analytical part of this thesis, starting in the subsequent subchapter.

Summary

This subchapter has provided an extensive overview regarding the member state levels of public support for different system elements of the EU. This overview has shown that there are significant variations within and between countries in public support over time, and also that there are significant variations between the different indicators of public support. Hobolt (2017, p. 224) argued that the Eurocrisis “has had consequences not only for the economic governance in Europe, but perhaps more fundamentally for the European Union’s political settlement and popular legitimacy. It presented the European Union (EU) with a fundamental challenge: on the one hand, the crisis led to greater public contestation of and opposition to the EU, and on the other hand, the Union has become ever more reliant on public support for its continued legitimacy”. It is difficult not to agree with Hobolt, when comparing the levels of public support prior to the start of the global recession and the Eurocrisis with the levels of public support during the following years, that the crises increased public opposition towards the EU. This was found especially within the countries most severely affected by the crises. However, the levels of public support for the most system important elements of the EU (EU membership, European identification, EU attachment) remained quite stable during this period within many countries. That is also in itself an interesting finding.

Starting with public support for the European integration policies component, public support for the widening of the EU has declined within all 28 member states during the period of 2004–2017. Public support for the deepening of European integration has declined in 21 member states, although not within most member states as much as public support for expansion has declined. Public support for the securing of European integration has declined within 18 member states, however most significantly within those countries that are not members of the eurozone. In general, there seems to have been a decline in public support for European integration during this period. With regard to public support for the EU regime component, public support

for the EU regime institutions has declined within 26 member states, Sweden and Finland being the only exceptions. Public support for the EU regime processes has declined within 17 member states, although not as significantly in comparison with public support for the EU regime institutions. Public support for the EU regime principles, measured by public attitudes towards EU membership, has declined in 14 member states. However, looking at the country levels of public support for the free movement policy within the EU area, there still appears to be a considerable majority within most member states supporting one of the basic freedoms provided by the EU. In general, there seems to have been a decline in public support for the EU regime during this period.

With regard to public support for the European political community, the levels of European identification have declined within ten member states, but based on the total levels within the EU area, the levels of European identification have increased during this period. There is also a similar development with regard to EU attachment, as the levels of EU attachment have increased within 21 countries during this period. In general, there seems to have been a slight increase in public support for the European political community during this period. An overview of this is presented in Table 8 (see page 242).

Table 8. Net change in member state levels of public support between 2004 and 2017.

Country \ variable	Policies			Regime			Community		Total:
	Wide.	Deep.	Secu.	Inst.	Proc.	Prin.	Iden.	Atta.	Net decline
	Enl.	Def.	Euro	EP	Dem.	Mem.	Ide.	Att.*	Total:
Austria	-7	-9	-8	-14	-3	3	-3	3	6 / 8
Belgium	-14	-9	-8	-14	-10	-10	-1	-1	8 / 8
Bulgaria	-31	-8	-40	-18	-4	-1	-7	-3	8 / 8
Croatia	-17	-13	-21	-12	3	-6	-1	4	5 / 8
Republic of Cyprus	-24	-6	4	-33	-20	-12	-19	9	6 / 8
Czech Republic	-43	-15	-43	-32	-8	-14	15	-12	7 / 8
Denmark	-17	-1	-22	-1	3	6	4	4	4 / 8
Estonia	-27	-3	29	-13	-3	16	1	19	4 / 8
Finland	-17	5	-1	1	11	10	8	13	2 / 8
France	-15	-3	-4	-23	-4	-3	-8	7	7 / 8
Germany	-9	-2	12	-2	0	20	8	19	3 / 8
Greece	-22	-12	4	-47	-37	-27	-1	-1	7 / 8
Hungary	-9	-15	-11	-24	-10	1	31	-5	6 / 8
Ireland	-13	0	-1	-25	-10	1	7	6	4 / 8
Italy	-31	-13	-4	-27	-8	-21	-9	-21	8 / 8
Latvia	-25	-3	16	-15	6	3	1	25	3 / 8
Lithuania	-20	-1	-9	-13	-1	-5	6	16	6 / 8
Luxembourg	-13	3	2	-8	-4	0	21	13	3 / 8
Malta	-6	5	33	-7	-1	18	7	17	3 / 8
Netherlands	-26	-3	6	-9	-1	3	2	11	4 / 8
Poland	-21	-7	-35	-16	1	17	10	4	4 / 8
Portugal	-15	-3	11	-22	15	-2	19	7	4 / 8
Romania	-23	-19	-23	-32	-14	-19	-10	-10	8 / 8
Slovakia	-28	-10	14	-31	4	-6	0	14	4 / 8
Slovenia	-24	-10	-4	-39	-26	-6	2	-8	7 / 8
Spain	-8	4	11	-33	-22	-10	16	8	4 / 8
Sweden	-9	8	-22	7	7	20	11	12	2 / 8
United Kingdom	-9	2	-3	-8	-4	8	8	6	4 / 8
EU-28	-19	-5	-4	-18	-5	-1	4	6	6 / 8
Eurozone	-18	-4	5	-19	-6	-2	3	8	5 / 8

The longitudinal trends in public support towards the different system components of the EU as a political system differ significantly within the EU area. This is apparent both between countries and through indicators of public support. However, as Peters (2013, p. 33)

argued, it is good to have a dependent variable that varies extensively. Based on this overview, it is possible to argue that public support for both the European integration policies and the EU regime have declined within the EU area during this period, while, on the other hand, public support for the European political community has increased. Still, there is an overwhelming majority within all member states in support of the underlying founding principles of the EU, illustrated by the levels of public support for the free movement of people within the EU area, as well as the levels of public support for the right to work and live within the EU area. Hence, the European public still seem to support the concrete benefits that EU membership enables. There are, however, four countries where the levels of public support for all eight elements have declined during this period; Belgium, Bulgaria, Italy and Romania. However, in most countries there are more mixed developments. The underlying reasons behind these developments have also been widely discussed within the literature. Tömmel (2014, p. 335) and McCormick (2014, p. 218), for instance, argue that these developments are derived from the notion that a larger amount of the European public has started to perceive the EU as the source of problems instead of the solution. However, it has already been the common procedure of national-level politicians to blame the implementation of unpopular decisions on Brussels (Marks et al., 1996, p. 150; Obradovic, 1996, p. 202). Therefore, that argument does not tell the whole story about the declining levels of public support.

Even though many EU scholars connect the declining levels of public support to the economic downturns caused by the global recession in 2008, and the Eurocrisis in 2010, some have also argued that public support for the EU regime has been in almost constant decline since the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 (Hix, 2005; Hooghe & Marks, 2005; Kaina, 2006; Mair, 2007). The Maastricht Treaty has therefore also been argued to constitute “a turning point in the study of public opinion towards European integration” (De Vries, 2018, p. 35). This long-term development in public support has also been

labelled by Eichenberg and Dalton (2007) as the “post-Maastricht blues”. Hence, the development with the declining levels of public support during the period of 2004–2017 could be just a continuation, or acceleration, of something constituting a longer trend. That assumption cannot, however, be confirmed by the findings presented in this thesis.

6.2 Explaining EU support

In this subchapter, the results from the statistical analyses are presented. As the results contain a great amount of important information, the results will be presented stepwise in a number of tables, each focusing on a specific system component of the EU. In the following section, the regression estimates for the three indicators of public support for the European integration policies (widening, deepening & securing) system component are presented. Thereafter, the regression estimates for the three indicators of public support for the EU regime (institutions, processes and principles) system component are presented. Finally, the regression estimates for the two indicators of public support for the European political community (identification & attachment) system component are presented. In order to highlight the main findings, the first part of this subchapter concludes with a summary section focusing on the main initial statistical findings. In the final part of this chapter, the more general findings derived from the statistical analyses and the methodological limitations with this study are presented and discussed.

6.2.1 Determinants of support for integration policies

The focus of this section is on presenting the regression estimates derived from the statistical analyses for explaining the within and between countries variations in public support for three different types of European integration policies. Based on the conceptualisation of the EU from a system perspective, public support for the European integration policies component is the least important component from a system persistence perspective. However, from the perspective of the future development of the EU, public attitudes towards this system

component are highly relevant as they signal in which direction the EU can develop without risking severe opposition from the European public. The theoretical assumption is that longer periods of declining levels of public support for European integration policies will, over time, also transform into declining levels of public support for the EU regime. Public support for European integration policies are also used to reflect the most specific kind of support, as public attitudes towards European integration policies are expected to fluctuate within countries when the perceived benefits of a European integration policy decline. The public in countries that should benefit more from a European integration policy are also expected to be more supportive of that policy.

Three indicators regarding public support for European integration policies were included in the statistical analyses, each reflecting public attitudes towards different European integration policies. Public support for future EU enlargement reflects public support for the proposal of further expanding the EU area to include more member states in the future. Public support for a common European defence policy reflects public support for the proposal of deepening European integration within a specific and important policy-area. Public support for the single European currency reflects public support for the securing of an already implemented European integration policy. The three following tables presented include values reflecting the regression estimates, standard errors, variance components and explained variance achieved by the multilevel models. All regression estimates presented are unstandardised. The results from the statistical analyses explaining the country-level variations in public support for the three European integration policies are presented in Table 9 (see page 246).

Table 9. Explaining public support for European integration policies.

	European integration policies		
	Future EU enlargement	Common European defence	Single European currency
Between-country effects			
Economic performance			
Debt	-0.19* (0.07)	-0.13* (0.06)	-0.21** (0.07)
Unemployment	1.27 (0.65)	-0.03 (0.49)	-0.48 (0.61)
Democratic culture			
Non-corruption	-0.52** (0.15)	-0.41*** (0.11)	-0.31* (0.14)
Economic inequality	0.19 (0.53)	-0.01 (0.40)	-0.91 (0.50)
External pressure			
Foreign population	-0.47* (0.22)	0.20 (0.17)	-0.11 (0.21)
Refugees	6.05 (3.93)	-1.27 (2.94)	-4.02 (3.70)
EU-relation			
Eurozone membership	-5.33 (4.88)	8.48* (3.64)	37.64*** (4.59)
EU budget net reciever	0.77 (2.11)	0.37 (1.57)	1.44 (2.00)
Within-country effects			
Economic performance			
Debt	-0.31*** (0.03)	-0.15*** (0.02)	-0.13*** (0.03)
Unemployment	0.26 (0.13)	0.23** (0.08)	0.45** (0.16)
Democratic culture			
Non-corruption	-0.21** (0.08)	-0.13** (0.05)	-0.26** (0.10)
Economic inequality	-0.24 (0.22)	-0.16 (0.14)	-0.88*** (0.27)
External pressure			
Foreign population	-1.78*** (0.23)	-0.41** (0.14)	-1.48*** (0.29)
Refugees	1.09 (1.13)	0.34 (0.68)	1.05 (1.39)
EU-relation			
Eurozone membership	-7.34*** (1.30)	1.16 (0.79)	17.90*** (1.60)
EU budget net reciever	-2.26*** (0.44)	-1.56*** (0.27)	-3.97*** (0.53)
Random effects			
Residual (Null model)	69.32*** (5.42)	16.31*** (1.33)	71.02*** (5.55)
Residual (Full model)	27.37*** (2.14)	9.68*** (0.79)	41.13*** (3.22)
Intercept (Null model)	228.04*** (62.04)	79.71*** (21.66)	214.87*** (58.87)
Intercept (Full model)	57.04*** (15.83)	32.18*** (8.81)	49.15*** (14.35)
Pseudo R-squares			
Between	0.75	0.60	0.77
Within	0.61	0.41	0.42
Countries	28	28	28
Observations	355	330	355

Standard errors in parentheses: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Starting with public support for future EU enlargement, which reflects country levels of public support for the future expansion of the EU area. The question of further EU enlargement to include more member states is regularly on the EU agenda, and there are signs that the EU, in the near future, is preparing to grant EU membership to more countries from the Balkans, as has been discussed in the previous chapter. It should, first and foremost, be emphasised at this point that public support for future EU enlargement has declined significantly within all of the 28 member states during the period of 2004–2017.¹¹² Looking at the results presented in Table 9, five of the contextual-level factors were statistically connected (statistically significant) to the within countries variations in public support, debt, non-corruption, foreign population, eurozone membership and EU budget net receiver. These findings suggest that higher levels of debt, lower levels of corruption, higher proportion of foreign population, being a eurozone member state and paying proportionally less to the EU budget all predict lower levels of public support for future EU enlargement within countries over time. Regarding the statistical connection between countries, only three contextual-level factors were statistically connected to the variations in public support, debt, non-corruption and foreign population. These findings suggest that higher levels of debt, lower levels of corruption and a higher proportion of foreign population predict lower levels of public support for future enlargement between countries. According to the pseudo R^2 values, this multilevel model was able to explain 75 per cent of the between countries and 61 per cent of the within countries variations in public support for future EU enlargement.

The second element of the European integration policies component is public support for a common European defence policy, reflecting country levels of public support for the deepening of European integration. This is a European integration policy that has been partially integrated within the EU machinery since the Maastricht Treaty, but has still not been further developed in practice. The general trends in

¹¹² See Figure 8 page 211 for summary.

public support for this proposal during the period of 2004–2017 have been quite stable within the EU area, as there have been no significant fluctuations in member state levels of public support. According to the most recent data from 2017, there was also a majority in support of a common European defence policy within most member states.¹¹³ According to the results presented in Table 9, five of the contextual-level factors were statistically connected to the within countries variations in public support for a common European defence policy, debt, unemployment, non-corruption, foreign population and EU budget net receiver. These results suggest that higher levels of national debt, lower levels of unemployment, lower levels of corruption, higher proportional levels of foreign population and paying proportionally less to the EU budget predict lower levels of public support for a common European defence policy within member states over time. Regarding the variations between countries, debt, non-corruption and the eurozone membership factor were all statistically connected to the variations. These results suggest that public support for a common European defence policy is lower in member states with higher levels of debt and with lower levels of corruption, but higher in countries that are eurozone countries. With the contextual-level factors included in this multilevel model, 60 per cent of the between countries variations and 41 per cent of the within countries variations of the variations in public support for a common European defence policy were explained, according to the pseudo R² values.

The third European integration policy is public support for a single European currency, reflecting member state levels of public support for the securing of an already implemented European integration policy. With regard to public support for the single European currency, it has been shown in the previous subchapter that there is a clear divide between the non-eurozone countries and the eurozone countries with regard to public support for the single European currency.¹¹⁴ According to the results presented in Table 9, seven of the eight contextual-level

¹¹³ See Figure 9 page 213 for summary.

¹¹⁴ See Figure 10 page 215 for summary.

factors included were statistically connected to the within countries variations in public support. The results therefore suggest that higher levels of debt, economic inequality, foreign population and paying proportionally less to the EU budget predict lower levels of public support, while higher levels of unemployment, lower levels of corruption and being a eurozone country predict higher levels of public support within countries over time. Regarding the variations between countries, higher levels of debt and lower levels of corruption predict lower levels of public support, while the eurozone membership factor predicts higher levels of public support, suggesting that the levels of public support are higher in countries that are actually using the single European currency, have lower levels of debt and are more corrupt. With the multilevel model, 77 per cent of the between countries variations and 42 per cent of the within countries variations in public support for the single European currency were explained, according to the pseudo R^2 values.

Based on the main findings presented in Table 9, it is possible to draw some general conclusions regarding the effect of contextual-level determinants on the variations in public support for the three different kinds of European integration policies, within and between countries. Starting with the between countries variations in public support, debt and corruption levels were statistically significant predictors in all cases. The results therefore clearly suggest that the general public in countries with higher levels of corruption are more likely to support European integration policies, while countries with higher levels of debt are more likely to be less supportive of European integration policies. With regard to between countries variations in public support for the single European currency, it is also worth noting how important the eurozone membership factor clearly seems to be. The public is generally more positive towards the single European currency within countries that are actually using the euro. Regarding the within countries variations in public support for European integration policies, four of the contextual-level factors were statistically significant for explaining the variations for all three European integration policies.

The results therefore suggest that higher levels of debt, higher levels of foreign population, paying proportionally less to the EU budget and lower levels of corruption are statistically connected to lower levels of public support for each of these three European integration policies over time. However, it is also important to point out that during 2004–2017, most of the member states have accumulated higher levels of debt, and many of the post-2004 member states have, during this period, also started to pay proportionally more to the EU budget as their economies have grown proportionally more than the EU-15 member states. It should also be noted that the proportional amount of foreign population has also grown in a majority of member states during this period, while there have been more mixed developments regarding the corruption level developments. In the following section, the determinants of public support for the EU regime will be presented and discussed.

6.2.2 Determinants of support for the regime

The focus of this section is on explaining the variations in public support for the three elements of the EU regime component. Three indicators reflecting public support for the EU regime were included in the statistical analyses, each reflecting public support for different elements of the EU regime. Trust in the European Parliament (EP) reflects public support for the EU regime institutions, satisfaction with EU democracy reflects public support for the EU regime processes, while public support for EU membership reflects public support for the EU regime principles. As member state levels of public support for these three elements of the EU regime have earlier been argued to be internally connected, it was also not to be expected that the statistical effects of the contextual-level factors would vary significantly between these three indicators of public support. The results from the statistical analyses explaining country-level variations in public support for the EU regime are presented in Table 10 (see page 251), according to the same guidelines as in the previous section.

Table 10. Explaining public support for the EU regime.

	EU regime		
	Trust in the European Parliament	Satisfaction with EU democracy	EU membership support
Between-country effects			
Economic performance			
Debt	-0.16* (0.07)	-0.14* (0.06)	-0.18 (0.09)
Unemployment	-0.26 (0.60)	-0.22 (0.56)	0.49 (0.81)
Democratic culture			
Non-corruption	-0.10 (0.14)	-0.15 (0.13)	0.17 (0.18)
Economic inequality	-0.30 (0.50)	0.15 (0.46)	0.41 (0.67)
External pressure			
Foreign population	-0.09 (0.21)	0.20 (0.19)	-0.01 (0.28)
Refugees	4.38 (3.64)	-0.40 (3.40)	-1.09 (4.91)
EU-relation			
Eurozone membership	6.42 (4.51)	-4.17 (4.22)	9.07 (6.09)
EU budget net receiver	2.91 (1.96)	-0.42 (1.83)	-1.44 (2.63)
Within-country effects			
Economic performance			
Debt	-0.45*** (0.03)	-0.23*** (0.03)	-0.05* (0.02)
Unemployment	-0.30* (0.13)	-0.89*** (0.14)	-0.98*** (0.13)
Democratic culture			
Non-corruption	-0.21** (0.08)	-0.06 (0.09)	-0.01 (0.08)
Economic inequality	-0.49* (0.22)	-0.26 (0.24)	0.40 (0.22)
External pressure			
Foreign population	-1.08*** (0.23)	-0.62* (0.25)	-0.16 (0.23)
Refugees	0.20 (1.12)	0.11 (1.20)	3.89*** (1.11)
EU-relation			
Eurozone membership	-4.64*** (1.29)	-2.88* (1.43)	1.58 (1.28)
EU budget net receiver	-1.93*** (0.43)	-0.48 (0.47)	-1.20** (0.43)
Random effects			
Residual (Null model)	105.23*** (8.22)	67.61*** (5.50)	42.77*** (3.34)
Residual (Full model)	26.72*** (2.09)	30.15*** (2.45)	26.29*** (2.06)
Intercept (Null model)	73.63*** (21.92)	78.69*** (22.54)	129.80*** (35.57)
Intercept (Full model)	48.65*** (13.63)	41.79*** (11.85)	90.31*** (24.69)
Pseudo R-squares			
Between	0.34	0.47	0.30
Within	0.75	0.55	0.39
Countries	28	28	28
Observations	355	330	355

Standard errors in parentheses: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Starting with the results explaining the variations in member state levels of trust in the EP. This is considered as the least system important element of the EU regime component, based on the conceptual framework of this thesis. It should first of all be noted that the levels of trust in the EP have declined significantly within most of the member states during 2004–2017.¹¹⁵ Hence, it was not surprising that two of the contextual-level factors that were statistically connected to the within countries variations in public support were the two most directly performance-related factors, debt and unemployment. However, also corruption, economic inequality, foreign population, eurozone membership and EU budget balance were statistically connected to the variations. The results therefore suggest that higher levels of debt, unemployment, economic inequality, foreign population and paying proportionally less to the EU budget, as well as lower levels of corruption and being a eurozone country, are all connected to lower levels of trust in the EP within countries over time. Regarding the between countries variations, only debt levels were statistically connected to trust in the EP, suggesting that higher levels of debt predict lower levels of trust in the EP between countries. With the multilevel model, it was possible to explain 34 per cent of the between countries and 58 per cent of within countries variations in the member state levels of trust in the EP, according to the pseudo R^2 values.

Continuing with satisfaction with EU democracy, which is here used to measure member state levels of public support for the EU regime processes. According to the conceptual framework of this thesis, public attitudes towards the EU regime processes also reflect public support for a more system important element of the EU regime than for the EU regime institutions. The general trend in public support within the EU area during this period has been similar to the trend regarding member state levels of trust in the EP, as might have been expected by the literature.¹¹⁶ Hence, it was not surprising that four of the same contextual-level factors were also statistically connected to the within

¹¹⁵ See Figure 11 page 220 for summary.

¹¹⁶ See Figure 12 page 223 for summary.

countries variations regarding satisfaction with EU democracy, debt, unemployment, foreign population and eurozone membership. This suggests that higher levels of debt, unemployment, foreign population and being a eurozone member state all predict lower levels of trust in the EP within countries over time. Also, debt levels were the only contextual-level factor statistically connected to the between countries variations, as was also the case regarding trust in the EP. With the multilevel model, 47 per cent of the between countries and 55 per cent of the within countries variations in member state levels of satisfaction with EU democracy were explained, according to the pseudo R^2 values. The results here were similar to the results with regard to member state levels of trust in the EP, and hence these results suggest that country-level variations in trust in the EP and satisfaction with EU democracy are largely explained by the same contextual-level factors.

Concluding the EU regime section with the variations in public support for EU membership, which are used in this thesis to measure and reflect member state levels of public support for the EU regime principles. According to the conceptual framework of this thesis, public attitudes towards the EU regime principles are the most important element of the EU regime component when seen from a system persistence perspective. The general trends in public support within the EU area during 2004–2017 have been similar to that of member state levels of trust in the EP and satisfaction with EU democracy, with public support for EU membership also declining within many member states, although in most cases not to the same extent. Hence, the declining trends are not as clear, with significant variations between countries regarding the developments.¹¹⁷ Based on the results, four of the contextual-level factors were statistically connected to the within countries variations in public support for EU membership, debt, unemployment, refugees and EU budget balance. The results therefore suggest that higher levels of debt and unemployment, and paying proportionally less to the EU budget predict lower levels of public support for EU membership over time. However, there also seems to

¹¹⁷ See Figure 13 at page 226 for summary.

be a statistical connection between a higher number of refugees and higher levels of public support over time, which is quite surprising. Also, none of the contextual-level factors included were statistically connected to the between countries variations in public support. With the multilevel model it was possible to explain 30 per cent of the between countries and 39 per cent of the within countries variations in public support for EU membership, according to the pseudo R^2 values. With regard to the within countries variations in public support, these results were similar to the findings related to within countries variations in public support for the EU regime institutions and EU regime processes.

Based on the main findings presented in Table 10, it is possible to draw some general conclusions regarding the contextual-level determinants of public support for the EU regime, within and between countries. As was expected, varying levels of economic performance within member states predict most of the within countries variations in public support for all of these three elements of the EU regime component, as all of the six regression estimates derived from the statistical analyses were statistically connected to the levels of both debt and unemployment. Higher levels of debt and higher levels of unemployment within a country over time hence predict lower levels of public support for the EU regime institutions, EU regime processes and EU regime principles; in short, therefore also for the whole EU regime. It is however also worth noting that there are significant differences between the country levels of public support for these three elements of the EU regime. It is also interesting to note how the eurozone membership factor is a statistically significant predictor for the within countries variations, regarding both public support for the EU regime institutions and the EU regime processes, but not with regard to EU regime principles. This suggests that as the kind of support becomes more diffuse, it is not as easily affected by short-term developments, as suggested by system support theory. In the following section, the determinants of public support for the European political community will be presented and discussed.

6.2.3 Determinants of support for the community

The focus of this section is on the variations in public support for the two elements of the European political community component, measured by member state levels of European identification and EU attachment. Public support for the European political community reflects the most diffuse kind of support for a political system, and hence also the most important system component of the EU, seen from a system persistence perspective. According to the system support theory, diffuse support reflects deeper held feelings of loyalty, identification and attachment towards a system component for what it is, not because of what it does. Therefore, the diffuse support should also remain more stable over time. With regard to diffuse support for the European political community, however, the country levels of diffuse support are quite challenging to measure empirically, as the EU as a political system is still not strictly comparable with the political systems of the member states. This has been extensively discussed in chapter three.

Nevertheless, within the conceptual framework of this thesis, the member state levels of European identification are used to measure the extent to which citizens perceive themselves to be participating in a shared European political community, while country levels of EU attachment measures the more affective kind of emotional attachment with the European political community created by the EU. Theoretically, and empirically, these two indicators of public support towards the European political community are closely related. As indicators of diffuse support are not expected to vary based on short-term developments, both the between and within countries variations were expected to be more difficult to statistically predict with contextual-level factors than was the case with the member state variations in public support for the European integration policies and the EU regime. The results from the statistical analyses for explaining the country-level variations in public support for the European political community are presented in Table 11 (see page 256), according to the same guidelines as the tables in the two previous sections.

Table 11. Explaining public support for the European political community.

	European political community	
	European identification	Attachment to the EU
Between-country effects		
Economic performance		
Debt	-0.08 (0.06)	-0.04 (0.08)
Unemployment	0.54 (0.54)	-0.44 (0.72)
Democratic culture		
Non-corruption	-0.25 (0.12)	-0.25 (0.16)
Economic inequality	-0.85 (0.44)	-0.12 (0.59)
External pressure		
Foreign population	0.21 (0.19)	0.41 (0.25)
Refugees	2.78 (3.26)	-4.24 (4.36)
EU-relation		
Eurozone membership	5.50 (4.04)	1.62 (5.40)
EU budget net reciever	-3.64* (1.75)	-1.50 (2.33)
Within-country effects		
Economic performance		
Debt	0.06* (0.03)	-0.02 (0.03)
Unemployment	-0.59*** (0.13)	-0.47** (0.17)
Democratic culture		
Non-corruption	-0.04 (0.08)	-0.05 (0.10)
Economic inequality	0.48* (0.24)	0.08 (0.29)
External pressure		
Foreign population	0.15 (0.17)	-0.44 (0.31)
Refugees	2.22* (1.08)	3.47* (1.34)
EU-relation		
Eurozone membership	-0.37 (1.40)	8.27*** (1.63)
EU budget net reciever	0.56 (0.44)	-1.04 (0.53)
Random effects		
Residual (Null model)	24.93*** (2.22)	34.69*** (3.39)
Residual (Full model)	21.90*** (1.95)	26.00*** (2.54)
Intercept (Null model)	72.46*** (20.06)	89.44*** (25.00)
Intercept (Full model)	38.53*** (10.92)	69.63*** (19.43)
Pseudo R-squares		
Between	0.47	0.22
Within	0.12	0.25
Countries	28	28
Observations	280	237

Standard errors in parentheses: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Starting with European identification, it should first of all be acknowledged here that the member state levels of European identification have not changed significantly within most of the member states during 2004–2017. However, there are significant variations between countries in the levels of European identification.¹¹⁸ Based on the results presented in Table 11, four of the contextual-level factors were statistically connected to the within countries variations in European identification, debt, unemployment, economic inequality and refugees. This suggests that higher levels of unemployment predict lower levels of European identification, while higher levels of debt, economic inequality and refugees, on the other hand, predict higher levels of European identification within countries. With regard to the between countries variations, only the EU budget balance factor was statistically connected to the country levels of European identification. This suggests that the levels of European identification are lower in the countries that receive proportionally more from the EU budget. It is also important to point out that there appears to be a clear East-West divide with regard to EU budget contributions, as most of the pre-2004 member states are net contributors to the EU budget. These countries have also been EU member states for a longer period, and hence perhaps become socialised into identifying as Europeans, as some have suggested (Karp & Bowler, 2006). With the multilevel model it was possible to explain 47 per cent of the between countries and 12 per cent of the within countries variations in member state levels of European identification, according to the pseudo R^2 values.

Concluding this section with the results for explaining the variations in member state levels of EU attachment. It is important to acknowledge that although the general developments with regard to the member state levels of EU attachment have been similar to that of European identification, there is data missing for a significant number of time points for the member state levels of EU attachment (data for 2004, 2005, 2008, 2009, 2011 and 2012 are missing).¹¹⁹ Therefore the

¹¹⁸ See Figure 17 page 236 for summary.

¹¹⁹ See Figure 18 page 238 for summary.

amount of observations, on which the analysis was conducted, were smaller in comparison to European identification, making strict comparisons between these two indicators empirically challenging. Taking the data limitations into consideration, it was still necessary to include this indicator of diffuse support in the analysis, as the levels of EU attachment do reflect another kind of diffuse support than the levels of European identification, as EU attachment is of the more directly system affective kind of support.

Based on the results presented in Table 11, three of the contextual-level factors were statistically connected to the within countries variations in the levels of EU attachment, unemployment, refugees and eurozone membership. Hence, the results suggest that higher levels of unemployment predict lower levels of EU attachment, while on the other hand, a higher level of refugees and being a eurozone member are predictors for higher levels of EU attachment within countries. Surprisingly, none of the contextual-level factors included were statistically connected to the variations between countries, which suggests that the more diffuse an element becomes, the more statistically challenging it is to explain variations in public support between countries. With the multilevel model, 22 per cent of the between countries and 25 per cent of the within countries variations in member state levels of EU attachment were explained, according to the pseudo R^2 values.

Based on the main findings presented in Table 11, it is possible to draw some general conclusions regarding how contextual-level factors are connected to the within and between countries variations in public support for the European political community. As was expected by the literature, many of the contextual-level factors that were statistically connected to the variations in public support for the European integration policies and the EU regime, both within and between countries, had not statistical effect on public support for the European political community. The only two contextual-level factors that produced statistically significant regression estimates for explaining the within countries variations in levels of European identification and

EU attachment were unemployment and refugee levels. Hence, these results clearly suggest that higher unemployment levels predict lower levels of public support, while a higher proportional number of refugees predicts higher levels of public support, for the European political community within countries over time. As expected, the analyses were not able to produce statistically significant regression estimates that could explain why public support for the European political community varies between countries. However, being a net recipient of the EU budget predicts lower levels of European identification between countries. Another interesting finding is that higher levels of debt predict higher levels of European identification, while higher levels of debt seem to predict lower levels of EU attachment within countries (although not statistically significant). This finding also illustrates why it was important to include more than one indicator for measuring public support for the European political community in the statistical analyses. In the following section, the main findings from the statistical analyses are summarised.

Summary

The results from the statistical analyses suggest that the contextual-level factors included in the multilevel analyses were more adequate for explaining the variations within than between countries. These results also clearly suggest that it is more difficult to statistically predict the within-country variations in the more diffuse kind of support than to the more specific kind of support for the European integration policies and the EU regime, at least when including these types of contextual-level factors in the statistical analyses. These results also clearly suggest that there are clear empirical advantages from dividing the EU as a political system into different system elements, towards which the indicators of public support are directed, as there are different contextual-level factors that explain different kinds of public support. The results also clearly show that the effect of the contextual-level determinants on member state levels of public support differs between the system elements. As the presentation of the results from

the statistical analyses shows, there is a large amount of information that needs to be acknowledged when trying to generalise the findings into the larger context of system development and persistence capabilities of the EU from a system perspective. The following subchapter will discuss the results more extensively.

6.3 Results discussion

This subchapter will discuss the findings derived from the previous two subchapters and relate these findings to the larger research purpose of this thesis. This subchapter will start with an overview regarding the developments in public support from a broad perspective in order to answer the first research question of this thesis.

1. How have the member state levels of public support for the different system components of the EU as a political system developed over time?

6.3.1 General trend in EU support

In the subsequent section, the results from the descriptive part of this thesis are summarised in three tables. These tables include information regarding how the levels of public support changed between 2004–2010, 2011–2017 and 2004–2017 towards European integration policies, the EU regime and the European political community. The reason for presenting the data divided into two separate periods is because these two periods largely represent two different eras, pre- and post-Eurocrisis. As will also become apparent, there is a valid argument for also presenting these two periods separately.¹²⁰ Also, as the country levels of public support have already been presented and analysed,¹²¹ the data presented in the tables are summarised to reflect five group-based values reflecting the change in percentage points during the periods within these groups. Hence, the net change in percentage

¹²⁰ The period of 2004–2010 ends with the value from 2010, and the period of 2011–2017 starts with the value from 2011. Hence these two periods constitute two different eras.

¹²¹ See Appendix Tables 11–22 on pages 320–321 for member state level values.

points between 2004-2010, 2011-2017 as well as 2004-2017 will be presented in the tables. In the tables, the EU-28 mean value includes all of the current 28 member states (hence including the United Kingdom, as well as Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia). The EU-15 mean value includes all of the West-European countries that were members of the EU prior to the great EU-enlargement of 2004. The EU-13 mean value includes all of the member states that have become EU member states after 2004 (including Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia). The eurozone mean value includes the 19 member states participating in the eurozone¹²² and the non-eurozone mean value includes the 9 member states not participating in the Eurozone to date.¹²³

European integration policies

In this section, the focus is on the three indicators used to measure country levels of public support for the European integration policies component. These three indicators are related to the most specific kind of support for the EU. Public attitudes towards European integration policies are therefore expected to be determined and affected by the perceived benefits for the public provided by the suggested and/or implemented European integration policies. According to the theoretical framework, the European integration policies component is the least important system component from a system persistence perspective, while still remaining important in terms of the future development and direction of the EU. This is basically because the EU is still being built stepwise through the implementation of a wide range of European integration policies. However, what the European public think of these European integration policies also matters from the perspective of the system persistence capabilities of the EU as a political system as well, as continuing public dissatisfaction with European

¹²² Austria, Belgium, Republic of Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain.

¹²³ United Kingdom, Sweden, Denmark, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia.

integration policies should also, over time, have a negative effect on the levels of public support for the EU regime and the European political community. Public support for three kinds of European integration policy has been included in this thesis, referred to as the widening (future EU enlargement), deepening (common European defence) and securing (the single European currency) of European integration. With regard to the system importance of these three European integration policies, there is also a suggested hierarchy. The developments in public support for the three European integration policies are summarised in Table 12.

Table 12. *Public support for European integration policies 2004–2017.*

<i>System element</i>	<i>Change</i>	<i>Change</i>	<i>Change</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Widening				
<i>(Future EU enlargement)</i>	2004-2010	2011-2017	2004-2017	2017
EU-28	-13	-1	-18	49
EU-15	-13	1	-15	41
EU-13	-12	-3	-22	59
Eurozone	-14	-2	-18	46
Non-Eurozone	-10	-8	-19	55
Deepening				
<i>(Common European defence)</i>	2004-2010	2011-2017	2004-2017	2017
EU-28	-3	-1	-5	80
EU-15	-4	2	-2	78
EU-13	-1	-5	-8	83
Eurozone	-2	-1	-4	82
Non-Eurozone	-3	-4	-8	75
Securing				
<i>(Single European currency)</i>	2004-2010	2011-2017	2004-2017	2017
EU-28	-5	4	-4	67
EU-15	-4	5	-1	69
EU-13	-5	3	-7	64
Eurozone	-2	9	5	79
Non-Eurozone	-11	-7	-25	40

According to the conceptual framework of this thesis, the least system important European integration policy is related to the

widening of the EU area, measured by the extent to which the public supports the prospect of a future EU enlargement. This is because what the public think about the prospect of further enlargement of the EU area does not say much in terms of the system persistence capabilities of the EU as it is. However, as has been shown, there are a large number of EU candidate countries that are waiting to be accepted into the EU (Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia etc.). Accepting more countries as member states without public approval could definitely result in more negative sentiments towards other system elements of the EU; mainly because new member states directly change the composition of the European political community (Ross, 2008; Hoeglinger, 2016). The levels of public support for future EU enlargement have declined significantly within all groups during 2004–2017, but the most significant decline took place during the period of 2004–2010. However, when looking solely at the period of 2011–2017, the levels of public support for future EU enlargement have actually increased within the EU-15 group. In general, there is a clear division between the EU-15 and EU-13 groups regarding public support for future EU enlargement, as the EU-13 group is much more positive towards the prospect of EU enlargement.

There is also an interesting difference between the eurozone and non-eurozone groups, as the non-eurozone group is significantly more positive towards EU enlargement. This could, however, also be explained by the fact that only three of the countries in the EU-15 group are part of the non-eurozone group (Denmark, Sweden and the United Kingdom). Nevertheless, it is important to note that the survey item used to measure public support for the widening of the EU area only reflects public support for future EU enlargement in general, and not with regard to specific countries. There are, however, good reasons to believe that a significant majority of the European public would be supportive of Iceland, Norway or Switzerland joining the EU, for example, as they would become net contributors to the EU budget. However, there might be more public hesitation regarding the prospect

of future enlargement when it relates to Turkey, North Macedonia or Serbia joining, as they would become net recipients of the EU budget.

What has been argued to constitute the second most system important European integration policy is related to the deepening of European integration within a specific policy area, in this thesis related to the prospect of a common European defence policy. However, it would be extremely difficult for the EU regime to attempt to go through with deeper European integration within a policy area, particularly one resulting in the transference of more national-level decision-making powers to the EU level, without public approval, especially within high-profile policy areas. If this transference of decision-making powers would be performed without public support from the member states, it could further increase the notion of a democratic deficit within the EU-machinery (Follesdal & Hix, 2006). Public support for the deepening of European integration is measured through the country levels of public support for a common European defence policy, and the trend is similar with regard to public support for the deepening of the EU as it was towards expansion.

The levels of public support for a common European defence policy have declined within all groups during the period of 2004–2017. However, the decline has not been as severe as the decline in public support for future EU enlargement. Again, looking solely at the period of 2011–2017, public support for a common European defence policy has actually increased within the EU-15 group, while the decline in public support continued during this period within the other groups. The higher levels of public support within the EU-15 group are probably connected to the Russian annexation of the Ukrainian Crimean peninsula in 2014, and perhaps also to the relatively large number of terrorist attacks within the EU-15 group during this period.¹²⁴ Even though there has been a small negative trend in public support, there is still widespread public support for this European integration policy within each group, ranging from 75 per cent support

¹²⁴ The overwhelming number of terrorist attacks within the EU area during 2011–2017 took place in countries within the EU-15 group.

within the non-eurozone group to 83 per cent support within the EU-13 group. Hence, at least with regard to this specific European integration policy, there is a clear majority of support for the further deepening of European integration within the EU area.

The most system important European integration policy from a system persistence perspective is public support for the single European currency, the euro. Since this extremely ambitious integration policy has already led to the creation of a multi-speed EU, with core eurozone- and outer non-eurozone countries, it could become extremely difficult to continue using the single European currency without sufficient levels of public support. If one wants to be dystopian, one should remember what Angela Merkel noted in 2011, namely that “if the euro fails, Europe fails”. Especially after the Eurocrisis (2010), the faith of the single European currency cannot be studied without considering the kind of effect it will have on the EU as a political system as a whole. The third and final European integration policy, hence, relates to what in this thesis has been referred to as the securing of an already implemented European integration policy, measured here through the levels of public support for the single European currency.

The trend with regard to public support for the single European currency differs quite extensively from the other two European integration policies, as the levels of public support for the single European currency have actually increased during 2004–2017 within the Eurozone group. Here it also becomes apparent why this period needed to be divided into two periods, as during 2004–2010 public support declined within each group, while public support increased again during the period of 2011–2017 within four groups. Especially with regard to the Eurozone and the non-Eurozone group, there is here an apparent difference in public support, as public support has declined by 25 percentage points within the non-eurozone group, simultaneously as public support increased by 5 percentage points within the eurozone group during the period 2004–2017. Roth et al. (2016, p. 956) argued that “the fact that the euro – a centerpiece of European integration – still finds support during the crisis should be

viewed as a necessary condition for its survival. The future will show if this support is sufficient to guarantee its existence". The findings presented here broadly support that argument, at least with regard to the eurozone. Nevertheless, what Lindberg and Scheingold (1970, p. 41) argued almost five decades ago still seems true to date:

"As a matter of fact we can make only very general statements about the relationship between the support indicators and political action – the kinds of statements which flow from the notion of "permissive consensus". Positive indicators simply suggest to us that policy makers can probably move in an integrative direction without significant opposition, since this permissive consensus would tend to reduce the chances that opposing elites could mount an effective counterattack. Conversely, significant opposition and persistent social cleavage do not necessarily mean that integrative steps cannot be taken, but rather that the opportunities for blocking them are greater".

Taking that into account, the country levels of public support for different types of European integration policies will still tell us something about both the public attitudes and preferences towards these policies, simultaneously as it might have an impact on the willingness of the political authorities at member state levels to proceed with the European integration project in general. As political authorities are prone to making "cost/benefit"-calculations when both suggesting and implementing political policies, they are surely taking into account the extent of public opposition that they would be likely to face if pursuing a specific European integration path. The example previously used regarding the stalled TTIP-negotiations in 2016 clearly showed the direct effect public opposition towards a policy proposal can have (De Ville & Siles-Brugge, 2017). In short, there are clear variations over time with regard to public support for these three system elements of the European integration policies component. Public support for a common European defence policy has remained high within all groups, while public support for future enlargements of the EU area, on the other hand, has declined significantly within all

groups during the period of 2004–2017. The most striking finding, however, is what has happened with public support for the single European currency, and there is a clear difference in the levels of public support between countries that are actually using the euro as a currency and countries that do not. In the following section, the focus is on the more system important component of the EU, the EU regime.

EU regime

In this section, the focus is on the three indicators used to measure member state levels of public support for the EU regime component, divided into the three elements constituting the EU regime institutions, the EU regime processes and the EU regime principles. These three indicators are placed in the middle of the system support continuum presented in the conceptual framework, and public support for this system component is, hence, neither completely specific nor completely diffuse in character. The EU regime also constitutes what is normally referred to when speaking of “the EU”. In this thesis, the EU regime more concretely refers to the institutional framework that has been created at the supranational European level with the purpose of implementing European integration policies and, hence, according to the system support theory, also constitutes a European political community over which the EU regime has a political mandate. Therefore, without the EU regime, there is no European political community. Based on Norris’ (1999) conceptualisation of the EU from a political regime perspective, the EU regime in this thesis has been further divided into three different system elements of system importance, towards which the indicators of public support are primarily directed. As with the European integration policies, these three elements are not, theoretically, of equal importance when seen from a system persistence perspective and should, hence, be seen as ranging on a continuum ranging from the least (institutions) to the most (principles) system important element. As public support for the EU regime principles is suggested to reflect the most diffuse kind of support for the EU regime, it is therefore expected to remain quite

stable over time, while public support for the EU regime institutions reflects the most specific kind of support for the EU regime, and is hence expected to fluctuate more heavily based on the contextual-level developments. Survey data regarding the developments in public support for these three system elements of the EU regime component are summarised in Table 13.

Table 13. Public support for the EU regime 2004–2017.

<i>System element</i>	<i>Change</i>	<i>Change</i>	<i>Change</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Institutions				
<i>(Trust in the EP)</i>	2004-2010	2011-2017	2004-2017	2017
EU-28	-12	0	-18	56
EU-15	-13	3	-15	56
EU-13	-13	-3	-22	57
Eurozone	-14	0	-20	56
Non-Eurozone	-9	-2	-16	56
Processes				
<i>(Satisfaction with EU dem.)</i>	2004-2010	2011-2017	2004-2017	2017
EU-28	-3	4	-5	58
EU-15	-4	5	-5	55
EU-13	-1	2	-5	61
Eurozone	-5	6	-6	57
Non-Eurozone	1	0	-3	60
Principles				
<i>(EU membership support)</i>	2004-2010	2011-2017	2004-2017	2017
EU-28	-8	10	0	58
EU-15	-9	10	0	62
EU-13	-7	10	1	53
Eurozone	-11	10	-2	59
Non-Eurozone	-2	8	4	54

Starting with public support for the EU regime institutions, measured by the levels of trust in the European Parliament (EP). According to the political trust literature, a minimal level of trust in the political institutions of the regime is of crucial importance within any kind of political system. This is because sustaining low levels of trust in the regime institutions will ultimately start challenging the stability of the political system as a whole (Dogan, 1994, p. 309; Hetherington, 2005,

p. 15). Trust in the EU regime institutions should therefore be regarded as reflecting how the EU's regimes current performance is evaluated by the European public (Harteveld et al., 2013, p. 544). In short, the levels of trust in the EP have declined significantly within all groups during the period of 2004–2017. The most significant declines in the levels of trust in the EP were during the period 2004–2010, but since 2011 the levels of trust in the EP have remained quite stable, and actually increased within the EU-15 group. It is also quite interesting that there are no significant differences between the groups regarding the levels of trust in the EP in 2017. However, one apparent finding is that the levels of trust have declined more significantly within the EU-13 group than within the EU-15 group.

As the EU regime has been more democratised over time, following increased decision-making powers being transferred to the European Parliament (EP), public attitudes towards the democratic processes within the EU regime have also grown in importance. The levels of public support for the democratic part of the EU regime's processes are usually measured by public attitudes measuring the levels of satisfaction with the democratic performance of the EU regime (Norris, 1999). The development in public support for the EU regime processes is also similar to the development in public support for the EU regime institutions. In short, there has been a small decline in the country levels of satisfaction with EU democracy during the period of 2004–2017 within all groups. However, during the period of 2011–2017, the country levels of satisfaction with EU democracy have actually remained stable, or even increased, within all groups. There are also no significant differences in the country levels of satisfaction with EU democracy between the groups, as there is a public majority expressing satisfaction with EU democracy within all groups in 2017.

As the EU regime has been built based on liberal democratic principles and values, the public evaluation of EU regime principles reflects a deeper and more affective kind of support towards the underlying principles upon which the EU regime has been built over time. Public support for this system element of the EU regime

component is therefore more important in terms of the long-term system persistence capabilities of the EU than public support towards the EU regime institutions and processes. Public support for the EU regime principles are, following Norris (1999), measured by the country levels of public support for EU membership, the traditionally most widely-used survey item in studies measuring public support for the EU. Quite interestingly, the country levels of public support for EU membership have not changed significantly during the total period of 2004–2017 within any of the groups. However, when looking at the two periods separately, it becomes apparent that the levels of public support for EU membership have been anything but stable. During the period of 2004–2010, the levels of public support declined within each group, but during 2011–2017 the levels of public support for EU membership returned to the levels of 2004. The levels of public support for EU membership in 2017 were highest within the EU-15 group (62%), while being lowest within the EU-13 group (53%). However, there was a public majority in support of EU membership within each group. In the previous subchapters, it was also described how the levels of public support for the underlying principles of the EU regime, related to the EU's four freedoms, are still at a high level within all member states of the EU.

The purpose with dividing the EU regime component into three separate evaluable system elements, towards which the indicators of public support are primarily directed, becomes clearer when presenting the findings in this context. The country levels of trust in the EP have decline significantly during the period of 2004–2017, while the decline has been less severe with regard to the country levels of satisfaction with EU democracy during this period. On the other hand, even though there was a significant decline in public support for EU membership during the period of 2004–2010, the levels of public support for EU membership have only declined within the eurozone-group when looking at the total period of 2004–2017. Simultaneously, the levels of public support for EU membership have actually increased both within the EU-13 and the non-eurozone groups. Hence, it is

possible to argue that even though the more performance-related indicators, related to more specific kinds of support for the EU regime, have declined over time, the more diffuse kind of support for the EU regime seems to have returned to the pre-economic crises levels of 2004. In the following section, the focus is on the most system important component of the EU as a political system, the European political community.

The European political community

In this section, the focus is on the two indicators used to measure the country levels of public support for the European political community. These two indicators refer directly to the most diffuse kind of support for the EU from a system perspective. According to the system support theory, it is the diffuse kind of support that is the most important from a system persistence perspective over time. This is because it is the diffuse kind of support for the political system, in the form of affective sentiments towards and identification with the political community, which is supposed to hold a political system together during longer periods of system stress through crises. As the EU has been increasingly transformed into a more state-like political regime, it has also been argued that the EU as a political system has become more dependent on the most diffuse kind of support to withstand crises (Kaina, 2006). Hence, as Wessels (2007, p. 303) argues: "Orientations toward the political community have a special position in the hierarchy of political objects. They are the first-order level of support; the necessary basis for any political system. They encompass the political system in two ways: because the political system is embedded in the political community, and because they contain an element of self-ascription, membership, and identification going beyond the formal citizen role". Survey data regarding the developments in public support for the European political community are summarised in Table 14 (see page 272).

Table 14. Public support for the European political community 2004–2017.

<i>System element</i>	<i>Change</i>	<i>Change</i>	<i>Change</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Identification				
<i>(European identification)</i>	2004-2010	2011-2017	2004-2017	2017
EU-28	-6	5	4	61
EU-15	-4	6	6	64
EU-13	-7	4	3	58
Eurozone	-5	4	3	62
Non-Eurozone	-9	10	6	60
Attachment				
<i>(EU attachment)</i>	2006-2010	2013-2017	2006-2017	2017
EU-28	0	7	5	54
EU-15	1	10	6	55
EU-13	0	6	5	54
Eurozone	3	8	8	55
Non-Eurozone	-4	6	0	52

Starting with the development in mutual European identification, measured by the country levels of European identification. An identity, in the social sense of the concept, is regarded as an affective state of belonging to a social group and is assumed to generate social preferences by emotional evaluations of social groups (Luedtke, 2005, p. 87). A mutual identification within a political community should therefore be regarded as an indicator of a shared sense of “we-feeling” within a political community (Kaina, 2006, p. 118), and hence at least function as a precondition for the development of diffuse support. In short, the levels of European identification have increased during the period 2004–2017 within all groups. However, during the period of 2004–2010, the levels of European identification actually declined within all groups, while the levels have increased, on the other hand, during the period of 2011–2017. The levels of European identification are highest within the EU-15 group, and lowest within the EU-13 group, while there are no significant variations between the eurozone and the non-eurozone groups. The primary explanation as to why the levels of European identification are higher within the EU-15 group can

probably be traced to the notion that the EU-15 member states have been socialised into Europeans, as a result of their longer EU-memberships (Karp & Bowler, 2006; Braun & Tausendpfund, 2014).

The other indicator used to measure country levels of public support for the European political community are the levels of EU attachment. As diffuse support is theoretically based on deep sentiments of loyalty and “we-feelings” towards an object, it constitutes a more general attachment towards an object for what it is, not for what it does. The argument presented in this thesis is that longer periods of European identification should also transform into higher levels of EU attachment. It was also important to include two indicators of diffuse support, as especially the survey item used to measure country levels of European identification has been heavily criticised within the literature (Bruter, 2008, p. 281). Because of the limited availability of survey data, there are no directly comparable survey data presented regarding the trends in European identification and EU attachment. However, based on the survey data from the period of 2006–2017, the levels of EU attachment are higher in 2017 within all groups except one, the non-eurozone group. Especially in the eurozone group, the levels of EU attachment have increased significantly during this period, which suggests that using the euro also seems to have affected the levels of diffuse support. However, there is only a small margin between the eurozone and the non-eurozone groups when it comes to the levels of EU attachment in 2017. In the following section, the results from the statistical analyses are discussed in relation to the literature.

6.3.2 Explaining the variations in EU support

In this section, the results will be further discussed and presented, shifting the attention from the attitudinal indicators of public support to the contextual-level factors used to explain the variations in public support within and between countries in the statistical analyses. This is in order to provide answers to the two main research questions in this thesis, which are:

2. To what extent can contextual-level factors explain the variations within countries in public support for the different system components of the EU as a political system?
3. To what extent can contextual-level factors explain the variations between countries in public support for the different system components of the EU as a political system?

For practical reasons, the discussion in this section will focus on the regression estimates that turned out to be statistically connected to the variations in public support in the analyses, and also summarise these regression estimates in a more reader-friendly manner. In short, when focusing on only the regression estimates that turned out to be statistically significant, it becomes clearer that the theoretical guidelines derived from the system support theory largely also seems to hold firm with regard to explaining the variations in public support for the most system important elements of the EU. The statistically significant regression coefficients are presented in Table 15 (see page 275).

Table 15. Summary of statistically significant coefficients.

	Policies		Regime				Community	
	Future EU enlargement	Common European defence	Single European currency	Trust in the European	Satisfaction with EU democracy	EU membership support	European identification	Attachment to the EU
Between-country effects								
Economic performance								
Debt	-0.19	-0.13	-0.21	-0.16	-0.14	-	-	-
Unemployment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Democratic culture								
Non-corruption	-0.52	-0.41	-0.31	-	-	-	-	-
Economic inequality	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
External pressure								
Foreign population	-0.47	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Refugees	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
EU-relation								
Eurozone membership	-	8.48	37.64	-	-	-	-	-
EU budget net receiver	-	-	-	-	-	-	-3.64	-
Within-country effects								
Economic performance								
Debt	-0.31	-0.15	-0.13	-0.45	-0.23	-0.05	0.06	-
Unemployment	-	0.23	0.45	-0.30	-0.89	-0.98	-0.59	-0.47
Democratic culture								
Non-corruption	-0.21	-0.13	-0.26	-0.21	-	-	-	-
Economic inequality	-	-	-0.88	-0.49	-	-	0.48	-
External pressure								
Foreign population	-1.78	-0.41	-1.48	-1.08	-0.62	-	-	-
Refugees	-	-	-	-	-	3.89	2.22	3.47
EU-relation								
Eurozone membership	-7.34	-	17.90	-4.64	-2.88	-	-	8.27
EU budget net receiver	-2.26	-1.56	-3.97	-1.93	-	-1.20	-	-

Variations within countries

The following discussion relates to the second research question, related to how contextual-level factors are able to explain the variations within countries in public support. The short answer to this question is, very well. A significant finding is that the results from the statistical analyses clearly suggests that the country levels of public support are affected by contextual-level developments. The results further suggest that there is a clear statistical connection between contextual-level developments and public support for all system elements of the EU.

These findings broadly support the cue-taking argument with regard to public support for the EU, suggesting that public attitudes towards the EU are determined by contextual-level developments functioning as cues for forming opinions about the EU (Anderson, 1998). There are, however, some contextual-level developments that are more important than others, and the connection between contextual-level developments related to economic performance, democratic culture, external pressure and EU-relation, as well as within countries variations in public support, will now be presented stepwise, based on these four categories.

Starting with the economic performances of the member states. The two contextual-level factors used to reflect the economic performances of the member states in the statistical analyses were debt and unemployment levels. What Inglehart and Rabier (1978, p. 40) argued for over 40 years ago in relation to the then European Community still seems true to date, namely that “public evaluations of membership in the community seem linked with economic growth or decline”. Since the start of the global recession in 2008, many studies have shown that the European public have become more hesitant towards the EU as a result of declining economic performance within many countries (Roth et al., 2011; Armingeon & Ceka, 2014; Braun & Tausendpfund, 2014; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015). A clear pattern also emerges when looking more extensively into the connection between economic performance and public support; when the economic performance declines, public support for most system elements of the EU follows. This is largely in accordance with earlier findings within the literature (Eichenberg & Dalton, 1993; 2007; Rohrschneider, 2002; Hobolt, 2012), and these results further confirm this relationship. The connection is, however, most clear regarding public support for the EU regime component, as higher levels of debt and unemployment were both statistically significant predictors for the declining levels of public support towards all three system elements of the EU regime. Hence, as suggested by Mungiu-Pippidi (2015, p. 122), no long-term solutions for the EU regime’s problems can be fixed without basic economic progress, and

that statement is further supported by these findings. When economic performance declines within countries, so do the levels of public support for the EU regime within the EU area.

However, the connection is not as clear when looking at the within countries variations regarding public support for European integration policies. Even though higher levels of debt were a significant predictor for declining levels of public support for all three types of European integration policies, higher levels of unemployment were, on the other hand, a significant predictor for both higher levels of public support for a common European defence policy and the single European currency. According to Schoen (2008), public support for a common European defence policy is a European integration policy that should not be directly connected by general performance evaluations, and hence not connected to macro-level developments related to economic performance. These results although suggest that public support for something as abstract as a common European defence policy is also affected by economic developments. However, the results still give quite mixed messages regarding the causal effect. The connection between European identification and economic performance has been understudied within the literature, but Polyakova and Fligstein (2016) have shown that during the period of 2007–2009, the European public became more nationalistic in the countries most severely affected by the global recession. The results from the statistical analyses suggest that there is also a connection over a longer period of time, as higher levels of unemployment was statistically connected to lower levels of European identification and EU attachment within countries. On the other hand, higher levels of debt was statistically connected to higher levels of European identification, producing mixed results about the causal effect of economic developments on the diffuse kind of support.

Continuing with the contextual-level factors measuring the institutional performance and quality of the member states, which were corruption and economic inequality developments. Based on the results, lower levels of corruption seem to be statistically connected to lower levels of public support for all three types of European

integration policy and trust in the EP within countries. On the other hand, higher levels of economic inequality predict lower levels of public support for the single European currency and lower levels of trust in the EP, while simultaneously predicting higher levels of European identification within countries. In short, the statistically significant regression estimates produced by the statistical analyses produce quite mixed signals regarding the connection between the institutional performance and variations in public support within countries. Nevertheless, these results broadly support what Sanchez-Cuenca (2000) and Arnold et al. (2012) have suggested, namely that the costs of European integration policies are perceived as being lower when the levels of corruption are increasing.

The two contextual-level factors used to reflect the external pressure on the member states were the proportional number of foreign population and refugees within the countries, related to the total population of the countries. With regard to the statistical connection between the external pressure developments and variations in public support within countries, the results suggest quite clearly that higher proportions of foreign populations predict lower levels of public support for both European integration policies and the EU regime. A higher proportion of a foreign population does not, however, seem to predict any variations in the most diffuse kind of support for the European political community. However, the other external pressure indicator, proportional number of refugees, appears, on the other hand, to be statistically connected to higher levels of diffuse support within countries. This is because it is statistically connected to higher levels of public support for EU membership, European identification and EU attachment. Social communication theories have suggested that contacts between cultures and nationalities should increase mutual acceptance of differences within political communities (Inglehart, 1967), but it is difficult to connect social communication theories to these findings as it gives quite mixed signals regarding the causal effect of changing demographic compositions within countries.

Finally, the two contextual-level factors used to reflect the relationship between the EU and the member states were the EU budget net receiver and eurozone membership factors. Even though the eurozone membership factor is perceived as a dummy, the fact that a number of countries have become eurozone members during 2004–2017 made it analytically possible to also include it as a changing contextual-level factor that varies over time in the multilevel model. First of all, being a eurozone member state predicts lower levels of public support for future EU enlargement, as well as lower levels of trust in the EP and satisfaction with EU democracy within countries over time. However, being a eurozone member state still predicts higher levels of public support for the single European currency. This supports earlier findings by Hobolt and Wratil (2015) that have shown how public support for the EU remained stable within the eurozone during the period of 2005–2013, simultaneously as public support declined within the non-eurozone countries.

Declining levels of public support for all three European integration policies, as well as towards the EU regime institutions and principles, are connected to paying proportionally less to the EU budget. The results therefore seem to suggest that when countries start to pay proportionally less to the EU budget, it has a negative effect on public support, which at first instance might seem surprising. However, as the factor reflects the EU-budget balance of the member states from a longitudinal perspective, paying proportionally less to the EU budget indicates that the national economy has been getting weaker during the period of 2004–2017. Hence, this causal relationship resembles that of the economic performance factors and could have been expected because “poor member states pay a smaller share of the costs and receive a larger share of the expenditure than richer EU members” (Mattila, 2006, p. 48). After this review regarding the statistical connection between national level developments and variations in public support within countries over time, the focus now shifts to the variations between countries.

Variations between countries

Continuing this overview by answering the third guiding research question of this thesis. The short answer is, not particularly good. Nevertheless, the results from the statistical analyses seems to suggest that there are different contextual-level factors that are statistically connected to the variations in different kinds of public support. Starting with the two contextual-level factors related to economic performance, debt and unemployment. It was not expected that national debt levels would turn out to be a better predictor for cross-country variations in public support than unemployment levels. In fact, it was expected that the European public would be more aware of unemployment than debt levels, and therefore use unemployment levels more as a proxy for forming their EU attitudes.¹²⁵ However, the results shows that there is a statistical connection between higher levels of national debt and lower levels of public support between countries, and this especially towards European integration policies and the EU regime institutions. This is supporting the suggestion that the countries most severely affected by the Eurocrisis are the same countries in which EU attitudes have become the most negative during the period after the Eurocrisis (Armingeon & Ceka, 2014; Braun & Tausendpfund, 2014). It is also interesting to note how the statistical effects of national debt do not hold for the indicators measuring the more diffuse kind of support. It is therefore possible to argue, based on these results, that the cross-country variations in the more specific kind of support can be explained by long-term economic developments, while the more diffuse kind of

¹²⁵ However, when the number of groups is small within a multilevel model, it becomes more difficult to statistically estimate the between-group variation (Gelman & Hill, 2006, p. 275) and there is also an ongoing discussion regarding how many countries need to be included within a LMM study, with recommendations usually being around 10–50. However, Bryan and Jenkins have concluded that at least 25 countries are needed, because otherwise “estimates of country-level fixed parameters are likely to be estimated imprecisely and this will not be adequately reflected in test statistics reported by commonly used software: users will conclude too often that a country effect exists when it does not” (2016, pp. 19–20). According to Gelman and Hill (2006, p. 276), even two observations per group is enough to fit a multilevel model.

support is not explained by economic developments, at least not during the short timeframe included in this study.

Continuing with the contextual-level factors reflecting the democratic culture of the member states, corruption and economic inequality. The results suggest that these two indicators were not particularly good at explaining the cross-country variations in public support. However, lower levels of corruption were connected to lower levels of public support for all three European integration policies. Hence, supporting Sanchez-Cuenca (2000) argument that the costs of transferring decision-making powers to the EU level are perceived as being lower in more corrupt countries. Karp and Bowler (2006) also suggested that the public in poorer member states are more negative towards future EU enlargement, which they argued were related to the fact that the public in poorer member states would have more to lose with further enlargements than the public in richer member states. To some extent, these results could be argued to oppose Karp and Bowler's argument, as these findings suggest that less corruption predicts lower levels of public support for the widening of the EU area between countries. Regarding the cross-country variations in public support for the EU regime and the European political community, the democratic culture indicators were not able to explain the variations, as none of the regression estimates obtained were also statistically significant. Of the two external pressure indicators, only foreign population levels were of any statistical relevance, as higher levels of foreign population seems to predict lower levels of public support for future EU enlargement between countries.

The two EU-relation contextual-level factors were neither of any relevance for explaining the variations in public support for the EU regime. Nevertheless, being a eurozone member state predicts higher levels of public support for both a common European defence policy and the single European currency between member states. The levels of European identification were also lower in countries that are receiving more from the EU budget. Already Anderson and Kaltenthaler (1996) suggested that the longer a country had been a

member of the EU the more likely it was that the public would become socialised into “Europeans,” and hence it is not surprising that the levels of European identification are higher within the countries that also pay proportionally more to the EU budget, as these are, to a large extent, the same West-European countries.

After presenting the results from the statistical analyses regarding the statistical connection between national contextual-level factors and public support, it should now be quite clear that the effects of the national contexts differ between the different types of public support. For instance, none of the eight contextual-level factors managed to produce statistically significant estimates for predicting the variations between countries regarding the levels of EU attachment. In short, these results do not contribute much to the literature related to explaining the variations in public support for the EU between countries, as many questions still remain unanswered based on these results. However, the results suggest that the multilevel model was better at predicting variations in public support for European integration policies, which indicates that the more system important the element of public support becomes, the more difficult it is to statistically predict variations within it. In short, it is statistically easier to predict the kind of countries that support the widening, deepening and securing of European integration than it is to predict the countries that have higher levels of European identification and EU attachment. In the following section, the analytical limitations of this study are further discussed.

6.3.3 Analytical limitations

To recap, the research purpose with the statistical part of this thesis has been to try and statistically connect the variations in public support for eight separate system elements of the EU at two analytical levels, within and between countries, to the contextual-level characteristics and developments within 28 countries over a period of 14 years (2004–2017). However, as Box and Draper suggested, “all models are wrong; the practical question is how wrong do they have to be to not be useful?” (1987, p. 4; quoted in Bell & Jones, 2015, p. 143). In relation to

the results presented in this chapter, that quote might perhaps be deemed highly relevant. First of all, through this kind of large picture research approach, some of the analytical depth might have been neglected to maximise the width of the analytical design. Also, by using the LMMs (Linear Mixed Models) as an analytical tool for explaining both the variations within and between countries, it is quite clear that there are limitations with the multilevel modelling method that need to be accounted for.

Another more concrete limitation with the analytical part is related to the measurement and operationalisation of the indicators reflecting the contextual-levels of external pressure on the countries. The values calculated to reflect the proportional amount of foreigners and refugees within a country reflect the total period of 2004–2017, and are hence probably not able to pick up the effect that the migration crisis in 2015 may have had on the variations in public support. Even though migration has been an issue within Europe for a longer period of time, and especially since the start of the Arab spring in 2011, the findings in this analyses do not show that there is a negative relationship between accepting a large number of refugees and public support for the EU at the macro-level. Which was to some extent expected based on the literature. However, if the analytical part would be limited to the period after 2011, the results might have been different. There are, hence, clear limitations with this kind of analytical approach, as by looking at the large picture regarding the relationship between contextual-level developments and country levels of public support, many important events are not directly accounted for in the model. As an example, variables reflecting the extent to which the countries were directly affected by events such as the Eurocrisis (2010) or the migration crisis (2015) have not been included in the analyses; events that most certainly should have affected the country levels of public support for some system elements of the EU.

There is also a risk that the results from this thesis risk ecological fallacy (Peters, 2013), as the overarching approach has been to generalise macro-level findings to characterise the public living within

the countries. A country, however, is not a homogenous unit and there are significant within-country variations based on regional differences, for instance, that have not been controlled for in this thesis. Hence, when generalising a country as being generally supportive towards a concrete system element of the EU, the statement is perhaps only valid for respondents of specific socioeconomic characteristics or from particular regions within that country. Therefore, there are significant cleavages within the countries that should be acknowledged, but because it does not fit into the scope of this thesis, that is for future research to consider. There are also certainly other limitations with the results and analytical design in this thesis that have not been accounted for here, however the results seem to indicate that the research aim when using this type of analytical design has been fulfilled. In the following section, this chapter will be summarised before presenting the general conclusion derived from this thesis in the final chapter.

Chapter summary

One obvious statement that could be drawn from the analytical part of this study is that the variations in public support for all system elements of the EU are to some extent connected to contextual-level characteristics of, and developments within, the member states. An interesting finding from these analyses is, furthermore, that it is possible to explain with statistical methods, using these eight contextual-level factors, why country levels of public support vary both within and between countries in public support for all of the three main system components of the EU. The results therefore suggest that it is at the national contextual-level where researchers should focus when trying to identify the underlying reasons for the variations in public support, and not focus on what the EU is actually doing. On the other hand, it is not possible to empirically validate that assumption based on these analyses, as no indicator reflecting the actual workings of the EU was included in the multilevel models. However, as the EU is a multi-level political system that is basically governed on both supranational and national institutional levels, the actual workings of

the EU are almost impossible to measure and operationalise at the macro-level for comparative purposes. Also, based on the findings, it is possible to conclude that researchers should include a wide range of national contextual-level factors when trying to analyse both the within and between countries variations in public support, as well as account for the multidimensional character of the EU.

Relating these findings to the larger context of system support theories, it is more interesting from a system persistence perspective to look at the kind of contextual-level developments that are connected to the variations within countries in public support. As expected from the literature, negative economic developments predict lower levels of public support for all system elements of the EU regime within countries. However, the results also suggest that declining levels of corruption also predict lower levels of public support within countries, and this especially with regard to European integration policies. Hence, there are differences also with regard to the kind of effect positive national-level societal developments have on the country levels of public support for a supranational political system such as the EU. It is also quite surprising that higher levels of the proportional number of refugees do not have any negative statistical effect on the country levels of public support for either European integration policies or the EU regime, as could perhaps have been expected. Instead, the results suggest that the most diffuse kind of support for the European political community is positively affected by higher proportional levels of refugees. On the other hand, a higher proportion of foreigners within a country predicts lower levels of public support for both European integration policies as well as the EU regime. This gives a quite mixed message for future researchers to consider. Looking at the larger picture, and even though this should not be considered to be a new finding, the results do suggest that the long-term system persistence capabilities of the EU as a political system will, to a large extent, be determined by the economic performances of the countries, and not by the number of refugees or foreigners that a country accepts.

7. Conclusions

The time when the constitutionalization of international law was focused exclusively on the goal of pacification, which also marked the beginning of the development of the European Union, is long past.

Habermas, 2012, p. xi

This thesis has analysed the variations in country levels of public support for different system elements of the EU within and between countries over time in order to explain these variations. The country-level variations in public support at these two analytical levels have, for the main part of the system elements, been successfully empirically connected to contextual-level determinants at the national level. After a brief summary regarding the research aim and the main concepts used in this thesis, this chapter summarises the main findings, discusses their implications and concludes what this study has contributed to the larger literature regarding the system persistence capabilities of the EU from a system perspective.

In order to focus on the broad picture regarding the underlying factors determining both the future development and persistence capabilities of the EU from a system perspective, the EU as a political system was divided into three main system components of system relevance. These system components were derived from the theoretical and conceptual guidelines provided by Easton (1965), which had been successfully further adapted to the EU context by Niedermayer and Westle (1995) and Norris (1999). Through the categorisation of the EU into component parts, aggregated country levels of public attitudes were used to measure public support for European integration policies, the EU regime and the European political community. Nevertheless, as these three system components were still too abstract for empirical purposes, they were further divided into separate system elements towards which the public attitudes were primarily directed. Hence, the European integration policies component includes public attitudes towards the widening, deepening and securing of European integration. Public attitudes towards these European integration

policies are mainly of political concern for the future development of the EU, and in this study conceptualised as the most specific kind of support for the EU. Furthermore, the EU regime component includes public attitudes towards the EU regime institutions, the EU regime processes and the EU regime principles. The EU regime is what is usually referred to when speaking of “the EU”. Finally, the European political community component, the most abstract of these three components, was further divided into two system elements, European identification and EU attachment. Public attitudes towards this component are the most important for the long-term system persistence capabilities of the EU, as they reflect the most diffuse kind of support for the EU.

In the first part of the thesis, it has been argued that in order to analyse the broad picture, with regard to the democratic legitimacy of the EU, it is important to look at country levels of public support for the different system elements of the EU. The empirical purpose to differentiate between the system elements towards which public attitudes are directed, and not only directly towards something singularly defined as “the EU,” was based on the understanding that the European public, over time, has clearly started to differentiate between the different aspects of the EU. Another crucial aspect from a system support perspective was that the country levels of public support for these different system elements was also not of equal importance. Country levels of public support towards European integration policies are a reflection of the most specific kind of support, and were hence expected to fluctuate with the perceived benefits of a European integration policy within countries. Country levels of public support for the EU regime are more related to the perceived performance of the EU regime, and therefore also expected to fluctuate according to the perceived performance of the EU regime within countries. Country levels of public support for the European political community, on the other hand, reflect the most diffuse kind of support, and are based on deeper-held loyalties towards the EU for what it represents, not for what it does. Hence, country levels of public support

for the European political community were expected to remain more stable within countries. However, according to the causal logic derived from Easton's system support theory, longer periods of public dissatisfaction with the single European currency and the workings of the EU regime, for instance, might, over time, also transform into more negative public sentiments towards the European political community, which should also contribute to declining country levels of the diffuse kind of support.

In accordance with the guidelines from the cue-taking theory (Anderson, 1998), the variations in public attitudes towards the EU were, to a varied extent, expected to be explained by contextual-level factors at the country levels. Therefore, in order to explain the country-level variations in public support, a wide range of contextual-level factors were included in the study. The theoretical assumption was that the effect of contextual-level factors varies between the indicators of public support. The contextual-level factors were, furthermore, divided into two main categories, constituting either internal or external factors. These broad categories were further divided into four smaller groups, with the internal factors reflecting the economic performance and the democratic culture of the countries, and with the external factors reflecting the external pressure and the EU-relation of the countries. The empirical assumption behind this kind of research design was that the contextual-level developments related to these four groups should be able to explain most of the varying country levels of public support for the three main system components of the EU, both within and between countries. That empirical assumption was also broadly confirmed by the results from the statistical analyses.

The thesis centred around three overarching research questions. The first one related to how the country levels of public support towards the EU had developed over time within the EU area. The country-specific overviews during the period of 2004–2017 clearly showed that the country levels of public support for many system elements of the EU tended to fluctuate significantly within many countries. The overview also showed that the country levels of public support

fluctuated more significantly towards some system elements of the EU than towards others, as the fluctuations in public support were most apparent towards the European integration policies and EU-regime related elements. The other two research questions had a more explanatory ambition. The second research question centred on explaining to what extent the variations in public support within countries could be predicted by contextual factors. The third, and final, research question, on the other hand, centred on explaining whether these same contextual-level factors were also able to explain the variations in public support between countries. By using multilevel modelling, linear mixed models (LMMs) to be more specific, it was possible to obtain comparable regression estimates that could be used to statistically show to what extent the contextual-level factors were able to explain the variations in public support towards the different system elements of the EU, both within and between countries. In the following subchapter, the main findings presented in this thesis are discussed.

7.1 Main findings

The overarching research aim with this thesis has been to connect contextual-level factors to the trends and variations in the country levels of public support for the EU from a system perspective, within the EU area, over time. The results derived from the statistical analyses suggest that both within and between countries variations in EU attitudes are, but to a varied extent, explained by contextual-level factors during the period of 2004–2017. However, based on these results, it is not possible to make a valid prognosis regarding either the future development or the system persistence capabilities of the EU in terms of “if X then Y,” with X implying country level developments within the EU area and Y the kind of effect that development would be likely to have on the EU. However, especially since the global recession (2008), and the following Eurocrisis (2010), it has become apparent that no EU member state remains completely unaffected when one member state is, for instance, facing economic difficulties. Therefore, it has been

argued in this thesis that since the development within one country also affects the rest of the EU area, it is crucial to conduct a wider analysis regarding the possible effects that similar contextual-level developments might contribute to within the EU area. As an example, when the unemployment levels are increasing within countries, it is possible to argue that it is likely to have a negative effect on the levels of public support for the EU regime within these countries, based on the results presented in this thesis. Hence, also as Braun and Tausendpfund (2014, p. 243) suggested, when public support “depends on economic considerations, it represents a rather unstable foundation for the future of European integration”.

In relation to the possibility of statistically connecting contextual-level developments to the country-level variations in public support, the results have, however, been mixed. Some of the contextual-level factors included in the analyses turned out to not have any significant effect on predicting variations in public support, while others were most certainly important. However, when looking at the broad picture, the results suggest that it is empirically possible to predict how country levels of public support within and between countries for different system elements of the EU will be affected by different kinds of EU-wide contextual-level developments. In relation to explaining the cross-country variations in public support, the results from this study showed that it is more difficult to explain variations in the diffuse kind of support than it is regarding the more specific kind of support. However, because the statistical part of this study included only eight contextual-level factors, it omitted a large number of contextual-level indicators that could have proven to be of significance, such as public money spent on social welfare (Arnold et al., 2012). However, the contextual-level factors for the statistical analyses were chosen to avoid multicollinearity in the multilevel model, and the factors included should have been able to intercept most of the neglected contextual-level factors that have been included by researchers conducting similar studies.

During the period of 2004–2017 there has been a significant decline in the country levels of public support, and this especially towards two system elements of the EU; the future widening of the EU area (EU enlargement) and the EU regime institutions (trust in the EP). There have been less significant declines in public support for the deepening of European integration (common European defence policy) and for the EU regime processes (satisfaction with EU democracy). There have been more mixed trends regarding public support for the securing of an already implemented European integration policy (single European currency) and for the EU regime principles (EU membership support). And finally, the most diffuse kind of support for the European political community has increased during this period. So, what to make of all these trends in country levels of public support for the EU?

First of all, these trends indicate a great amount regarding the empirical usefulness of using system support theory as a conceptual tool for analysing country levels of public support for a supranational political system such as the EU. The more specific kind of support, which is based on short-term considerations as well as “cost/benefit” calculations, was expected to fluctuate if the perceived costs were higher than the likely benefits. This notion also holds firm with regard to public support for European integration policies and the EU regime institutions. However, when the indicators of public support become more diffuse, as with regard to EU regime processes, EU regime principles and the European political community, the levels of public support do not fluctuate as significantly, and the effects of the contextual-level developments have been considerably weaker. This was also expected by the system support theory. If one chooses to interpret Easton directly, the EU should, from a system persistence perspective, now be better prepared for future periods of system stress. This is since the country levels of public support for the European political community have generally increased within the EU area during this period. There are, however, worrying exceptions to that general trend. The fact that there are also apparent signs of increased public scepticism towards the workings of the EU regime, as well as

towards the widening and deepening of European integration, could also start to affect the country levels of public support for the European political community negatively over time. This, however, depending on how the EU proceeds with the prospect of further enlargement and deeper integration in the future. Nevertheless, these trends suggest that the European public has become less supportive of more European integration, but simultaneously that the European public has become more supportive of the European political community created by the EU regime. The fact that this development has seemingly occurred during a period in EU-history dominated by crises could also be considered an interesting finding.

The importance of higher levels of the more diffuse kind of support, for the long-term stability of the EU, has been argued for some time. According to system support theory, sufficient levels of diffuse support are also what enable political systems to persist during periods of system stress, even though the members of the political community have not been satisfied with the performance of the political system. Easton (1965, p. 269) argued that:

“Against the stimulation of specific support as a response related to the persistence of a system, we know from history that members of a system have proved able to tolerate long periods of frustration in the satisfaction of their wants without support falling below the minimal level and passing over the threshold into stress. Indeed, no regime or community could gain general acceptance and no set of authorities could expect to hold power if they had to depend exclusively or even largely on outputs to generate support as a return for specific and identifiable benefits. Other means of adaption to stress are necessary”.

Hence, when looking at the country levels of public support for the European political community, the EU should be better prepared to endure the unavoidable future legitimacy crises caused by declining levels of public support for the EU. There is, however, no way of knowing whether the levels of diffuse support are stable enough for the EU to withstand the inevitable forthcoming crises. Nor is it possible to

know whether diffuse support in relation to a supranational political system actually functions in the same way as diffuse support theoretically does in relation to nation states. Also, as has been noted within some of the member states most heavily affected by the economic crises, the country levels of public support for the European political community can also decline during longer periods of system pressure. For instance, when comparing the country levels of European identification in 2004 with 2017, the levels of European identification have declined by 17 percentage points in the Republic of Cyprus, 11 percentage points in Romania and 9 percentage points in Italy. This shows that community identification at the European level is still something that is under construction, and not as stable as would be preferable from an EU perspective. Even though the EU enjoys relatively high levels of diffuse support in the majority of the member states, it could be enough that two or three more member states choose to leave the EU, and that could quickly transform into a domino-effect. That kind of domino-effect could even, hypothetically, result in the complete dissolution of the EU over time. Hence, as a researcher, one should always take into account how the trees look, and not only focus on the forest at large, when it comes to predicting the future of the EU.

Based on the findings presented in this thesis, we should now have a greater understanding regarding whether, and in what direction, contextual-level developments affect the EU's ability to withstand future legitimacy crises caused by declining levels of public support. These findings are also related to what Mitchell (2014, p. 614) argues has become one of the core-questions within the EU-literature: "Given the increasing mobilisation of European citizens around European issues, it is reasonable to expect that the future of the EU will be determined, not only by elite bargains – as has largely been the case in the past – but also more than ever before by public opinion. It is, therefore, more important than ever to know not only what Europeans think about the European project, but what drives their preferences". It is possible to argue that the findings presented in this thesis have

contributed to increasing our understanding regarding what the national level “drivers” of public opinion actually are.

Furthermore, based on the main results from the statistical analyses, it is possible to conclude a number of things. In short, contextual-level factors related to economic performances can, to a large extent, explain the variations in public support for the EU within countries. When national economic performance declines, so does public support for most system elements of the EU. However, this statistical connection is most directly related to public support for the EU regime, especially towards the EU regime institutions and processes. The results also interestingly showed that when unemployment levels increase within countries, so do the levels of public support for a common European defence policy and the single European currency. In general, the findings largely support the cue-taking approach (Anderson, 1998), suggesting that the country levels of public support for the EU regime are largely determined by national level cues, i.e. the public use the events and circumstances within their own countries as proxies when forming their attitudes about the workings and functioning of the EU regime, and to some extent also about the European integration policies and the European political community. This was also to be expected, based on the extensive literature regarding the connection between economic developments and public support for the EU. Hence, these results confirm that it is crucial from the perspective of democratic legitimacy for the EU that the national economies are performing well.

With regard to explaining the variations in public support between countries, there are more mixed results. Public support for both the widening, deepening and securing of European integration are higher within countries with more corruption, while public support for the deepening and securing are higher within eurozone countries. Public support for the EU regime institutions and processes are lower in countries with higher levels of national debt, while the levels of European identification are higher within countries that contribute proportionally more to the EU budget. In short, it is easier to statistically predict variations in public support for a more specific kind

of support than it is for a more diffuse kind of support, both within and between countries. An overview regarding the contextual-level factors that turned out to be statistically significant is presented in Table 16.

Table 16. Summary of contextual-level factors statistically connected to the within and between countries variations in public support.

Public support indicator	Within countries	Between countries
<i>European integration policies</i>	<i>Contextual factor</i>	<i>Contextual factor</i>
Widening (Future EU enlargement)	Debt, Non-corruption, Foreign population, Eurozone membership, EU budget net receiver	Debt, Non-corruption, Foreign population
Deepening (Common European defence)	Debt, Unemployment, Non-corruption, Foreign population, EU budget net receiver	Debt, Non-corruption, Eurozone membership
Securing (Single European currency)	Debt, Unemployment, Non-corruption, Economic inequality, Foreign population, Eurozone membership, EU budget net receiver	Debt, Non-corruption, Eurozone membership
<i>EU regime</i>	<i>Contextual factor</i>	<i>Contextual factor</i>
Institutions (Trust in the EP)	Debt, Unemployment, Non-corruption, Economic inequality, Foreign population, Eurozone membership, EU budget net receiver	Debt
Processes (Satisfaction with EU democracy)	Debt, Unemployment, Foreign population, Eurozone membership	Debt
Principles (EU membership support)	Debt, Unemployment, Refugees, EU budget net receiver	
<i>European political community</i>	<i>Contextual factor</i>	<i>Contextual factor</i>
Identification with (European identification)	Debt, Unemployment, Economic inequality, Refugees	EU budget net receiver
Attachment to (EU attachment)	Unemployment, Refugees, Eurozone membership	

In the following section, the main limitations are discussed together with suggestions regarding future research related to this topic.

7.2 Limitations and suggestions on future research

Every study has its limitations, and this thesis is far from an exception in that regard. In this subchapter, the most apparent limitations are discussed, together with a few suggestions regarding future research. First of all, the longitudinal perspective of this thesis has been limited by the availability of survey data. This has been especially the case regarding the public support indicators used as dependent variables in the statistical analyses, as comparative survey data from all of the current 28 member states were only available from 2004 and onwards. Additionally, by focusing on the broadest possible perspective regarding country-level variations in public support for the EU, it could be quite problematic to generalise the findings presented in this thesis. Another obvious limitation is that the individual-level determinants of support have been ignored in the statistical part of this thesis, but as there is no lack of studies focusing on individual-level determinants of EU attitudes, it is quite challenging to contribute with anything of lasting empirical significance within that research area. Furthermore, and especially since the start of the global recession in 2008, there has been an explosion of studies trying to connect individual-level characteristics with different types of EU attitudes.

Another critique that could be applied to this study is in relation to the applicability of using Easton's system support theory as a conceptual tool for understanding the political importance of fluctuations and variations in public support for something as complex and abstract as the EU. After all, the EU is not governed as a liberal democracy, nor could it be considered a political federation or a European super-state. Therefore, the causal relationship between sufficient levels of public support and democratic legitimacy is not as straightforward within the EU context as it is within democratic political systems at the national levels. Also, as a European political system based on multilevel-governance at the EU and national levels (Kenealy et al., 2015, p. 233), it could perhaps have been valid to more directly account for what the public in the member states think about their own systems of governance, since negative sentiments towards

national level politics seem to create negative sentiments also towards EU level politics (Munoz et al., 2011; Armingeon & Ceka, 2014). This thesis has also shown that negative national level developments regarding economic performance are connected to lower levels of public support for most system elements of the EU, within countries.

However, as the EU is from a system perspective still under construction, in this thesis it has been argued that the EU constitutes a perfect case for applying the system support theory as an analytical tool, especially since the EU is something that countries can choose to withdraw from. Hence there is a real political possibility the EU could also actually be dissolved over time as a result of declining levels of public support within countries. This, especially, if the citizens are given a direct choice in an EU membership referendum. It is this political possibility that makes this kind of studies highly relevant. Moreover, the division of the concept of public support into two different kinds of support, specific and diffuse, is perhaps not as valid in the context of public support for the EU, since the European political community is still not the primary political community of concern for ordinary EU-citizens. Furthermore, even though much work has been conducted by the EU in terms of creating the more diffuse kind of support for the European political community, diffuse support towards the EU is far from being as stable as diffuse support for the nation states is. It is therefore debatable whether diffuse support for the EU would actually be able to save the EU during longer periods of dissatisfaction with the workings and functioning of the EU.

Some minor reflections regarding the use of the survey data in this study are also necessary, starting with the problem of using the so-called "Moreno-question" for measuring country levels of one of two types of the most diffuse support. The question relates to whether the respondents to some extent identify as Europeans, and hence not, strictly speaking, to being part of the EU as constituting a European political community. There is without a doubt, a difference between the EU as a political system and Europe as a continent, and hence there are significant shortcomings with using this survey item to measure

country levels of public support for the European political community created by the EU. This has also been acknowledged by Eurobarometer (EB), and since 2010 EB has started to include a survey item asking the respondents whether they perceive themselves as being citizens of the EU.¹²⁶ Taking the apparent conceptual differences into consideration, the survey item was still used in the thesis to measure member state levels of mutual European identification, because it was the best available recurrent survey item included during the period of 2004–2017.

Also, there were some empirical shortcomings regarding the contextual-level data used, especially related to the two contextual-level indicators used in the external pressure group. First of all, it should be noted that it was difficult to find EU-wide comparative data that was able to capture the changing demographic compositions within the member states caused by both increasing levels of immigration and the influx of refugees. Nevertheless, the purpose of including this group of indicators was to empirically capture the effect that changing demographics might have had on the variations in the country levels of public support. Also, using proportional data based on the proportion of “foreign population” and “refugees,” related to the year-specific total population of the country, was perhaps not the most optimal way of creating comparable values for the statistical analyses. Because of this, the statistical models were perhaps not directly able to pick up the statistical effects of immigration levels on country-level variations in public support for the EU within the EU area. Future studies should aspire to develop better indicators for this group of indicators, as this is a group of contextual-level factors that should be included within similar kinds of studies.

Even though this has been an overarching study regarding the phenomenon of public support towards the EU at the country levels,

¹²⁶The survey question is as follows: For each of the following statements, please tell me to what extent it corresponds or not to your own opinion: You feel you are a citizen of the EU? “Yes, definitely”, “Yes, to some extent”, “No, not really”, “No, definitely not” or “Don’t know”.

there are many possibilities to continue with this kind of “big picture” research. As already mentioned, individual level determinants of EU attitudes are already found in a crowded research-field, but there is still a lack of this similar kind of macro-level research regarding varying country levels of public support within the EU literature. That was also one of the main reasons for applying this kind of overarching research design, and arguably that is also the small contribution that this thesis can make towards filling a vacuum that still exists within the broader EU literature. Regarding the usefulness of adapting the system support theory for analysing country levels of public support for the EU, it would also be interesting, in the future, to conduct individual-level research regarding the causal connection between specific and diffuse support for the EU. According to Easton, longer periods of declining specific support should also start affecting the more diffuse kind of support over time. That causal relationship could also be directly tested with regard to specific and diffuse support for the different system elements of the EU. There is also a need of more research regarding the impact that immigration in general, and the migration crisis in 2015 in particular, might have had on EU attitudes over time. Even though the individual level connection between immigration- and EU-attitudes has been widely established (McLaren, 2002; Kentman-Cin & Erisen, 2017), there is still room for more research within that research area, especially since immigrant-bashing seems to have become something of a trademark for Eurosceptic political parties on the political right.

Another interesting future direction for similar research to pursue could be to focus more directly on the actual political implications and effects of individual-level attitudes towards the EU. As Hobolt and De Vries (2016a, p. 426) have also suggested, there is an apparent gap within the EU literature regarding whether public opinion shapes actual policy-making regarding European integration within the member states. Even though the empirical connection between having EU positive attitudes and, for example, voting for a pro-EU political party during national parliamentary elections have been studied (Lubbers & Scheepers, 2005; 2010), there is still a need for more updated

and comparative studies regarding this connection across the EU area. As this thesis has focused on the variations in public support within and between countries, another future research direction would be to look more extensively at the actual real-life political consequences that changing political attitudes towards the EU as a political system might have contributed to. As an example, De Vries (2017) has recently studied the effects that the Brexit vote has had on the political policies of political parties within the rest of the EU area. The long-term effects of the Brexit vote are also something that is going to be increasingly studied within a wide range of topics for years to come. In short, the connection between EU attitudes and political decision-making has been briefly discussed in the introduction of this thesis, and the empirical connection between EU attitudes and political decision-making within different political arenas should definitely be studied more extensively.

Finally, it would be interesting to change the supranational political system of interest from the EU to, as an example, the United Nations (UN). This could be in order to analyse closer whether the contextual-level developments only affect the country levels of public support for the EU, or if the developments also affect the levels of public support for other types of supranational political systems that these, or other, countries are participating in. Is there a general development of distrust in everything supranational, or is it only the EU specifically? Presumably the declining levels of public support for the EU are connected to a larger development towards increased scepticism towards anything restricting the maneuvering space of nation states. As the Eurobarometer surveys also regularly include survey items measuring the levels of trust in the UN, that kind of research would also be empirically possible, at least to some extent. In the following subchapter, the main implications and contributions of this study are presented.

7.3 Implications and contributions of the thesis

At first sight, it seems highly unlikely that public opinion or political culture would have any relevance to the formation or maintenance of international regimes.

Sinnott, 1995, p. 25

This thesis has applied the system support theory as a conceptual tool for understanding the importance of public support for the EU from a system support perspective and demonstrated that the general theoretical guidelines provided by Easton are also applicable for analysing country levels of public support for a supranational political system such as the EU. However, what is the general contribution of this thesis to the broader EU literature? First and foremost, I would argue that the main *empirical* contribution of this thesis is that it has empirically identified and connected contextual-level developments to the country levels of public support for eight different system elements of the EU. Most importantly, the study has shown that the effects of contextual-level factors vary extensively between indicators of public support. In this way, the thesis constitutes an encompassing study regarding the connection between contextual-level developments and country characteristics and different kinds of EU attitudes. The width of this thesis is therefore in itself a significant contribution to the general EU literature, as this thesis clearly shows that there are different contextual-level factors that researchers should account for when explaining country-level variations in public attitudes towards European integration policies, the EU regime or the European political community.

The thesis has also shown that indicators measuring the more specific kind of support fluctuate more than indicators measuring the more diffuse kind of support within countries, and that the fluctuations, although to a varied extent, can be predicted by national contextual-level developments. Finally, this thesis has also shown, in line with Anderson (1998), that there is a connection between contextual-level developments and country levels of public support for

all important system elements of the EU, but that the connection is more profound with regard to public support for European integration policies and the EU regime than it is in relation to the European political community.

Even though this thesis is far from the first similar study to take inspiration from Easton, it could be argued to constitute one of the most extensive studies with regard to the concept of system support for the EU, at least since the start of the global recession in 2008, an event that changed the public perception of the EU for the foreseeable future. Moreover, by adapting Easton's theoretical guidelines, for the purpose of the research aim of this thesis, for analysing system support for a supranational political system, the division of the EU into three system components, as well as into two types of public support, has been shown to be necessary for understanding the complexity of public support for a supranational European political system such as the EU. Because as Easton argued, sufficient levels of public support are what enable the existence and functioning of the political authorities, political institutions and political communities during periods of system stress.

However, in this thesis it has been further argued that sufficient levels of public support are also of crucial importance for democratically legitimising the development, functioning and, in the end, also the existence of concrete European integration policies, the EU as a political regime, as well as the European political community created through the EU regime. What the European public think about one of these system components should also affect their perceptions of the other components over time. Hence, the country levels of public support for these system components within the 28 member states of the EU function as a summary indicator for the status of the EU from a system support perspective when seen from the perspective of the European public. As such, the main findings of this thesis constitute a good empirical starting point for researchers interested in the connection between contextual-level developments and country levels of public support for any system component of the EU.

The findings presented in this thesis might also possibly be used to better understand future political developments regarding European integration. As the thesis has further shown how within countries variations in the levels of public support for all system elements of the EU are largely connected to the economic performances of the countries, during future periods of negative economic developments, the democratic legitimacy of the EU will continue to be questioned. This especially as the country levels of diffuse support for the European political community are not on such a high level to function as “a reservoir of support” that the EU could rely upon during periods of system pressure. Hence, the EU’s future existence will most probably continue to become openly questioned during times of crisis. This constitutes an existential problem from a system persistence perspective, as without a sufficiently high amount of the diffuse kind of support, it might be next to impossible to implement the necessary political policies that are needed for the EU in order to counteract the inevitable future legitimacy crisis.

Most likely then, when the next EU-wide crisis emerges, the EU’s future existence will once again become increasingly questioned, as it was during the heights of the Eurocrisis in 2010 and again during the migration crisis in 2015. This also suggests that it will be difficult for political leaders at the national levels to promote further European integration during periods of national disturbances. In short, before focusing on what is best for the EU, national political leaders should make sure that they have their own countries in order. Without internal stability at the country levels, instability will again spread to the EU level whenever EU-wide crises emerge, as EU attitudes cannot be argued to compensate for the negative performance of the member state, as has been previously suggested within the literature (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000; Kritzinger, 2003). The following, and final, subchapter presents the concluding remarks derived from this thesis.

7.4 Final remarks

It is absurd to expect in the long run that you can maintain economic and monetary union without political union.

Helmut Kohl, German statesman, 1991¹²⁷

In this thesis, sufficiently high country levels of public support for the EU have been considered as the political foundation for European integration (Gabel, 1998, p. 333). Finally, what is there to learn about the stability of the political foundations for European integration from this thesis? The short answer could be that country levels of public support for all the system important elements of the EU are in some way explained by the events and developments at the country levels, and hence it is at the national levels that researchers should focus when discussing the future of the EU. The major remaining question is how to relate these findings to the long-term development and persistence capabilities of the EU? This is an essential question, because even though the perceived Bolshevik danger that Count Coudenhove-Kalergi (1931, p. 638) warned about destroyed itself, there is no lack of monsters left in Europe to destroy that could threaten the political stability achieved within the EU area.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, it is impossible to make a valid empirically-based prediction regarding the future of the EU based on the results presented in this thesis, as there are events within, what Easton referred to as the political environment, that are impossible to account for empirically.

According to Grande and Hutter (2016, p. 13), the very purpose of European integration was to establish a supranational authority, with autonomy from the member states, in order to restrict their sovereignty in policy areas of importance for peace and welfare in Europe. However, political developments in Europe, such as the outcome of the Brexit referendum in 2016, show that when given the opportunity, the

¹²⁷ Helmut Kohl is a former German chancellor (1982–1998), quoted in Spolaore (2013, p. 135).

¹²⁸ In reference to the famous quote by John Quincy Adams (1821): “But she goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy”.

European public can choose to turn its back on the EU. Implicitly, that is also a public rejection of the European political community created by the process of European integration promoted and pursued through the EU regime. The most important aspect of the Brexit vote from a system persistence perspective is, however, that the decision sets a precedent for actually leaving (De Vries, 2017, p. 39). Hence, one of the main arguments of this thesis has been that public attitudes towards the EU actually matter for the future of the EU, and in the end for the future of Europe as we know it. Based on this thesis, however, there is no way of telling how the public would, for instance, vote in the remaining 27 member states if given the chance to decide whether their respective countries should remain a part of the EU, or follow the path chosen by the British public instead. Nevertheless, this thesis does provide some empirical basis for speculation and for making prognoses regarding the outcomes of future hypothetical EU membership referendums within the remaining EU-27 member states.

The prevalent understanding among the political elites during the history of the EU has been, in spite of all of the EU's apparent flaws, that an EU membership and a strong EU will benefit all of Europe in the end. That is also why an EU membership is still considered to be something worth aspiring for among many of the European countries that have still not been allowed to become EU members. This notion has also been shared by a majority of the European public, although post-Maastricht (1992) that has begun to change, something that has been described as the "post-Maastricht blues" (Eichenberg & Dalton, 2007), which further accelerated after the start of the global recession in 2008. During the EP-elections in 2014, one in four voted for a Eurosceptic party (De Vries, 2018), a number that is likely to have been even higher during the 2019 EP-elections. Furthermore, Easton identified cleavages and conflicts within a political system as the most significant sources of stress on a political system, and the success of political parties with an anti-EU agenda is a concrete sign that the EU already constitutes, and is likely to grow further as, a conflict issue within the EU area. Cleavages within the political community are also

perceived to be the most significant cause for the erosion of diffuse support, and if a political system does not have the capacity to cope with stress, it will eventually be destroyed (Miller, 1971, p. 202).

To date, the end of the so-called “permissive consensus” (Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970) and the start of the so-called “constraining dissensus” (Hooghe & Marks, 2008) towards European integration have not constituted the end of this particular European integration project. However, there is no way of telling whether the “constraining dissensus” towards European integration in the near future could develop into more direct “active opposition” from the European public towards continuing supranational European political integration. Nevertheless, in 2019 that has not yet occurred, at least not on any larger scale. Instead, pro-EU forces have increasingly started to mobilise all over Europe (Börzel & Risse, 2018, p. 102). Still, as the spirit of the times seems to be publicly hostile towards what is vaguely defined as the political elites, it is not difficult to imagine a future when public hostility towards the largely pro-EU political elites within Europe will also transform into public hostility towards the single policy issue that the elite-sceptic part of the public actually seems able to agree on, namely that the EU is something *bad*.

There is no telling what the future of Europe would look like without the EU. Perhaps everyday life would become better for all Europeans without the EU complicating things. If the EU were to suddenly cease to exist, perhaps something new and better would replace it instantly. That is, however, impossible to say. What we do know is that the EU has been continuously built for over 60 years, although it is still a political project under construction and far from finished. The building and governing processes within the EU area have also been anything but simple, as implementing EU-wide policies for an area constituting 28 separate political entities is far from a simple political task. One of the main problems with the EU is perhaps that no one is certain regarding when the development and construction of the EU could be considered to be finished. Also, according to the so-called “bicycle-theory,” the EU must keep moving forward, especially during crises,

for the EU not to collapse (Majone, 2016, p. 2). There is also no lack of frozen intra-European conflict that could appear again if the EU would suddenly start to dissolve, and there is no doubt that “the underlying motive behind European integration has always been peace” (Olsen & McCormick, 2016, p. 17). Looking from a global perspective, the unipolar world that has existed since the end of the Cold War, with the victory of liberal democracy, is also slowly but surely transforming into a bipolar (China), and over time also a multipolar (India), world. One should also remember that history has a habit of repeating itself, and the political developments currently taking place in countries such as Hungary, Italy and Poland could, and should, be taken as worrying signs of what is to come if the EU becomes even more questioned. Especially the developments of public support in Italy, the prospective third largest economy and the country with the second largest national debt within the EU area, constitute reasons for real concerns. However, according to the constitutional arrangements of Italy, it is unlikely that a referendum on EU membership could actually be arranged, but the outcome of such an election would be highly uncertain (De Vries, 2017, p. 43). As a result, the global order of international relations is also changing and liberal democracy, as the prevailing system of governance in Europe, is now being increasingly threatened from both outside and within. In the following years, Italy will most likely be the country to watch.

Even though these are worrying signs for the EU, it should also be noted that the political decision-making powers of the EU have been increasing for every new EU treaty with the continuing transferring of more decision-making powers from the national to the EU arena (Mair, 2007). This is probably in an effort to strengthen the EU’s capabilities to act on the global stage, as the 28 countries, independently, are not strong enough to have any global impact. Moreover, as a result of this process of transferring decision-making powers, some have started to argue that there exists something of a democratic deficit within the EU that can only be fixed with more democracy at the EU level (Follesdal & Hix, 2006), while others, on the other hand, argue that “the notion of

a “democratic deficit” is largely the creation of academics and intellectuals” (Schmitter, 2003, p. 79). Nevertheless, as Buchanan and Keohane (2006, p. 407) noted, “the perception of legitimacy matters, because, in a democratic era, multilateral institutions will only thrive if they are viewed as legitimate by democratic publics”.

I am not certain that more democracy at the EU level is the solution for the EU’s legitimacy problems, nor if there actually exists a democratic deficit at the EU level. There is, however, a real danger with democratising the governing of the EU too much, as the practical operations and functioning within the EU regime institutions will then become affected, to an even larger extent, by shifting national level public sentiments towards the EU. Democratising the supranational governance structure of the EU could, hence, also constitute a real existential threat to the EU, as this thesis has shown that the European public is prone to fluctuate significantly in their attitudes towards the EU regime, especially during times of national disturbances. On the other hand, without democratising the EU regime further, there is an even larger possibility that the public within more member states will be tempted to follow the Brits in “taking back control” during longer periods of increased dissatisfaction with the functioning and development of the EU.¹²⁹ How this problem will be solved remains to be seen, it is, however, an issue over which it will be extremely challenging to reach a political consensus within the EU area.

Finally, as the EU continues to be a work in progress, there is no telling what the final result will look like, if the EU ever develops that far. One should, however, remember that before the failed referendums on the European constitution in 2005, it was not that farfetched to believe that the EU was on the verge of becoming a federalised political union. However, there are not any longer many politicians that are openly calling for the creation of the United States of Europe. As Hobolt (2015, p. 238) also argues, the future of European integration will most likely be directly or indirectly determined by the European public, and therefore researchers and politicians alike should start focusing more

¹²⁹ One of the slogans used by the Brexit campaigners in 2016.

on what public attitudes tell us about public preferences with regard to European integration. Furthermore, no matter what the future holds for the EU, I agree with Hobolt (2017, p. 40), that its direction will directly or indirectly be determined by the attitudes and preferences expressed by the European public but that declining levels of public support and the rise of Eurosceptic parties should not transform the EU in a short-term perspective. As this thesis has shown, these attitudes and preferences towards the EU should be determined by contextual-level developments within the member states.

Jean Monnet (1978, p. 46) famously argued that Europe would be built through crises, and with regard to the development of European integration, that statement has, at least to date, been proven to hold firm. Yet, it is far from impossible that Europe, as we know it, will sooner or later be torn down as a result from a crisis.

Appendix

Table 1. Summary of the contextual-level factors used.

Category:	Variable:	Explanation / coding:	Unit:	Source:
Economic performance:	Unemployment	The unemployment rate is the number of unemployed persons as a percentage of the labour force based on International Labour Office (ILO) definition. The labour force is the total number of people employed and unemployed. Unemployed persons comprise persons aged 15 to 74 who: - are without work during the reference week; - are available to start work within the next two weeks; - and have been actively seeking work in the past four weeks or had already found a job to start within the next three months.	Annual ratio in percentage of workforce.	Eurostat
	Debt	The ratio of government debt outstanding at the end of the year to gross domestic product at current market prices.	Annual ratio in percentage of national debt.	Eurostat
Democratic culture:	Non-corruption	A country's score indicates the perceived level of public sector corruption on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). Scale changed in 2012 from 0-10 to 0-100, values before 2012 are hence written according to the newscale, hence a value of 9,1 was coded as 91 during 2004-2011.	(0) Highly corrupt (100) Very clean	Transparency International
	Economic inequality	The Gini coefficient is based on the comparison of cumulative proportions of the population against cumulative proportions of income they receive, and it ranges between 0 in the case of perfect equality and 100 in the case of perfect inequality.	(0) Perfect equality (100) Perfect inequality	Eurostat
External pressure:	Refugees	Refugees: Individuals granted complementary forms of protection or those enjoying temporary protection. The refugee population also includes people in a refugee-like situation. Asylum-seekers: Individuals who have sought international protection and whose claims for refugee status have not yet been determined, irrespective of when they may have lodged.	Annual ratio of total refugees + asylum-seekers as a percentage of year specific total population.	The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)
	Foreign population	Percentage of population with foreign country passport or stateless status.	Annual ratio of foreign-born population as a percentage of year specific total population.	Eurostat
EU-relation:	Eurozone membership	Eight of the EU-28 member states have become Eurozone members during the period 2004-2017. In that way it was possible to also get variation from mean values from this variable within the analyses, which made it possible to compute both a "between" and a "within" estimate.		
	EU budget net reciever	Here Eurostat specific numbers are used, reflecting the EU-budget balance based on EU-budget expenditures and revenues. The budget balance is calculated as the % of total GNI (Gross National Income) of the member state. Member states having a positive balance will be getting more back from the budget (Net-recipients), and member states having a negative balance will be contributing more than they are getting back (Net contributors).	Largest mean contributor: Netherlands (-0.36 %) Smallest mean contributor: Lithuania (3.47 %) Indicating that the Netherlands have gotten on average 0.36 % less on balance from the EU budget than they have contributed (mean balance hence -0.36), and that Lithuania have gotten 3.47 % more on balance from the EU budget than they have contributed (mean balance hence 3.47).	Eurostat

Table 2. Summary of Eurobarometer survey items used.

Elements	Period:	Variables:	Eurobarometer question:	Original values:	New values:	Operationalisation:
The European Political Community	2006-2017	EU attachment	People may feel different degrees of attachment to their town or village, to their region, to their country or to Europe. Please tell me how attached you feel to: The European Union	(1) Very attached (2) Fairly attached (3) Not very attached (4) Not at all attached (5) Don't know	1->1 2->1 3->0 4->0 5->missing	(1) EU attachment (0) Low or no attachment
	2004-2017	European identification	In the near future do you see yourself as...?	(1) Nationality only (2) Nationality and European (3) European and Nationality (4) European only (5) None (6) Refusal (7) Don't know	1->0 2->1 3->1 4->1 5->0 6,7->missing	(1) European identification (0) No European identification
EU regime principles	2014-2017	The right for EU citizens to live abroad	For each of the following statements, please tell me if you think that it is a good thing, a bad thing or neither a good or a bad thing.	(1) A good thing (2) A bad thing (3) Neither good nor bad (4) Don't know	1->1 2->0 3->0 4->missing	(1) A good thing (0) Not a good thing
	2014-2017	The right for EU citizens to work abroad	For each of the following statements, please tell me if you think that it is a good thing, a bad thing or neither a good or a bad thing.	(1) A good thing (2) A bad thing (3) Neither good nor bad (4) Don't know	1->1 2->0 3->0 4->missing	(1) A good thing (0) Not a good thing
	2014-2017	The right for EU citizens to live in our country	For each of the following statements, please tell me if you think that it is a good thing, a bad thing or neither a good or a bad thing.	(1) A good thing (2) A bad thing (3) Neither good nor bad (4) Don't know	1->1 2->0 3->0 4->missing	(1) A good thing (0) Not a good thing
	2014-2017	The right for EU citizens to work in our country	For each of the following statements, please tell me if you think that it is a good thing, a bad thing or neither a good or a bad thing.	(1) A good thing (2) A bad thing (3) Neither good nor bad (4) Don't know	1->1 2->0 3->0 4->missing	(1) A good thing (0) Not a good thing
	2015-2017	Free movement of citizens	What is your opinion of each of the following statements? Please tell me for each statement, whether you are for it or against it? The free movement of EU citizens who can live, work, study and do business anywhere in the EU.	(1) For (2) Against (3) Don't know	1->1 2->0 3->missing	(1) For (0) Against
	2014-2017	EU-immigration	Please tell me whether each of the following statements evokes a positive or negative feeling for you: Immigration of people from other EU member states.	(1) Very positive (2) Fairly positive (3) Fairly negative (4) Very negative (5) Don't know	1->1 2->1 3->0 4->0 5->missing	(1) Positive (0) Negative
	2004-2017	EU membership support	Generally speaking, do you think your country's membership to the EU is a...?	(1) A good thing (2) A bad thing (3) Neither good nor bad (4) Don't know	1->1 2->0 3->0 4->missing	(1) A good thing (0) Not a good thing
EU regime processes	2004-2017	EU democracy satisfaction	How about the way democracy works in the European Union?	(1) Very satisfied (2) Fairly satisfied (3) Not very satisfied (4) Not at all satisfied (5) Don't know	1->1 2->1 3->0 4->0 5->missing	(1) Satisfied (0) Not satisfied
EU regime institutions	2004-2017	Trust in the European Parliament	I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it? The European Parliament.	(1) Tend to trust (2) Tend not to trust (3) Don't know	1->1 2->0 3->missing	(1) Tend to trust the EP (0) Tend not to trust the EP
Securing	2004-2017	Single European currency	What is your opinion of each of the following statements? Please tell me for each statement, whether you are for it or against it? A single European currency, the euro.	(1) For (2) Against (3) Don't know	1->1 2->0 3->missing	(1) For (0) Against
Deepening	2004-2017	Common European defence policy	What is your opinion of each of the following statements? Please tell me for each statement, whether you are for it or against it? A common defence and security policy among European Union member states.	(1) For (2) Against (3) Don't know	1->1 2->0 3->missing	(1) For (0) Against
Widening	2004-2017	Future enlargement	What is your opinion of each of the following statements? Please tell me for each statement, whether you are for it or against it? Further enlargement of the European Union to include other countries in future years.	(1) For (2) Against (3) Don't know	1->1 2->0 3->missing	(1) For (0) Against

Table 3. List of EU-related referendums (Qvortrup, 2016, p. 62; updated by author).

Country	Year	Yes vote (%)	Turnout (%)	Issue
Norway	1972	47	79	EU Membership
Denmark	1972	63	90	EU Membership
France	1972	68	60	Approve applicants
Ireland	1972	81	83	EU Membership
United Kingdom	1975	67	64	Renegotiation
Greenland	1982	47	73	Leave the ECC
Denmark	1986	56	75	Single European Act
Ireland	1987	70	44	Single European Act
Denmark	1992	49	83	Maastricht Treaty
France	1992	51	69	Maastricht Treaty
Ireland	1992	69	44	Maastricht Treaty
Denmark	1993	56	86	Maastricht Treaty
Norway	1994	47	89	EU Membership
Sweden	1994	52	82	EU Membership
Finland	1994	56	70	EU Membership
Austria	1994	66	82	EU Membership
Denmark	1998	55	76	Amsterdam Treaty
Ireland	1998	62	56	Amsterdam Treaty
Denmark	2000	46	87	Single European currency
Ireland	2001	46	35	Nice Treaty
Ireland	2002	63	49	Nice Treaty
Malta	2003	53	90	EU Membership
Sweden	2003	55	82	Single European currency
Poland	2003	59	77	EU Membership
Slovenia	2003	60	90	EU Membership
Estonia	2003	67	64	EU Membership
Czech Republic	2003	77	55	EU Membership
Hungary	2003	84	46	EU Membership
Lithuania	2003	91	63	EU Membership
Romania	2003	91	55	EU Membership
Slovakia	2003	92	52	EU Membership
Latvia	2004	67	71	EU Membership
Netherlands	2005	38	63	European Constitution
France	2005	45	69	European Constitution
Luxembourg	2005	56	90	European Constitution
Spain	2005	77	42	European Constitution
Ireland	2008	47	53	Lisbon Treaty
Ireland	2009	67	59	Lisbon Treaty
Ireland	2012	60	39	Financial compact
Croatia	2012	66	43	EU Membership
Denmark	2014	62	55	Patent Court
Denmark	2015	42	75	Police co-operation
Greece	2015	43	62	Bailout
Netherlands	2016	36	32	EU-Ukraine trade-agreement
United Kingdom	2016	52	72	EU Membership

Table 4. National debt rate of total GDP 2004–2017 (Eurostat).

Country	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Mean
Austria	65	68	67	65	68	80	82	82	82	81	84	84	84	78	76
Belgium	97	95	91	87	93	100	100	103	104	106	107	106	106	103	100
Bulgaria	36	27	21	16	13	14	15	15	17	17	27	26	29	25	21
Croatia	40	41	39	38	40	49	58	65	71	82	86	85	83	78	61
Republic of Cyprus	64	63	59	54	45	54	56	66	80	103	108	108	107	98	76
Czech Republic	29	28	28	28	28	34	37	40	45	45	42	40	37	35	35
Denmark	44	37	32	27	33	40	43	46	45	44	44	40	38	36	39
Estonia	5	5	4	4	5	7	7	6	10	10	11	10	9	9	7
Finland	43	40	38	34	33	42	47	49	54	57	60	64	63	61	49
France	66	67	64	64	68	79	82	85	90	92	95	96	97	97	82
Germany	65	67	67	64	65	73	81	79	80	77	75	71	68	64	71
Greece	103	107	104	103	109	127	146	172	160	177	179	177	181	179	145
Hungary	58	60	64	65	71	77	80	80	78	76	75	75	74	74	72
Ireland	28	26	24	24	42	62	86	110	120	119	105	77	73	68	69
Italy	100	102	103	100	102	113	115	117	123	129	132	132	132	132	116
Latvia	14	11	10	8	18	36	47	43	41	39	41	37	41	40	30
Lithuania	19	18	17	16	15	28	36	37	40	39	41	43	40	40	30
Luxembourg	7	7	8	8	15	16	20	19	22	24	23	22	21	23	17
Malta	72	70	65	62	63	68	68	70	68	68	64	60	58	51	65
Netherlands	50	49	45	43	55	57	59	62	66	68	68	65	62	57	57
Poland	45	46	47	44	46	49	53	54	54	56	50	51	54	51	50
Portugal	62	67	69	68	72	84	96	111	126	129	131	129	130	126	100
Romania	19	16	12	13	13	23	30	34	37	38	39	38	38	35	28
Slovakia	41	34	31	30	29	36	41	44	52	55	54	52	52	51	43
Slovenia	27	26	26	23	22	35	38	47	54	70	80	83	79	74	49
Spain	45	42	39	36	40	53	60	70	86	96	100	99	99	98	69
Sweden	49	49	44	39	38	41	39	38	38	41	46	44	42	41	42
United Kingdom	39	40	41	42	50	64	76	81	85	86	87	88	88	88	68

Table 5. Unemployment rate of total workforce 2004–2017 (Eurostat).

Country	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Mean
Austria	5	6	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	6	6	6	6	5
Belgium	8	9	8	8	7	8	8	7	8	8	9	9	8	7	8
Bulgaria	12	10	9	7	6	7	10	11	12	13	11	9	8	6	9
Croatia	14	13	12	10	9	9	12	14	16	17	17	16	13	11	13
Republic of Cyprus	5	5	5	4	4	5	6	8	12	16	16	15	13	11	9
Czech Republic	8	8	7	5	4	7	7	7	7	6	5	4	3	6	6
Denmark	6	5	4	4	3	6	8	8	8	7	7	6	6	6	6
Estonia	10	8	6	5	6	14	17	12	10	9	7	6	7	6	9
Finland	9	8	8	7	6	8	8	8	8	8	9	9	9	9	8
France	9	9	9	8	7	9	9	9	10	10	10	10	10	9	9
Germany	11	11	10	9	7	8	7	6	5	5	5	5	4	4	7
Greece	11	10	9	8	8	10	13	18	25	28	27	25	24	22	17
Hungary	6	7	8	7	8	10	11	11	11	10	8	7	5	4	8
Ireland	5	4	5	5	7	13	15	15	16	14	12	10	8	7	10
Italy	8	8	7	6	7	8	8	8	11	12	13	12	12	11	9
Latvia	12	10	7	6	8	18	20	16	15	12	11	10	10	9	12
Lithuania	11	8	6	4	6	14	18	15	13	12	11	9	8	7	10
Luxembourg	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	6	6	7	6	6	5
Malta	7	7	7	7	6	7	7	6	6	6	6	5	5	4	6
Netherlands	5	6	5	4	4	4	5	5	6	7	7	7	6	5	5
Poland	19	18	14	10	7	8	10	10	10	10	9	8	6	5	10
Portugal	8	9	9	9	9	11	12	13	16	16	14	13	11	9	11
Romania	8	7	7	6	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	6	5	7
Slovakia	18	16	14	11	10	12	15	14	14	14	13	12	10	8	13
Slovenia	6	7	6	5	4	6	7	8	9	10	10	9	8	7	7
Spain	11	9	9	8	11	18	20	21	25	26	25	22	20	17	17
Sweden	7	8	7	6	6	8	9	8	8	8	8	7	7	7	7
United Kingdom	5	5	5	5	6	8	8	8	8	8	8	6	5	4	6

Table 6. Corruption Perceptions Index values 2004–2017 (Transparency International).¹³⁰

Country	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012*	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Mean
Austria	84	87	86	81	81	79	79	78	69	69	72	76	75	75	78
Belgium	75	74	73	71	73	71	71	75	75	75	76	77	77	75	74
Bulgaria	41	40	40	41	36	38	37	33	41	41	43	41	41	43	40
Croatia	35	34	34	41	44	41	41	40	46	48	48	51	49	49	43
Republic of Cyprus	54	57	56	53	64	66	63	63	66	63	63	61	55	57	60
Czech Republic	42	43	48	52	52	49	46	44	49	48	51	56	55	57	49
Denmark	95	95	95	94	93	93	93	94	90	91	92	91	90	88	92
Estonia	60	64	67	65	66	66	65	64	64	68	69	70	70	71	66
Finland	97	96	96	94	90	89	92	94	90	89	89	90	89	85	91
France	71	75	74	73	69	69	68	70	71	71	69	70	69	70	71
Germany	82	82	80	78	79	80	79	80	79	78	79	81	81	81	80
Greece	43	43	44	46	47	38	35	34	36	40	43	46	44	48	42
Hungary	48	50	52	53	51	51	47	46	55	54	54	51	48	45	50
Ireland	75	74	74	75	77	80	80	75	69	72	74	75	73	74	75
Italy	48	50	49	52	48	43	39	39	42	43	43	44	47	50	46
Latvia	40	42	47	48	50	45	43	42	49	53	55	56	57	58	49
Lithuania	46	48	48	48	46	49	50	48	54	57	58	59	59	59	52
Luxembourg	84	85	86	84	83	82	85	85	80	80	82	85	81	82	83
Malta	68	66	64	58	58	52	56	56	57	56	55	60	55	56	58
Netherlands	87	86	87	90	89	89	88	89	84	83	83	84	83	82	86
Poland	35	34	37	42	46	50	53	55	58	60	61	63	62	60	51
Portugal	63	65	66	65	61	58	60	61	63	62	63	64	62	63	63
Romania	29	30	31	37	38	38	37	36	44	43	43	46	48	48	39
Slovakia	40	43	47	49	50	45	43	40	46	47	50	51	51	50	47
Slovenia	60	61	64	66	67	66	64	59	61	57	58	60	61	61	62
Spain	71	70	68	67	65	61	61	62	65	59	60	58	58	57	63
Sweden	92	92	92	93	93	92	92	93	88	89	87	89	88	84	90
United Kingdom	86	86	86	84	77	77	76	78	74	76	78	81	81	82	80

¹³⁰ Before 2012 Transparency International used the scale of 0–10 to measure corruption level, but from 2012 onwards they changed the scale to 0–100. Hence, values pre-2012 were re-coded to fit the model. Therefore, pre-2012 values such as 9.1 are here coded as 91.

Table 7. Gini index values 2004–2017 (Eurostat).¹³¹

Country	2004*	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Mean
Austria	26	26	25	26	28	28	28	27	28	27	28	27	27	28	27
Belgium	26	28	28	26	28	26	27	26	27	26	26	26	26	26	27
Bulgaria	26	-	31	35	36	33	33	35	34	35	35	37	38	40	35
Croatia	-	-	-	-	-	-	32	31	31	31	30	30	30	-	31
Republic of Cyprus	-	29	29	30	29	30	30	29	31	32	35	34	32	31	31
Czech Republic	25	26	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25
Denmark	24	24	24	25	25	27	27	27	27	27	28	27	28	28	26
Estonia	37	34	33	33	31	31	31	32	33	33	36	35	33	32	33
Finland	26	26	26	26	26	26	25	26	26	25	26	25	25	25	26
France	28	28	27	27	30	30	30	31	31	30	29	29	29	-	29
Germany	25	26	27	30	30	29	29	29	28	30	31	30	30	29	29
Greece	33	33	34	34	33	33	33	34	34	34	35	34	34	33	34
Hungary	24	28	33	26	25	25	24	27	27	28	29	28	28	28	27
Ireland	32	32	32	31	30	29	31	30	31	31	31	30	30	-	31
Italy	33	33	32	32	31	32	32	33	32	33	32	32	33	33	32
Latvia	34	36	39	35	38	38	36	35	36	35	36	35	35	35	36
Lithuania	31	36	35	34	35	36	37	33	32	35	35	38	37	38	35
Luxembourg	27	27	28	27	28	29	28	27	28	30	29	29	31	-	28
Malta	30	27	27	26	28	27	29	27	27	28	28	28	29	28	28
Netherlands	27	27	26	28	28	27	26	26	25	25	26	27	27	27	27
Poland	30	36	33	32	32	31	31	31	31	31	31	31	30	29	31
Portugal	38	38	38	37	36	35	34	34	35	34	35	34	34	34	35
Romania	30	-	-	38	36	35	34	34	34	35	35	37	35	33	35
Slovakia	-	26	28	25	24	25	26	26	25	24	26	24	24	-	25
Slovenia	22	24	24	23	23	23	24	24	24	24	25	25	24	24	24
Spain	31	32	32	32	32	33	34	34	34	34	35	35	35	34	33
Sweden	23	23	24	23	25	26	26	26	26	26	27	27	28	-	25
United Kingdom	35	35	33	33	34	32	33	33	31	30	32	32	32	-	33

¹³¹ In the cases where values were missing for 2004, values from the closest previous year were used instead. These were: Bulgaria (2002), Czech Republic (2001), Germany (2001), Hungary (2000), Latvia (2000), Lithuania (2001), Netherlands (2002), Poland (2001), Romania (2002), Slovenia (2002), United Kingdom (2002). Last day of data-collection 30.9.2018, member state values not included by Eurostat by then excluded from statistical analyses.

Table 8. Foreign-born population and stateless population as percentage of total population 2004–2017 (Eurostat, author’s calculations).¹³²

Country	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Mean
Austria	9	9	10	10	10	10	11	11	11	12	13	13	15	15	11
Belgium	8	8	9	9	9	9	10	11	11	11	11	11	12	12	10
Bulgaria			0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Croatia										1	1	1	1	1	1
Republic of Cyprus	12	13	15	16	16	16	20	20	20	20	19	17	17	16	17
Czech Republic	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	4
Denmark	5	5	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	7	7	8	8	8	6
Estonia			18	18	17	16	16	16	16	15	15	15	15	15	16
Finland	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	3
France		6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	7	7	7	6
Germany	9	9	8	9	9	9	9	8	8	8	9	9	11	11	9
Greece	8		8	8		8	8	8	8	8	8	8	7	8	8
Hungary	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
Ireland	9	9	10	12	13	13	13	12	12	12	11	11	12	12	11
Italy	4	4	5	5	6	6	6	7	7	7	8	8	8	8	6
Latvia	23	22	21	20	19	18	17	17	16	16	15	15	15	14	17
Lithuania	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Luxembourg	39	40	40	42	43	44	43	43	44	45	45	46	47	48	43
Malta	3	3	3	3	4	4	5	5	5	6	7	9	10	12	6
Netherlands	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	4
Poland	0	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Portugal			3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Romania									0	0	0	1	1	1	0
Slovakia	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Slovenia	2	2	2	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	6	4
Spain	7	8	9	10	11	12	12	11	11	11	10	10	10	10	10
Sweden	5	5	5	5	6	6	6	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	6
United Kingdom	5	5	6	6	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	8	9	9	7

¹³² Calculations based on the year-specific total foreign-born population, and stateless population, within the country as a proportion of the total year-specific population of the country.

Table 9. Refugees and asylum-seekers as percentage of total population 2004–2017 (Eurostat, author’s calculations).¹³³

Country	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Mean
Austria	0.69	0.76	0.82	0.84	0.89	0.85	0.82	0.85	0.88	0.93	1.08	1.77	1.95	1.96	1.4
Belgium	0.35	0.33	0.31	0.31	0.29	0.31	0.33	0.38	0.33	0.33	0.35	0.63	0.59	0.54	0.39
Bulgaria	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.08	0.08	0.09	0.09	0.1	0.05	0.12	0.25	0.36	0.47	0.31	0.16
Croatia	0.09	0.07	0.06	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.03
Republic of Cyprus	1.46	1.88	1.81	1.73	1.22	0.99	1.07	0.78	0.73	0.75	0.88	1.1	1.36	1.76	1.24
Czech Republic	0.03	0.03	0.05	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.03
Denmark	1.23	0.83	0.68	0.5	0.44	0.39	0.38	0.27	0.24	0.26	0.39	0.53	0.7	0.69	0.49
Estonia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.01
Finland	0.22	0.23	0.25	0.13	0.18	0.21	0.2	0.21	0.22	0.24	0.25	0.68	0.44	0.44	0.28
France	0.32	0.28	0.29	0.29	0.32	0.37	0.39	0.4	0.41	0.43	0.47	0.51	0.55	0.6	0.41
Germany	1.17	0.94	0.8	0.74	0.75	0.77	0.79	0.79	0.84	0.4	0.55	0.91	1.53	1.7	0.89
Greece	0.09	0.1	0.14	0.28	0.36	0.45	0.51	0.41	0.35	0.48	0.39	0.47	0.8	0.77	0.42
Hungary	0.08	0.09	0.09	0.1	0.1	0.07	0.06	0.05	0.04	0.04	0.19	0.42	0.08	0.07	0.11
Ireland	0.25	0.23	0.27	0.32	0.32	0.27	0.31	0.3	0.26	0.25	0.23	0.24	0.21	0.26	0.27
Italy	0.03	0.04	0.05	0.07	0.08	0.1	0.1	0.12	0.13	0.15	0.23	0.29	0.41	0.58	0.18
Latvia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.04	0.01
Lithuania	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.06	0.03
Luxembourg	0.35	0.4	0.48	0.58	0.65	0.75	0.79	0.89	0.79	0.36	0.43	0.66	0.74	0.6	0.62
Malta	0.42	0.52	0.65	0.95	1.36	1.89	1.79	2.03	2.16	2.56	1.46	1.74	1.96	2.04	1.62
Netherlands	0.95	0.81	0.7	0.57	0.53	0.56	0.53	0.51	0.49	0.45	0.53	0.69	0.66	0.64	0.59
Poland	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.04	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.04	0.04	0.04
Portugal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.01
Romania	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.01
Slovakia	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02
Slovenia	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.04	0.04	0.02
Spain	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.04	0.07	0.11	0.03
Sweden	1.13	1.01	1.08	1.13	1.1	1.08	1.08	1.11	1.22	1.48	2.06	3.35	3.18	2.93	1.67
United Kingdom	0.52	0.52	0.52	0.51	0.5	0.45	0.4	0.33	0.27	0.24	0.24	0.26	0.25	0.25	0.37

¹³³ Calculations based the year-specific total amount of refugees within the country as a proportion of the total amount of year-specific total population of the country. Data including: refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced peoples (IDPs), returnees, stateless persons and "others".

Table 10. EU budget balance 2004–2017 (Eurostat).¹³⁴

Country	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Mean
Austria	-0.15	-0.11	-0.11	-0.2	-0.12	-0.14	-0.23	-0.26	-0.34	-0.39	-0.38	-0.25	-0.28	-0.25	-0.23
Belgium	-0.18	-0.19	-0.21	-0.25	-0.2	-0.48	-0.39	-0.36	-0.38	-0.39	-0.37	-0.33	-0.36	-0.16	-0.30
Bulgaria	-	-	-	1.13	1.92	1.77	2.5	1.88	3.32	3.8	4.45	5.33	4.15	2.92	3.02
Croatia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.12	0.42	0.52	1.17	0.55		0.56
Republic of Cyprus	0.49	0.64	0.67	-0.06	-0.1	-0.1	0.06	0.03	-0.13	0.23	0.69	-0.13	0.12	0.27	0.19
Czech Republic	0.3	0.17	0.33	0.51	0.78	1.23	1.44	0.96	2.02	2.33	2.08	3.77	1.96	1.37	1.38
Denmark	-0.11	-0.12	-0.22	-0.26	-0.22	-0.42	-0.25	-0.33	-0.44	-0.49	-0.32	-0.29	-0.22	-0.24	-0.28
Estonia	1.57	1.43	1.38	1.5	1.46	4.18	4.82	2.25	4.64	4.22	2.49	1.21	2.34	2.09	2.54
Finland	-0.04	-0.05	-0.14	-0.09	-0.16	-0.3	-0.16	-0.33	-0.33	-0.3	-0.4	-0.23	-0.2	-0.12	-0.20
France	-0.18	-0.16	-0.16	-0.15	-0.19	-0.3	-0.27	-0.3	-0.39	-0.39	-0.33	-0.25	-0.41	-0.2	-0.26
Germany	-0.31	-0.26	-0.26	-0.29	-0.34	-0.25	-0.35	-0.33	-0.42	-0.48	-0.52	-0.46	-0.34	-0.32	-0.35
Greece	2.16	1.98	2.39	2.4	2.68	1.35	1.62	2.29	2.33	2.93	2.89	2.8	2.43	2.1	2.31
Hungary	0.24	0.69	1.29	1.7	1.11	3.05	2.95	4.62	3.47	5.08	5.64	4.38	3.3	2.66	2.87
Ireland	1.19	0.77	0.67	0.39	0.35	-0.03	0.58	0.27	0.47	0.19	0.02	0.19	0.08	-0.07	0.36
Italy	-0.2	-0.15	-0.11	-0.12	-0.25	-0.32	-0.28	-0.36	-0.31	-0.24	-0.28	-0.16	-0.19	-0.21	-0.23
Latvia	1.72	1.94	1.52	2.23	1.69	2.49	3.7	3.62	4.33	3.46	3.35	3.12	2.01	1.98	2.65
Lithuania	2.06	2.3	2.48	2.84	2.67	5.44	4.94	4.55	4.69	4.45	4.38	1.51	3.09	3.14	3.37
Luxembourg	-0.42	-0.33	-0.25	-0.48	-0.07	-0.42	-0.16	-0.27	-0.28	-0.24	0.27	-0.27	0.02	0.04	-0.20
Malta	0.93	1.82	1.95	0.5	0.5	0.15	0.84	1.00	1.03	1.21	2.35	0.37	1.27	1.00	1.07
Netherlands	-0.38	-0.49	-0.44	-0.47	-0.43	0.02	-0.29	-0.34	-0.36	-0.42	-0.71	-0.54	-0.04	-0.19	-0.36
Poland	0.72	0.77	1.12	1.7	1.25	2.09	2.43	3.03	3.24	3.22	3.47	2.31	1.71	1.92	2.07
Portugal	2.08	1.52	1.42	1.46	1.57	1.27	1.51	1.73	3.06	2.63	1.88	0.56	0.95	1.29	1.64
Romania	-	-	-	0.49	1.14	1.42	0.99	1.1	1.55	2.94	3.09	3.27	3.62	1.85	1.95
Slovakia	0.51	0.71	0.73	1.13	1.13	0.85	2.06	1.69	2.26	1.78	1.37	4.07	2.49	1.17	1.57
Slovenia	0.4	0.35	0.46	0.26	0.31	0.68	1.18	1.34	1.6	1.2	2.17	1.51	0.46	0.34	0.88
Spain	1.00	0.66	0.38	0.35	0.26	0.11	0.38	0.28	0.38	0.29	0.1	0.42	0.15	0.06	0.34
Sweden	-0.34	-0.27	-0.25	-0.27	-0.4	-0.03	-0.32	-0.32	-0.44	-0.49	-0.52	-0.48	-0.2	-0.29	-0.33
United Kingdom	-0.15	-0.08	-0.1	-0.19	-0.04	-0.11	-0.31	-0.3	-0.36	-0.43	-0.23	-0.46	-0.27	-0.23	-0.23

¹³⁴ Values reflect the operating budgetary balance as percentage of Gross National Income (GNI). A negative budget balance indicate the country being a net contributor to the EU budget, as it pays proportionally more than it receives back.

Table 11. Public support for the future enlargement of the EU 2004–2017 (Eurobarometer).

Country	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Mean
Austria	34	34	33	28	28	29	25	21	23	21	27	24	24	27	27
Belgium	51	50	46	47	47	43	39	39	36	36	33	34	32	37	41
Bulgaria	94	90	88	80	87	74	79	72	71	67	68	65	60	63	76
Croatia	83	79	75	78	65	67	74	72	70	76	68	67	68	65	72
Republic of Cyprus	74	81	76	75	74	62	64	53	43	35	43	45	41	50	58
Czech Republic	79	72	66	69	66	59	56	46	43	47	47	36	33	36	54
Denmark	49	49	52	51	53	42	44	42	41	42	39	36	32	32	43
Estonia	73	65	64	62	71	59	65	48	52	56	56	50	42	47	58
Finland	45	44	39	41	43	40	33	27	26	28	31	27	29	28	34
France	43	34	33	33	32	33	31	28	26	23	24	27	29	28	30
Germany	39	36	31	34	32	32	26	21	22	22	25	25	26	29	28
Greece	69	71	65	54	55	46	49	48	46	45	45	47	43	47	52
Hungary	75	77	72	69	68	69	74	65	61	63	62	59	59	66	67
Ireland	66	67	60	54	52	51	42	34	45	45	46	49	47	54	51
Italy	75	68	58	57	50	50	50	46	40	37	41	40	38	44	50
Latvia	78	73	67	62	66	56	56	54	55	56	60	57	55	53	61
Lithuania	92	84	76	80	79	70	76	72	70	74	75	70	70	72	76
Luxembourg	41	35	32	27	31	35	35	32	27	31	26	25	28	28	31
Malta	77	74	77	76	75	74	72	70	62	67	73	71	68	71	72
Netherlands	54	49	46	51	49	46	40	34	35	30	34	35	30	27	40
Poland	88	85	84	85	83	80	80	78	73	74	75	68	65	67	77
Portugal	61	68	64	63	60	68	52	50	48	42	47	45	49	46	55
Romania	94	91	90	88	84	79	81	77	75	77	83	79	72	71	81
Slovakia	81	79	73	68	73	72	69	57	52	54	54	50	51	52	63
Slovenia	83	81	78	70	77	70	64	56	62	57	62	55	57	60	67
Spain	79	73	74	79	75	70	61	59	54	53	64	67	62	72	67
Sweden	49	53	55	57	58	53	54	49	46	49	54	47	39	41	50
United Kingdom	58	53	46	44	44	38	35	37	34	37	41	44	43	49	43

Table 12. Public support for the single European currency 2004–2017 (Eurobarometer).

Country	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Mean
Austria	79	71	71	72	74	75	69	63	69	69	71	66	68	70	71
Belgium	89	84	84	84	83	82	80	81	74	76	78	80	79	81	81
Bulgaria	84	79	79	73	78	72	66	63	57	55	49	45	44	44	63
Croatia	69	66	66	72	75	67	73	70	61	62	58	59	57	49	65
Republic of Cyprus	62	54	50	51	63	67	62	57	52	48	54	53	58	67	57
Czech Republic	65	65	61	58	55	52	40	26	24	25	25	22	24	22	40
Denmark	55	52	55	55	54	55	46	36	31	34	34	34	32	33	43
Estonia	58	58	51	55	63	65	63	69	72	76	84	87	85	86	69
Finland	80	77	76	79	81	81	78	75	77	77	79	78	79	79	78
France	81	79	75	77	74	73	71	69	72	66	69	73	73	76	73
Germany	72	65	67	74	72	71	68	68	70	72	75	77	80	84	72
Greece	62	49	49	46	54	62	66	71	73	63	65	71	66	67	62
Hungary	69	73	73	70	71	71	74	62	52	57	56	55	55	58	64
Ireland	90	90	90	90	91	91	87	85	80	77	80	85	87	89	86
Italy	70	71	72	73	68	68	73	70	64	63	59	65	61	66	67
Latvia	66	61	53	53	55	56	58	51	40	51	69	80	83	83	61
Lithuania	77	63	54	55	59	58	57	52	47	44	51	73	67	68	59
Luxembourg	85	89	84	84	85	86	85	84	78	80	81	84	87	87	84
Malta	53	55	58	68	72	71	70	71	66	72	79	80	82	85	70
Netherlands	73	73	73	80	83	83	75	74	76	71	78	77	78	80	77
Poland	70	57	58	55	50	50	48	40	38	34	38	38	37	36	47
Portugal	69	68	62	70	61	66	61	59	61	56	56	68	74	80	65
Romania	87	86	82	83	82	83	78	74	69	65	71	72	63	64	76
Slovakia	72	69	65	66	71	91	89	82	80	80	79	83	82	86	78
Slovenia	91	83	84	90	92	89	85	83	84	80	82	83	86	87	86
Spain	71	66	67	72	70	68	67	68	64	59	65	70	72	82	69
Sweden	49	49	54	48	53	56	38	31	25	24	27	28	30	28	39
United Kingdom	33	31	32	29	29	29	20	19	15	18	21	21	22	30	25

Table 13. Public support for a common European defence policy 2004–2017 (Eurobarometer).

Country	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Mean
Austria	70	69	67	71	81	-	71	67	64	65	68	61	59	61	67
Belgium	93	92	89	90	90	-	87	87	86	85	85	85	86	84	87
Bulgaria	93	93	89	94	93	-	96	95	92	92	85	83	82	84	90
Croatia	87	82	80	82	82	-	83	81	81	86	82	80	80	74	82
Republic of Cyprus	92	95	95	96	95	-	92	91	88	84	89	85	82	85	90
Czech Republic	90	91	89	89	89	-	83	82	80	82	79	74	76	74	83
Denmark	72	72	73	75	77	-	71	70	68	69	73	73	71	72	72
Estonia	92	94	91	93	92	-	92	90	91	91	92	90	89	89	91
Finland	65	66	66	69	69	-	63	63	55	58	65	70	65	70	65
France	87	87	86	88	85	-	84	82	82	84	85	84	86	84	85
Germany	90	89	89	91	87	-	87	84	84	85	86	84	87	88	87
Greece	87	83	83	86	81	-	78	83	78	76	78	72	73	75	79
Hungary	90	91	90	87	87	-	87	82	77	78	72	72	76	75	82
Ireland	72	72	71	78	67	-	67	59	57	59	66	68	73	72	68
Italy	88	86	84	84	79	-	86	81	78	78	83	78	74	74	81
Latvia	93	95	92	93	91	-	91	89	87	91	91	91	91	90	91
Lithuania	94	93	93	94	93	-	95	92	91	92	94	94	94	93	93
Luxembourg	88	91	91	91	91	-	89	91	85	89	89	89	91	91	90
Malta	75	79	79	82	82	-	85	85	81	81	85	87	87	80	82
Netherlands	88	84	82	82	85	-	78	79	77	77	81	83	83	85	82
Poland	92	92	91	91	90	-	92	89	85	86	90	84	83	84	88
Portugal	83	84	81	88	77	-	81	81	77	74	78	78	80	81	80
Romania	96	92	92	93	91	-	90	88	89	89	88	86	79	78	89
Slovakia	93	90	89	91	92	-	93	91	89	89	83	83	82	83	88
Slovenia	94	92	87	91	91	-	88	83	83	82	85	82	85	84	87
Spain	87	86	87	90	89	-	89	90	86	84	87	88	87	91	88
Sweden	59	64	62	60	63	-	60	60	56	60	62	63	61	66	61
United Kingdom	69	68	66	64	65	-	54	61	58	63	67	68	68	71	65

Table 14. Trust in the European Parliament 2004–2017 (Eurobarometer).

Country	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Mean
Austria	64	55	57	59	55	57	52	49	49	49	51	44	45	51	53
Belgium	74	68	69	72	70	67	65	65	61	60	55	57	57	60	64
Bulgaria	80	75	77	78	77	78	75	71	69	69	62	62	59	62	71
Croatia	66	58	55	50	49	45	48	45	46	51	50	60	54	55	52
Cyprus	79	76	79	72	77	68	61	61	45	29	37	35	39	46	57
Czech Republic	70	62	68	68	68	58	61	52	49	50	42	41	35	39	54
Denmark	67	64	69	75	69	70	73	67	69	66	64	67	60	66	67
Estonia	80	72	78	79	78	77	76	69	68	67	70	68	65	67	72
Finland	67	57	59	58	63	64	61	60	56	55	64	67	64	68	62
France	69	59	60	70	61	55	55	50	54	46	43	43	42	47	54
Germany	63	57	59	63	58	57	52	48	51	49	50	48	51	60	55
Greece	76	66	67	77	60	59	45	34	28	29	33	29	26	30	47
Hungary	82	77	79	72	69	65	74	62	59	63	58	61	55	58	67
Ireland	87	78	82	84	77	69	64	51	48	49	49	56	60	62	65
Italy	77	74	74	68	68	65	64	58	46	45	44	51	46	51	59
Latvia	70	68	65	65	57	51	53	47	53	51	53	54	54	55	57
Lithuania	87	76	79	81	78	70	73	64	68	66	71	73	70	74	74
Luxembourg	79	75	73	75	73	75	72	69	67	66	63	69	66	70	71
Malta	80	73	75	79	83	76	70	68	65	73	74	73	70	74	74
Netherlands	68	55	60	68	65	65	65	57	57	51	54	56	53	59	60
Poland	72	70	73	79	74	66	70	63	64	60	61	60	58	56	66
Portugal	78	77	73	76	74	73	62	52	46	35	41	47	48	56	60
Romania	95	86	83	89	84	77	70	69	63	57	64	69	60	62	73
Slovakia	80	73	76	77	76	76	78	65	59	57	47	49	47	48	65
Slovenia	80	70	75	73	71	52	53	48	48	40	42	39	36	41	55
Spain	77	64	68	77	77	61	53	43	28	24	26	33	37	43	51
Sweden	64	56	64	66	67	65	65	65	61	58	62	66	64	70	64
United Kingdom	48	39	37	33	35	29	29	25	26	26	30	33	37	40	33

Table 15. Satisfaction with EU democracy 2004–2017 (Eurobarometer).

Country	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Mean
Austria	52	48	49	51	-	55	48	41	44	44	49	44	44	49	48
Belgium	73	67	68	69	-	63	64	62	62	63	63	63	58	63	64
Bulgaria	73	75	82	63	-	77	75	70	71	69	65	71	68	70	71
Croatia	51	50	55	51	-	49	57			51	58	66	57	54	55
Republic of Cyprus	70	72	72	64	-	73	61	59	48	30	35	32	38	49	54
Czech Republic	60	66	71	67	-	64	58	49	49	51	56	53	49	52	57
Denmark	67	63	69	68	-	71	69	70	68	66	69	69	67	70	68
Estonia	66	69	65	69	-	65	67	55	58	58	65	59	56	63	63
Finland	50	47	43	39	-	47	51	48	52	53	55	55	54	60	50
France	53	50	47	59	-	55	53	48	56	48	48	48	41	50	50
Germany	52	52	48	57	-	62	52	53	52	52	51	45	44	52	52
Greece	64	57	53	58	-	57	43	30	23	22	26	29	23	27	40
Hungary	64	62	69	64	-	57	62	56	52	58	52	54	50	53	58
Ireland	83	75	84	77	-	73	68	50	53	54	62	62	69	72	68
Italy	55	62	66	56	-	64	60	46	38	39	39	46	45	47	51
Latvia	65	68	70	72	-	61	68	60	69	67	69	68	70	71	68
Lithuania	74	69	68	67	-	61	62	59	64	65	71	72	70	73	67
Luxembourg	74	71	71	61	-	78	69	71	67	66	66	65	67	70	69
Malta	72	69	68	69	-	65	67	61	64	71	72	74	69	71	69
Netherlands	49	44	51	47	-	58	50	51	53	49	50	49	45	48	50
Poland	69	68	78	81	-	73	78	70	73	77	76	76	71	70	74
Portugal	49	58	49	55	-	55	38	27	25	17	31	40	51	64	43
Romania	77	84	81	69	-	73	69	66	57	58	65	73	64	63	69
Slovakia	48	56	51	55	-	64	60	48	48	45	44	47	49	52	51
Slovenia	74	72	71	66	-	54	58	51	52	44	49	48	47	48	56
Spain	72	70	76	82	-	67	63	49	40	33	32	42	41	50	55
Sweden	48	49	54	54	-	57	57	55	50	49	54	52	50	55	53
United Kingdom	54	55	53	46	-	53	52	41	42	42	47	49	48	49	49

Table 16. Public support for EU membership 2004–2017 (Eurobarometer).

Country	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Mean
Austria	41	35	37	37	37	42	36	37	32	42	42	40	38	44	39
Belgium	72	63	67	72	65	65	64	67	67	64	68	68	64	62	66
Bulgaria	-	-	-	57	53	55	49	49	57	52	51	50	51	57	53
Croatia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	47	46	48	48	41	46
Republic of Cyprus	54	45	49	43	48	47	34	38	35	27	35	41	40	42	41
Czech Republic	45	46	51	45	46	39	30	31	24	30	39	34	33	31	37
Denmark	63	58	64	68	65	66	66	55	66	65	62	65	62	69	64
Estonia	53	46	54	64	60	61	52	47	52	55	69	62	63	68	58
Finland	46	40	38	42	44	51	43	45	50	50	49	54	56	56	47
France	57	50	49	56	49	50	45	46	57	51	48	54	50	54	51
Germany	61	57	59	67	64	63	52	57	72	69	74	72	72	81	66
Greece	63	56	54	57	46	53	44	37	46	34	33	45	30	36	45
Hungary	51	41	44	38	32	34	38	32	30	40	45	46	47	52	41
Ireland	81	78	79	78	74	74	69	67	58	68	71	73	76	82	73
Italy	59	56	57	53	43	51	50	44	40	42	46	43	38	38	47
Latvia	41	39	40	37	28	25	26	26	32	39	44	47	47	44	37
Lithuania	71	59	62	66	60	57	51	52	51	64	67	68	65	65	61
Luxembourg	85	82	75	80	74	79	71	75	81	74	82	84	83	85	79
Malta	48	43	47	54	53	51	44	42	51	64	62	62	59	66	53
Netherlands	75	74	73	78	78	75	70	69	72	64	66	72	72	78	72
Poland	52	55	60	70	65	60	63	54	50	54	66	63	63	69	60
Portugal	61	60	47	57	53	55	44	41	36	35	46	48	48	59	49
Romania	-	-	-	72	69	69	57	59	62	57	71	65	52	52	62
Slovakia	55	50	58	60	57	66	59	52	43	48	47	47	54	49	53
Slovenia	55	47	56	57	56	49	40	38	43	42	40	44	45	49	47
Spain	75	70	71	74	68	70	63	58	53	49	61	60	59	64	64
Sweden	48	43	50	52	57	56	54	57	61	62	60	64	66	68	57
United Kingdom	41	38	40	39	34	31	31	27	34	34	41	49	49	50	38

Table 17. Public support for EU and non-EU immigration 2014–2017 (Eurobarometer).¹³⁵

Country	EU immigration								Non-EU immigration							
	2014	2015	2015	2016	2016	2017	2017	Mean	2014	2015	2015	2016	2016	2017	2017	Mean
Austria	59	58	60	66	67	66	70	64	38	39	35	37	40	43	40	39
Belgium	50	48	59	56	59	64	63	57	30	31	33	37	37	48	45	37
Bulgaria	63	57	67	69	69	71	73	67	25	31	21	20	17	23	24	23
Croatia	69	69	70	72	71	70	64	69	56	50	45	48	45	49	45	48
Republic of Cyprus	42	38	44	41	46	48	50	44	23	22	27	21	22	26	27	24
Czech Republic	36	33	42	47	46	48	53	44	19	15	15	18	15	14	15	16
Denmark	72	68	66	64	67	73	72	69	44	37	31	30	30	29	29	33
Estonia	55	61	65	69	71	71	70	66	20	17	13	16	14	17	16	16
Finland	76	70	73	76	74	80	77	75	44	38	30	34	38	41	37	37
France	52	49	53	60	59	61	59	56	35	33	32	38	37	37	36	35
Germany	56	64	61	66	75	74	77	68	33	42	37	37	43	45	43	40
Greece	53	47	49	54	62	62	60	55	24	19	24	23	27	24	21	23
Hungary	47	48	51	56	61	64	69	56	29	24	16	15	17	17	21	20
Ireland	65	66	74	79	82	86	84	77	49	49	52	54	57	63	60	55
Italy	41	38	45	48	47	53	55	47	21	22	28	30	26	35	37	29
Latvia	33	38	50	47	48	53	53	46	17	16	10	11	13	13	13	13
Lithuania	59	58	71	73	73	75	77	69	32	22	18	23	23	29	35	26
Luxembourg	75	79	81	83	85	89	85	82	46	47	47	56	52	60	53	52
Malta	54	52	58	61	65	61	59	58	23	22	21	23	26	26	22	23
Netherlands	62	61	68	67	68	67	70	66	47	42	47	46	46	47	45	46
Poland	69	60	68	68	73	74	80	70	47	38	31	28	31	24	26	32
Portugal	67	67	66	69	72	77	82	71	51	45	47	47	50	56	55	50
Romania	69	65	57	56	62	57	60	61	55	58	37	30	38	35	37	41
Slovakia	42	39	46	46	56	53	51	48	20	16	10	12	16	14	18	15
Slovenia	57	62	62	64	69	65	70	64	33	38	21	29	28	28	31	30
Spain	71	69	73	76	76	78	77	74	53	52	59	56	58	60	64	58
Sweden	82	79	81	79	83	84	86	82	71	65	67	62	61	62	63	64
United Kingdom	45	50	54	52	63	66	67	57	40	42	42	44	53	57	56	48

¹³⁵ Parentheses indicate the month during which the sample was collected by Eurobarometer.

Table 18. Public support for the EU citizen right to live and work abroad 2014–2017 (Eurobarometer).¹³⁶

Country	EU right to live abroad								EU right to work abroad							
	2014 (11)	2015 (5)	2015 (11)	2016 (5)	2016 (11)	2017 (5)	2017 (11)	Mean	2014 (11)	2015 (5)	2015 (11)	2016 (5)	2016 (11)	2017 (5)	2017 (11)	Mean
Austria	65	61	61	65	60	63	63	62	65	59	62	64	61	62	63	62
Belgium	60	68	71	66	67	72	75	68	61	63	70	66	64	68	73	66
Bulgaria	86	84	82	83	81	83	81	83	85	86	84	84	84	84	82	84
Croatia	82	82	74	76	70	77	65	75	85	83	73	76	73	78	66	76
Republic of Cyprus	66	68	69	71	67	62	68	68	68	66	72	72	69	64	70	69
Czech Republic	74	75	67	71	65	67	70	70	79	79	72	76	66	73	73	74
Denmark	74	75	76	73	72	76	76	75	75	75	78	74	73	77	79	76
Estonia	84	84	83	81	83	82	80	82	88	88	87	86	86	86	84	86
Finland	78	81	77	82	80	83	82	80	80	84	82	87	86	85	85	84
France	71	75	77	77	74	74	74	75	71	74	79	78	76	74	73	75
Germany	78	85	79	79	86	85	83	82	78	86	81	81	86	85	84	83
Greece	76	69	75	72	71	75	71	73	76	68	72	72	72	74	70	72
Hungary	74	78	74	80	75	80	83	77	77	80	78	83	78	79	84	80
Ireland	77	80	82	84	85	86	88	83	80	81	83	86	87	88	87	84
Italy	67	68	62	60	61	59	59	62	70	69	65	63	62	59	59	64
Latvia	80	83	76	79	80	79	81	80	86	87	84	86	86	88	85	86
Lithuania	88	88	87	88	88	86	88	88	91	91	90	90	90	88	89	90
Luxembourg	86	90	89	90	92	92	91	90	82	89	90	90	93	94	92	90
Malta	75	79	71	75	75	73	68	74	72	79	71	75	74	73	68	73
Netherlands	73	75	73	74	75	74	75	74	71	74	78	76	78	75	76	75
Poland	83	79	78	76	77	74	82	78	85	80	80	79	80	81	84	81
Portugal	80	80	80	84	81	84	86	82	80	81	82	84	83	83	86	83
Romania	85	87	77	73	71	74	67	76	87	89	80	77	72	78	69	79
Slovakia	82	81	81	80	79	78	73	79	85	83	83	83	81	79	72	81
Slovenia	83	81	81	80	79	76	77	79	85	85	84	83	82	80	78	82
Spain	90	90	89	88	86	88	90	89	91	89	89	89	88	89	91	90
Sweden	78	79	76	76	78	79	79	78	85	87	90	86	87	88	90	87
United Kingdom	51	55	53	55	62	66	68	58	57	61	60	61	68	71	74	65

¹³⁶ Parentheses indicate the month during which the sample was collected by Eurobarometer.

Table 19. Public support for the EU citizen right to live and work in one’s own country 2015–2017 (Eurobarometer).¹³⁷

Country	EU right to live in our country						EU right to work in our country					
	2015 (11)	2016 (5)	2016 (11)	2017 (5)	2017 (11)	Mean	2015 (11)	2016 (5)	2016 (11)	2017 (5)	2017 (11)	Mean
Austria	60	62	59	61	61	61	57	58	55	56	56	56
Belgium	66	64	63	69	69	66	64	61	61	66	68	64
Bulgaria	79	78	76	76	76	77	76	76	74	74	75	75
Croatia	68	68	64	67	54	64	65	66	62	65	53	62
Republic of Cyprus	64	61	58	57	62	61	60	55	59	54	62	58
Czech Republic	58	65	58	62	65	62	60	65	58	64	66	63
Denmark	74	71	70	75	76	73	76	73	73	76	78	75
Estonia	81	79	79	79	79	79	83	81	81	80	80	81
Finland	78	83	81	83	83	82	80	85	84	84	85	83
France	74	74	72	71	72	73	73	73	70	69	70	71
Germany	74	74	82	81	79	78	75	76	84	81	80	79
Greece	70	66	67	68	69	68	65	63	64	65	66	64
Hungary	67	70	67	72	77	70	65	70	65	72	77	70
Ireland	80	84	85	85	87	84	82	84	85	87	86	85
Italy	56	54	54	54	52	54	53	50	52	51	52	52
Latvia	71	75	77	74	78	75	73	76	79	76	79	76
Lithuania	82	84	84	80	83	83	83	83	85	81	83	83
Luxembourg	87	85	89	92	87	88	88	86	90	94	90	89
Malta	61	64	66	64	62	63	59	62	66	63	60	62
Netherlands	72	72	72	72	73	72	75	74	74	73	73	74
Poland	75	75	73	71	79	74	74	74	73	72	80	74
Portugal	79	83	79	83	85	82	78	83	79	81	85	81
Romania	73	71	65	69	62	68	73	71	65	69	62	68
Slovakia	75	73	74	72	69	73	75	72	73	70	67	71
Slovenia	76	74	72	71	69	72	76	73	72	70	69	72
Spain	87	86	85	86	89	87	86	86	85	87	90	87
Sweden	81	80	80	82	82	81	89	87	86	88	89	88
United Kingdom	52	53	60	64	67	59	58	59	66	69	73	65

¹³⁷ Parentheses indicate the month during which the sample was collected by Eurobarometer.

Table 20. Public support for the free movement of citizens 2015–2017 (Eurobarometer).¹³⁸

Country	2015 (11)	2016 (5)	2016 (11)	2017 (5)	2017 (11)	Mean
Austria	69	75	68	75	74	72
Belgium	79	79	80	81	83	80
Bulgaria	94	94	94	93	93	94
Croatia	84	88	86	89	79	85
Republic of Cyprus	88	91	88	91	87	89
Czech Republic	80	87	84	83	86	84
Denmark	74	69	75	76	75	74
Estonia	97	95	97	96	98	97
Finland	86	90	89	89	87	88
France	81	86	83	81	80	82
Germany	90	89	93	93	92	91
Greece	87	84	85	88	88	86
Hungary	80	86	85	85	87	85
Ireland	87	89	93	91	90	90
Italy	79	76	79	76	77	77
Latvia	95	98	97	97	97	97
Lithuania	98	97	97	96	97	97
Luxembourg	92	90	97	95	93	94
Malta	86	90	91	92	89	90
Netherlands	83	79	85	84	84	83
Poland	82	83	89	86	89	86
Portugal	87	91	92	90	91	90
Romania	88	85	82	84	80	84
Slovakia	91	91	88	92	89	90
Slovenia	89	88	91	88	89	89
Spain	93	94	93	95	96	94
Sweden	86	86	88	90	88	87
United Kingdom	69	68	73	77	80	73

¹³⁸ Parentheses indicate the month during which the sample was collected by Eurobarometer.

Table 21. European identification 2004–2017 (Eurobarometer).

Country	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Mean
Austria	61	54	-	55	-	-	50	56	59	61	63	53	58	58	57
Belgium	71	67	-	70	-	-	64	71	70	67	66	67	70	70	69
Bulgaria	58	55	-	54	-	-	43	51	50	47	47	49	48	52	50
Croatia	64	67	-	-	-	-	-	-	68	66	65	70	66	64	66
Republic of Cyprus	70	67	-	59	-	-	59	59	60	50	47	42	49	51	56
Czech Republic	47	62	-	49	-	-	39	43	48	52	56	56	55	62	52
Denmark	60	58	-	62	-	-	56	57	59	58	63	63	62	64	60
Estonia	51	46	-	46	-	-	48	49	47	49	59	55	53	51	50
Finland	45	49	-	48	-	-	47	47	49	52	54	55	55	53	50
France	71	66	-	67	-	-	56	62	64	61	63	63	65	63	64
Germany	63	64	-	69	-	-	60	68	67	67	69	70	69	71	67
Greece	47	54	-	49	-	-	47	44	53	50	49	50	47	46	49
Hungary	39	47	-	51	-	-	52	48	51	54	56	64	65	70	54
Ireland	53	49	-	41	-	-	38	39	39	39	51	54	56	60	47
Italy	68	64	-	48	-	-	52	69	66	62	56	59	55	59	60
Latvia	50	51	-	42	-	-	44	47	50	51	56	48	50	51	49
Lithuania	45	42	-	43	-	-	37	46	42	52	49	52	48	51	46
Luxembourg	64	72	-	76	-	-	76	78	81	77	80	83	86	85	78
Malta	62	67	-	65	-	-	58	66	65	63	74	68	69	70	66
Netherlands	69	67	-	71	-	-	63	66	68	65	69	72	73	71	69
Poland	54	57	-	52	-	-	53	55	60	62	61	60	63	64	58
Portugal	46	51	-	48	-	-	54	50	58	51	52	57	62	66	54
Romania	62	61	-	44	-	-	41	51	54	49	57	58	53	53	53
Slovakia	60	59	-	54	-	-	58	67	66	66	57	60	61	59	61
Slovenia	56	63	-	61	-	-	43	60	58	55	58	58	54	58	57
Spain	61	60	-	64	-	-	62	66	65	63	67	68	70	78	66
Sweden	54	57	-	55	-	-	51	59	59	58	66	67	64	65	59
United Kingdom	43	35	-	39	-	-	28	38	38	36	36	34	42	51	38

Table 22. EU attachment 2006–2017 (Eurobarometer).

Country	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Mean
Austria	-	-	48	46	-	-	55	-	-	44	42	46	46	51	47
Belgium	-	-	60	66	-	-	51	-	-	61	54	60	56	59	59
Bulgaria	-	-	56	47	-	-	57	-	-	55	44	48	51	54	52
Croatia	-	-	42	32	-	-	-	-	-	46	42	51	42	45	42
Republic of Cyprus	-	-	28	29	-	-	29	-	-	23	27	29	29	37	29
Czech Republic	-	-	49	46	-	-	42	-	-	35	35	34	32	37	39
Denmark	-	-	49	45	-	-	40	-	-	45	49	51	47	53	47
Estonia	-	-	29	36	-	-	35	-	-	46	49	46	45	48	42
Finland	-	-	31	28	-	-	33	-	-	35	35	43	40	45	36
France	-	-	52	58	-	-	56	-	-	53	53	58	54	59	55
Germany	-	-	50	54	-	-	56	-	-	57	51	56	59	69	56
Greece	-	-	35	38	-	-	44	-	-	27	29	33	32	34	34
Hungary	-	-	65	56	-	-	58	-	-	52	51	59	60	60	56
Ireland	-	-	55	54	-	-	55	-	-	47	44	51	56	60	52
Italy	-	-	68	63	-	-	75	-	-	48	43	45	43	47	53
Latvia	-	-	45	49	-	-	49	-	-	58	64	65	69	70	58
Lithuania	-	-	35	39	-	-	37	-	-	43	43	52	52	51	43
Luxembourg	-	-	67	63	-	-	71	-	-	71	75	78	78	80	73
Malta	-	-	51	56	-	-	52	-	-	56	58	62	57	68	57
Netherlands	-	-	34	33	-	-	33	-	-	35	34	42	40	45	37
Poland	-	-	62	67	-	-	66	-	-	62	63	61	66	66	64
Portugal	-	-	47	53	-	-	52	-	-	40	43	48	49	54	48
Romania	-	-	67	62	-	-	53	-	-	51	60	62	56	57	58
Slovakia	-	-	42	48	-	-	63	-	-	52	52	48	47	56	51
Slovenia	-	-	59	52	-	-	44	-	-	41	40	47	49	52	48
Spain	-	-	57	58	-	-	62	-	-	48	47	55	60	65	55
Sweden	-	-	40	42	-	-	38	-	-	41	42	50	48	52	43
United Kingdom	-	-	39	32	-	-	29	-	-	31	37	44	47	45	37

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¹³⁹ When possible, the Standard Eurobarometer Series surveys have been used, but when survey data for a survey item have not been included in

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Svensk sammanfattning

Ett tillräckligt högt politiskt stöd från medlemsländerna för den Europeiska Unionen (EU) är en förutsättning för att EU:s existens inte ska ifrågasättas. Med politiskt stöd från medlemsländerna avses i denna avhandling politiska attityder på aggregerad nivå inom medlemsländerna som indikerar ett positivt förhållningssätt gentemot EU. I denna avhandling har det politiska stödet för tre olika aspekter av EU, sett ur ett system perspektiv, analyserats. Detta med hänsyn till att den breda allmänheten har lärt sig att göra skillnad på olika aspekter av EU, vilket har gjort att attityderna gentemot dessa olika delar tenderar att variera. I och med att EU har utvecklats märkbart över tid, och är långt ifrån färdigställt, kommer allmänhetens attityder gentemot EU att ha både en direkt och indirekt påverkan på vilken riktning EU tar i framtiden och, för att dra argumentet till sin spets, även på EU:s framtida existens.

Det att allmänhetens attityder inom EU-området anses ha direkta följder för EU:s utveckling är en uppfattning som har etablerats i takt med att EU har utvecklats i en allt mer överstatlig riktning. Detta är en utveckling som inte har välkomnats utav alla, med ökade framgångar för euroskeptiska partier som det tydligaste exemplet på ökad skepticism och motstånd gentemot utvecklingen. Därtill visade folkomröstningen om Storbritanniens medlemskap i EU med största tänkbara tydlighet att allmänheten inom specifika medlemsstater kan, om och när de får chansen, välja att vända EU ryggen.

Detta har aktualiserat forskning kring hur attityder gentemot EU formas inom medlemsländerna, inte minst med tanke på att fler länder kan välja att följa britternas exempel. I takt med att allmänhetens attityder nu behöver beaktas har det blivit relevant att analysera ifall det finns sammanbindande faktorer på nationell nivå inom EU-området som kan tänkas förklara skillnader i attityder gentemot EU och vilka dessa faktorer isåfall är.

Syftet med denna avhandling har varit att öka kunskapen om hur attityder gentemot EU påverkas utav nationella faktorer över tid. De övergripande frågeställningarna är: Hur har stödet inom medlemsländerna för olika aspekter av EU som ett politiskt system

utvecklats över tid? Till vilken utsträckning kan nationella faktorer förklara variationerna i stödet inom medlemsländerna för de olika aspekterna av EU som ett politiskt system? Till vilken utsträckning kan nationella faktorer förklara variationerna i stödet mellan medlemsländerna för de olika aspekterna av EU som ett politiskt system? De former av politiskt stöd som denna avhandling empiriskt granskar är attityder riktade mot Europeisk integrations policy, EU som en politisk regim och det Europeiska politiska samhället.

Denna monografi består av tre huvuddelar. I den första delen redogör jag för bakgrunden till studien och diskuterar centrala begrepp. I den andra delen redogör jag för den empiriska designen samt presenterar resultaten från analyserna. I den summerande avslutningsdelen redogör jag för avhandlingens bidrag, sammanfattar resultaten från analyserna och diskuterar begränsningar samt rekommendationer för framtida forskning.

Det empiriska angreppssättet i avhandlingen är en kombination av olika metoder. För att besvara avhandlingens inledande frågeställning används deskriptiv statistisk för olika typer av EU attityder under tidsperioden 2004–2017. De två följande frågeställningarna, som har en mer förklarande ambition, besvaras med hjälp av att tillämpa flernivåregression för att etablera sambandet mellan EU attityder och nationella faktorer, under samma tidsperiod. Jag drar nytta av den statistiska metoden för att utreda det kausala sambandet mellan sammanlagt åtta olika nationella faktorer, indelade i grupper av ekonomiska, kulturella, demografiska och EU-relaterade faktorer, och variationer i politiskt stöd för EU både mellan och inom EU:s medlemsländer över tid.

Resultaten visar att stödet för delar relaterade till Europeisk integration policy och EU som en politisk regim generellt kan anses ha sjunkit inom EU-området under denna tidsperiod. Däremot har stödet för det Europeiska politiska samhället hållits stabilt, och även till viss grad stigit inom denna tidsperiod. Variationerna i politiskt stöd inom medlemsländerna kan i stor grad förklaras av den ekonomiska utvecklingen inom medlemsländerna, medans skillnaderna mellan medlemsländerna inte direkt kan kopplas till en viss typ av nationella

faktorer. Resultaten var däremot starkt varierande beroende på vilken typ av EU attityder som avses. Detta signalerar att det är direkt missvisande att empiriskt angripa EU som ett singulärt objekt utan att beakta de olika delar som tillsammans utgör EU, sett som ett överstatligt europeiskt politiskt system.

Vissa intressanta resultat kan särskilt lyftas fram. Till exempel finns det en stor skillnad mellan Euro och icke-Euro länder när det kommer till stöd för en gemensam Europeisk valuta. Inom de länder som verkligen använder Euron har stödet ökat över tid, medans det har sjunkit inom icke-Euro länder och dessa skillnader har dessutom blivit märkbart större efter Eurokrisen (2010–2012). Därtill inverkar en högre arbetslöshetsnivå och statsskuld negativt på stödet för Europaparlamentet, de demokratiska processerna inom EU samt på EU medlemskapet inom EU-området, över tid. Därmed tenderar EU attityder att vara starkt kopplade till den ekonomiska utvecklingen inom EU:s medlemsländer.

Resultaten visar att allmänheten inom EU-området använder sig av nationella faktorer som ett riktmärke när de formar attityder gentemot EU. Dock varierar riktmärket beroende på vilken aspekt av EU som utvärderas. Resultaten visar också att skillnaderna mellan medlemsländer är mer komplicerade att förklara än inom EU-området består av 28 separata medlemsländer, och det verkar inte finnas någon konkret nationell faktor som förmår förklara varför allmänheten inom vissa typer av EU-länder är mer kritiska till EU än andra.

Det har inom EU litteraturen funnits ett behov av denna typ av övergripande forskningsansats kring hur olika typer av EU attityder hänger ihop med nationella faktorer. Avhandlingens huvudsakliga bidrag är därmed att den har bidragit med en bred analys av ett begrepp som ofta använts som någonting singulärt, *åsikt om EU*. Samtidigt ger avhandlingens empiriska bidrag grund för ytterligare forskning inom området.

Thomas Karv

Public Attitudes Towards the European Union

A study explaining the variations in public support towards the European Union within and between countries over time

The objective of this thesis is to gain knowledge about public attitudes towards the European Union (EU) across the EU area. Since the Brexit referendum in 2016 it has been proven that the general public within a member state can choose to turn their backs on the EU when given the opportunity. Hence, the political relevance of EU attitudes for the future of the EU has never been more important.

This thesis seeks to identify the underlying factors that shape public attitudes towards the EU, both within and between the 28 member states over time. This in order to gain knowledge about why public attitudes towards the EU varies at the country-level within the EU area. This thesis sheds light on how national-level factors are used as information shortcuts when the European public are asked to evaluate different aspects of the EU.