

European Integration in Times of Crises

A Comparative Case Study of the Covid-19 Pandemic
and the 2015 Refugee Crisis

DEVELOPMENT & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
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Abstract

This thesis explores why the Covid-19 Pandemic and the 2015 Refugee Crisis resulted in a different outcome for European integration in burden-sharing policies. It follows a predetermined hypothesis that the presence or absence of exclusive identities among the population, within and among the EU member states, will supposedly influence the decision-making process of state actors regarding European integration. This is in accordance with the assumptions of the post-functionalist theory. The research question that motivates this thesis is: *Why was the outcome of European integration in burden-sharing policies different during the Covid-19 Pandemic compared to the 2015 Refugee Crisis?*

To answer this question, this thesis will analyze four identified variables that the existing research argues are influential in shaping European integration. These are dilutive boundary regime, contractual incompleteness, asymmetrical bargaining power, and exclusive identities. As such, this thesis takes the form of a comparative case study, with a most-similar case system design, as the empirical analysis is structured around the examination of these variables across the Covid-19 Pandemic and the 2015 Refugee Crisis. In the literature review, these four variables are identified and in the theoretical framework and application, the contested areas between the European integration theories of post-functionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism are uncovered to be analyzed in the empirical analysis.

By following the most-similar case system design throughout the analysis, it will be uncovered which of the four variables were present and absent in each case to identify the causal variable that resulted in the different outcomes of European integration across the Covid-19 Pandemic and the 2015 Refugee Crisis. Here it is found that when there is salient tension between the public and the EU, exclusive identities can be mobilized by Eurosceptic political entrepreneurs against European integration in burden-sharing policies. This is given that burden-sharing requires solidarity between member states which makes an exclusive identity among EU citizens obstructive to overcoming asymmetrical bargaining power, finding common ground on incomplete contracts, and cooperating to mitigate the exogenous shock of a crisis, which exposes the EU's institutional frameworks due to dilutive boundary regimes. It is observed that exclusive identities were present and mobilized during the 2015 Refugee Crisis but not during the Covid-19 Pandemic, despite all the other variables being similar. It is, therefore, concluded that the absence or presence of exclusive identities, was the causal

variable that resulted in a different outcome of European integration during the Covid-19 Pandemic compared to the 2015 Refugee Crisis.

Keywords: European integration, Post-functionalism, Liberal intergovernmentalism, EU crises, Exclusive identities, Contractual incompleteness, Asymmetrical bargaining power, Dilutive boundary regime.

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1. Introduction

European integration in the twenty-first century has changed vastly from its original format. The process of integrating sovereign European states initially began as a long-term peace project in the aftermath of the Second World War. Economic collapse and a growing threat of Soviet expansion put the three strongest European powers Germany, France, and the United Kingdom in a position, where collaboration seemed more feasible than war. Especially France and Germany, at the time, had a recent history riddled with crises and conflict.¹ After the First World War, the approach to achieve peace was to constrain the power of Germany as much as possible by isolating them from the rest of Europe and putting limitations on their economic and military power. However, when this approach proved disastrous in preventing a second world war, it was increasingly believed that long-term peace had better prospects of being accomplished by facilitating mutual interdependence and integration between European nations, rather than by isolation, which had proved to be a breeding ground for exclusive nationalistic identities in Nazi Germany.²

Consequently, the great powers of Europe embarked on a new path of European integration to prevent future conflicts between democratic European states. Following liberal principles, the foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community was the first step toward deepening European integration, by increasing economic interdependence between its members.³ Besides making war between its members less economically feasible than collaboration, its members also delegated national authority to a supranational entity that would control the market for coal and steel, which were vital war materials, thus making war between participants impractical, if not impossible.⁴ The belief was, that the establishment of a transnational European organization with supranational capacities, that facilitated mutual economic benefits and provided rules for its member states, would reduce the competitive nature of member states and help overcome the conflictual nature of an anarchic world system, in which independent political units exist in the absence of a central authority.⁵

While the European Coal and Steel Community removed the internal economic boundaries between member states, a new Customs Union acted as protection from exogenous economic

¹ Carmichael, Callum Petrie. 2013. "Liberal Theory and the European Union". In *Mapping Politics*, vol. 5: 16-20, p. 17

² Ibid.

³ De Buck, Denise, and Madeleine O. Hosli. 2020. "Traditional Theories of International Relations". In *The Changing Global Order: Challenges and Prospects*. ED Madeleine O. Hosli, and Joren Selleslaghs. Cham: Springer: 3-21, p. 15

⁴ Carmichael, 2013, p. 17

⁵ De Buck, and Hosli, 2020, p. 14

pressures by establishing a common external economic border, and the Common Agricultural Policy shielded farmers from global competition.⁶ Still, the European Coal and Steel Community had a small policy portfolio that only touched upon a few economic policies and exclusively prioritized market integration. In the years that followed, integration deepened, albeit slowly, and there was a reluctance to expand the scope of this new European community by accepting other European states into the organization.⁷ Thus, European integration remained somewhat limited with the period between the 1960s and the 1980s being described by the German economist Herbert Giersch (1985), as a time of ‘Eurosclerosis’ owing to the stagnation of the European economy and the limited integration.⁸ The project of European integration experienced a long period of stagnation, however, a second wave of globalization at the end of the Cold War and a third wave of democratization in Southern and Eastern Europe created new opportunities. These opportunities regarded opening more borders internally between existing members and opening the external borders to the global community as the pressure for deeper integration and enlargement of the European community increased.⁹

The founding of the European Union with the signing of the Maastricht Accord in 1992 is argued by many to be a turning point, as it opened the decision-making on European integration to party competition, elections and referendums, thus exposing the decision-making to public scrutiny.¹⁰ As such, it is argued to be one of the “[...] critical junctures in the European integration process [...]”.¹¹ Consequently, the project of European integration was reconfigured and deepened, as the EU entered a phase where its policy scope and supranational competencies were increased, the decision-making process was publicized, and a road was paved for the massive expansions of membership in the twenty-first century.¹² Member states delegated more authority to the organization through a process of intensified internal debordering with the establishment of the Single Market Program, the Monetary Union, and the Schengen Agreement. At the same time, the EU’s membership of the World

⁶ Schimmelfennig, Frank. 2021-B. “Rebordering Europe: external boundaries and integration in the European Union”. In *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 28, no. 3: 311-330, p. 318

⁷ Ibid. p. 319

⁸ Giersch, Herbert. 1985, “Eurosclerosis”. In *Kieler Diskussionsbeiträge*, no. 112. Econstor

⁹ Schimmelfennig, 2021-B, p. 319

¹⁰ Kuhn, Theresa. 2019. “Grand theories of European integration revisited: does identity politics shape the course of European integration?”. In *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 26, no. 8: 1213-1230, p. 1220

¹¹ Carrieri, Luca. 2012. *The Impact of European Integration on West European Politics: Committed Pro-Europeans Strike Back*. Palgrave Macmillan: Springer Nature Switzerland, p. 2

¹² Schimmelfennig, 2021-B, p. 319

Trade Organization in 1995 deepened global trade liberalization, leading to even more external debordering of the economic boundaries.¹³

The EU has since moved beyond market integration and expanded its policy portfolio to cover issues such as border management, foreign affairs, and security giving it supranational power in areas that have historically been seen as sovereign political matters to be exerted at the domestic level by nation-states. A development that has seen the EU increasingly resembling a domestic political system with competencies that traditionally define the essence of a state.¹⁴ As the EU's policy areas have transitioned from technocratic and isolated decision-making into policy areas of core state powers that are closely linked to questions of solidarity and national sovereignty, it has become increasingly exposed to the arena of mass politics.¹⁵ Combined with debordering policies that have increased the participation of European citizens in transnational interactions and exposed them to European socialization in an unequal and socially stratified manner, the public opinion of EU citizens has become even more relevant for European integration, and for the prospects of supporting burden-sharing agreements and showing solidarity with other member states.¹⁶ This holds especially true in times of crises where the institutional frameworks of the EU are put under pressure. During such events, citizens might oppose solidarity with other EU member states due to national security concerns and for reasons of self-interest.¹⁷

The Covid-19 Pandemic and the Refugee Crisis in 2015 are two recent crises of the EU that pressured its institutional frameworks and sparked discussions about deeper European integration on burden-sharing policies to mitigate the consequences of crises. In both cases, an exogenous threat resulted in unilateral decisions to close internal borders and thus the temporary disintegration of the Schengen Agreement. Furthermore, security concerns at the national level initially saw member states engage in self-helping behavior and disregard the well-being of other member states in a show of non-solidarity. However, despite similarities, the outcomes for European integration in burden-sharing policies were entirely different.

During the Refugee Crisis, the EU Commission proposed deeper integration with a reform of EU's asylum policies to redistribute asylum applications fairly between member states based on a

¹³ Ibid, pp. 319-320

¹⁴ Kuhn, 2019, p. 1214

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Kuhn, 2019, p. 1214. & Verhaegen, Soetkin. 2017. "What to expect from European identity? Explaining support for solidarity in times of crisis". In *Comparative European Politics*, vol. 16: 871-904, p. 873

¹⁷ Verhaegen, 2018, p. 873

quota system. A proposal that would have shown European solidarity with front-line and destination countries, primarily Greece, Italy, Germany, and Sweden for whom the pressure of refugees was very high in comparison to the EU average. The proposal for a temporary relocation and resettlement mechanism with a two-year run-time was met with fierce opposition from the Visegrád group and when a proposal for a permanent mechanism was pushed through by Germany, Sweden, and Austria a broad coalition of member states, including the Baltic countries, the Visegrád Group, France, and Spain vetoed the initiative.¹⁸ Instead of sharing the burden, multiple member states chose to unilaterally close their national borders and resist integration and burden-sharing commitments, leading to the failure of fulfilling the targets of the temporary mechanism.¹⁹

Similarly, when a new and highly infectious pathogenic virus, originating from the Wuhan province in China, spread to the EU in the first quarter of 2020 member states began stockpiling emergency equipment and unilaterally closing their internal borders to avoid contagion.²⁰ When Italy at the onset of the pandemic was running out of personal protective equipment for its emergency personnel and issued an emergency request to the EU for help, not a single member state responded in yet another show of non-solidarity.²¹ However, when the EU Commission proposed the establishment of a supranational economic recovery instrument, which would expand European integration in fiscal and health policies by sharing the economic costs of the pandemic and financing public health initiatives, member states were able to successfully reach an agreement. In late June 2020, the Next Generation EU recovery fund was successfully negotiated with all 27 member states unanimously agreeing to expand European integration and establish mutual debt to provide grants, loans, and macroeconomic stabilization for the first time in the history of the EU, in a massive show of fiscal solidarity.²²

The main puzzle of this thesis is to understand why the support for European integration and burden-sharing was different during the Covid-19 Pandemic in comparison to the 2015 Refugee

¹⁸ Bosilca, Ruxandra-Laura. 2021. "The Refugee Crisis and the EU Border Security Policies". In *The Palgrave Handbook of EU Crises*. ED Marianne Riddervold, Jarle Trondal, and Akasemi Newsome: 469-487, pp. 475-476

¹⁹ Schimmelfennig, Frank. 2021-A. "Liberal Intergovernmentalism". In *The Palgrave Handbook of EU Crises*. ED Marianne Riddervold, Jarle Trondal, and Akasemi Newsome: 61-78, p. 70

²⁰ Genschel, Philipp, and Markus Jachtenfuchs. 2021. "Postfunctionalism reversed: solidarity and rebordering during the COVID-19 pandemic". In *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 28, no. 3: 350-369, p. 354

²¹ Greer, Scott L. Anniek de Ruijter, and Eleanor Brooks. 2021. "The COVID-19 Pandemic: Failing Forward in Public Health". In *The Palgrave Handbook of EU Crises*. ED Marianne Riddervold, Jarle Trondal, and Akasemi Newsome: 747-764, p. 758, & Genschel, and Jachtenfuchs, 2021, p. 354

²² Genschel, and Jachtenfuchs, 2021, pp. 364-365

Crisis. It is with the onset of this puzzle that this thesis is motivated to answer the following research question:

Why was the outcome of European integration in burden-sharing policies different during the Covid-19 Pandemic compared to the 2015 Refugee Crisis?

When finding an answer to this research question, both cases will be examined to uncover similar and different variables between them, with the objective to identify and isolate the causal variable responsible for the different outcomes for European integration. This will be done in accordance with the analytical tools of European integration theory, specifically post-functionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism.

2. Literature review

As the EU is facing multiple crises in the twenty-first century, research and academic literature on the subject are expanding. Researchers are increasingly seeking to understand the reasons behind these crises and analyze the implications they have for the development of European integration. In this literature review, the existing research is consulted to provide an understanding of European integration and explain contractual incompleteness, dilutive boundary regimes, asymmetrical bargaining power, and exclusive identities, which are argued to influence the outcome of European integration during a crisis. This chapter will thus review some of the existing literature and research so that this thesis may produce new knowledge on the foundation of past knowledge.

2.1. European crisis and its implications for integration

As mentioned in the introduction, the development and expansion of European integration have accelerated since the founding of the EU with the signing of the Maastricht Accord in 1992. The supranational governance of the EU has since expanded into policy areas of core state powers where questions of solidarity and national sovereignty hold increasing importance. This process of integrating sovereign states under supranational governance has motivated scholars of international relations to examine the processes by which integration is expanded and reduced at the European level.

According to Edward Best, and Thomas Christiansen (2014), the process of European integration challenges the traditional centrality of states as they become interlinked through integration in policy areas where their interests overlap. It is a process that begins when states are increasingly interacting with each other, for example through trade, and often begins with the removal of obstacles to this interaction, as initially seen with market integration after the Second World War.²³ True regional integration first ensues when states go beyond the removal of obstacles and establish a: “[...] regional space subject to some distinct common rule.”²⁴ This aforementioned ‘common rule’ is what sets European integration apart from traditional intergovernmental cooperation, since it preconditions the

²³ Best, Edward, and Thomas Christiansen. 2014. “Regionalism in international affairs”. In *The Globalization of World Politics: An introduction to international relations*. ED John Baylis, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens: 401-416, p. 402

²⁴ Ibid.

presence of a supranational decision-making body, whereas intergovernmental cooperation simply describes the making of multilateral and bilateral agreements between states.²⁵

According to Tanja A. Börzel (2013), European integration and regional integration generally, imply some degree of geographical proximity and contiguity, as well as mutual interdependence and, to a certain extent, cultural homogeneity. She, therefore, sums up regional integration as: “[...] processes and structures of region building in terms of closer economic, political, security and sociocultural linkages between states and societies that are geographically proximate.”²⁶ Arguably, the EU is currently the world’s clearest example of regional integration as it exerts supranational governance in a multitude of policy areas and is exclusively made up of member states geographically based in Europe who have willingly delegated authority to the EU’s institutional frameworks.²⁷ Authority is here understood as legitimate power, which is argued to be different from ordinary power as member states acknowledge the legitimacy of the EU and feel obliged to follow its commands.²⁸ Had the EU not been perceived as a legitimate organization, countries would, arguably, have refused to delegate authority to its supranational decision-making bodies of their own free will.

A crisis indicates the presence of both threat, urgency, and uncertainty according to the definition of Todd R. Laporte (2007), who conceptualizes crises as situations in which policymakers experience a; “[...] serious threat to the basic structure or fundamental values and norms of a system, which under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances necessitates making vital decisions.”²⁹ The exogenous shock produced by a crisis can put severe strains on the institutional frameworks of the EU. Such shock can challenge the EU’s legitimacy to exert supranational governance by exposing major deficiencies of integration and facilitating intergovernmental political conflict on sharing the burdens of that shock.³⁰ However, a crisis can also create pressure for more integration, if the external shock creates a window of opportunity that activates problems, initiatives, solutions, and participants

²⁵ Dosenrode, Søren. 2012. “Crisis and Regional Integration: A Federalist and Neo-Functionalist Perspective”. In *Regions and Crises: New Challenges for Contemporary Regionalism*. ED Lorenzo Fioramonti: 13-30, p. 17

²⁶ Börzel, Tanja A. 2013. “Comparative Regionalism: European Integration and Beyond”. In *Handbook of International Relations*: 503-523, p. 503

²⁷ Moravcsik, Andre. 2005. “The European constitutional compromise and the neofunctionalist legacy”. In *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 12, no. 2: 349-386, pp. 349-350

²⁸ Hooghe, Liesbet, Tobias Lenz, and Gary Marks. 2019. *A Theory of international organization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 26

²⁹ Laporte, Todd R. 2007. “Book Review – Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership Under Pressure by Arjen Boin, Paul ‘T Hart, Eric Stern, and Bengt Sundelius”. In *International Public Management Journal*, vol. 10, no. 1: 111-117, p. 111

³⁰ Schimmelfennig, Frank. 2018. “European integration (theory) in times of crisis. A comparison of the euro and Schengen crises”. In *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 25, no. 7: 969-989, p. 970

and forces member states to make new decisions in otherwise gridlocked policy areas, or common solutions are unanimously perceived to be beneficial in solving the negative effects of a crisis.³¹

Given that crises are believed to have become a major driver for both the expansion and reduction of European integration, research has been directed towards understanding those circumstances surrounding crises that constitute incremental changes to the project of European integration. It is even argued by Marianne Riddervold and Akasemi Newsome (2021), that understanding crises has become necessary for understanding European integration: “The numerous crises confronting the EU today combine to form the perfect storm of conditions that make this particular historical moment in European integration so crucial to understand, theoretically, conceptually, and empirically.”³²

According to Frank Schimmelfennig (2018), these numerous crises have changed the perception of European integration theory in the research. In the past, theoretical debates on European integration were only centered around the conditions and mechanisms that facilitated more integration. The idea that the integration process could stagnate or even disintegrate was rarely if ever, considered in European integration theory. However, after multiple crises of European integration, the research has shifted to focus on understanding the development of concepts such as Euro-skepticism, stagnation, differentiated integration, and even disintegration.³³ In a recent publication, Riddervold and Newsome together with Jarle Trondal (2021) have thus identified three outcomes for European integration in times of crisis.

These three outcomes are breaking down, muddling through, and heading forward. Breaking down concerns the EU breaking apart in one or more policy areas. Muddling through regards the EU stabilizing one or more policy areas but failing to reach agreements over the lowest common denominator, thus maintaining the status quo. Heading forward considers member states agreeing to delegate new capacities to the EU and expand integration to address common challenges. A crisis can result in more than one outcome happening at the same time in different policy areas.³⁴ For example, Kaija Schilde and Sara Wallace Goodman (2021) argue that the negotiations of the EU’s asylum policy during the 2015 Refugee Crisis were muddling through with failed negotiations resulting in a

³¹ Riddervold, Marianne, Jarle Trondal, and Akasemi Newsome. 2021. “European Union Crisis: An Introduction”. In *The Palgrave Handbook of EU Crises*. ED Marianne Riddervold, Jarle Trondal, and Akasemi Newsome: 3-47, pp. 11-12

³² Riddervold, Marianne, and Akasemi Newsome. 2018. “Transatlantic relations in times of uncertainty: crises and EU-US relations”. In *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 40, no. 5: 505-521, p. 507

³³ Schimmelfennig, 2018, p. 1

³⁴ Riddervold, Trondal, and Newsome, 2021, pp. 9-12

status quo of the dysfunctional Dublin system, while integration was heading forward in the policy area of border security by increasing the capacities of Frontex.³⁵ Crises can thus cause a variety of different outcomes for European integration and even multiple outcomes in different policy areas during the same crisis.

While it is difficult, perhaps even impossible, to make broad generalizations based on the analysis of only two crises, this thesis argues that the presence or absence of exclusive identities among the public is a necessary precondition for the outcome of European integration in core state powers.³⁶ According to Philip Genschel and Markus Jachtenfuchs (2018), the mass public tends to be highly attentive to the integration of core state powers as it touches upon either their distributive interests or their sense of identity, which is the case with fiscal and asylum policies.³⁷ Furthermore, integration in these areas is argued to challenge our understanding of national sovereignty given that they are usually perceived to result in zero-sum outcomes.³⁸ According to Viktoria Kaina (2013), the presence of a strong European identity and public support for the EU is then an essential precondition for people's willingness to show solidarity with other member states.³⁹ Contrastingly, if identities are exclusive, it is expected that integration in burden-sharing agreements will be unsuccessful.

2.2. Dilutive boundary regime, unequal bargaining power, and contractual incompleteness

Though this thesis argues that the absence or presence of exclusive identities is a variable that changes the outcome of European integration in burden-sharing policies, other variables are also highlighted in the research. The three other variables are dilutive boundary regime, unequal bargaining power, and contractual incompleteness and these are also important to consider and will be elaborated on in this subchapter. Exclusive identities will be explained in the section regarding the theoretical

³⁵ Schilde, Kaija, and Sara Wallace Goodman. 2021. "The EU's Response to the Migration Crisis: Institutional Turbulence and Policy Disjuncture". In *The Palgrave Handbook of EU Crises*. ED Marianne Riddervold, Jarle Trondal, and Akasemi Newsome: 449-468, pp. 451-452, and p. 455

³⁶ Hooghe, Liesbet, and Gary Marks. 2009. "A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus". In *British journal of political science*, vol. 29, no.1: 1-23, pp. 21-22

³⁷ Genschel, Philipp, and Markus Jachtenfuchs. 2018. "From Market Integration to Core State Powers: The Eurozone Crisis, the Refugee Crisis and Integration Theory". In *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 56, no. 1: 178-196, p. 182

³⁸ Kuhn, Theresa, and Francesco Nicoli. 2020. "Collective Identities and the Integration of Core State Power: Introduction to the Special Issue". In *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 58, issue 1: 3-20, p. 4

³⁹ Kaina, Viktoria, and Ireneusz Pawel Karolewski. 2013. "EU Governance and European identity". In *Living Reviews in European Governance*, vol. 8, no. 1: 5-59, p. 5

framework. Moreover, it is recognized that the three alternative variables are not insignificant in influencing the outcome of European integration. Quite the opposite, this thesis believes that they can have a substantial influence on the mobilization and construction of exclusive identities among EU citizens, depending on the specific circumstances of a crisis. As such, many of these alternative variables are both connected to each other and identity, as well as being mutually reinforcing, though they are not believed to be either sufficient or necessary by themselves to result in failed negotiations on European integration.

The dilutive boundary regime is linked to the EU's configuration of its internal and external borders. Schimmelfennig (2021-B) argues that the external boundaries of the EU and how these boundaries interact with the internal boundaries of member states can be implemented systematically to explain crises and their implications for European integration. In this context, Schimmelfennig (2021-B) defines boundaries as rules that regulate the movement of products and people between territorial organizations both regarding the entries and exits.⁴⁰ There are two types of boundaries where one is internal borders, which are those between member states, and the other is external borders, which are those boundaries that member states share with non-member states along the periphery of the EU. The configuration of these boundaries depends on the openness, which Schimmelfennig (2021-B) describes as debordering and the closeness which he describes as rebordering.⁴¹

If both the internal and external boundaries are debordered, the result is a dilutive boundary regime that expands the policy scope, supranational competencies, and membership of the EU while simultaneously making it vulnerable to exogenous pressures and crises by opening the EU to the global environment: "The recent crises of the EU are closely linked, and present a major challenge to this dilutive boundary regime."⁴² Dilutive boundary regimes are assumed to weaken the traditional competencies of the nation-state by limiting the sovereign capacities of states to control their own internal borders while failing to compensate for this development by strengthening the supranational capacities at the external borders surrounding the EU.⁴³ In this case, the Schengen Agreement is used as an example of internal debordering, which left the implementation and enforcement of its rules at

⁴⁰ Schimmelfennig, 2021-B, p. 315

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 316

⁴² Ibid. p. 320

⁴³ Ibid. p. 312

the external border largely in the hands of national authorities. As such, it created a combination of open internal borders and brittle external borders.⁴⁴

This makes the EU vulnerable to crises and exogenous shocks as there are few regulative capacities at the external borders, which can potentially cause a populist backlash, democratic backsliding, and hostility towards globalization.⁴⁵ In this event, a consequence can be European disintegration as the member states resurrect barriers between themselves due to security concerns and might declare their exit from common policies of the EU altogether.⁴⁶ It is a development that Genschel and Jachtenfuchs (2021) argue can happen when security concerns at the national level, replace efficiency at the international level as the top functional concern of member states.⁴⁷

The idea that European integration depends on the balance of bargaining power between member states follows the theoretical conceptualization of liberal intergovernmentalism.⁴⁸ In this theory, the scope and pace of integration are determined by intergovernmental bargaining processes among the national governments of each member state who each pursue their own domestically determined economic interests.⁴⁹ In a crisis situation, the exogenous shock is expected to potentially shape and change the national preferences of the member states in different ways, since a crisis will usually affect member states unequally. This can be due to multiple factors, such as the geographical location of a member state and/or its current financial situation.⁵⁰

According to liberal intergovernmentalism, this creates asymmetrical bargaining power, since states who are most negatively affected by a crisis should be more dependent on negotiating burden-sharing agreements under the supranational governance of the EU, than states who are least affected and might perceive themselves to gain little or even lose gains from further integration.⁵¹ According to Natasha Zaun (2017), asymmetrical bargaining power between member states have a tendency to result in cooperate-defect scenarios meaning that states are unable to successfully negotiate agreements that expand integration and reinforce burden-sharing during a crisis since states with a

⁴⁴ Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, Mette. 2020. "Re-bordering Europe? Collective action barriers to 'Fortress Europe'". In *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 28, no. 3: 447-467, p. 448

⁴⁵ Schimmelfennig, 2021-B, p. 318

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 313

⁴⁷ Genschel, and Jachtenfuchs, 2021, p. 351

⁴⁸ Schimmelfennig, Frank. 2015. "Liberal intergovernmentalism and the euro area crisis". In *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 22, no. 2: 177-195, p. 178

⁴⁹ Jones, Erik, Daniel R. Kelemen, and Sophie Meunier. 2016. "Failing Forward? The Euro Crisis and the Incomplete Nature of European Integration". In *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 49, no. 7: 1010-1034, p. 1014

⁵⁰ Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2020, pp. 462-463

⁵¹ Schimmelfennig, 2015, p. 184

powerful bargaining position refuse to accept the terms proposed by states with a weak bargaining position.⁵²

As such, states that are less immediately and heavily threatened by a crisis, and/or have the key to mitigating the situation will be in a: “[...] better position to realize their preferences on the terms of integration [...]”.⁵³ Negotiations will thus follow a pattern where strategically motivated state actors base their decisions on rational economic preferences and strive to maximize these predetermined and fixed preferences in intergovernmental bargaining processes.⁵⁴ Consequently, the negotiating states will be unable to reach an agreement over the lowest common denominator, which might either result in the complete failure to implement the proposed agreement or in highly incomplete contracts.⁵⁵

While incomplete contracts are usually non-comprehensive and insufficient in mitigating a crisis, they are argued to be necessary for facilitating more European integration. According to Anne Elizabeth Stie (2021), a crisis creates exogenous shocks which can increase European integration by highlighting policy failures from incomplete contracts.⁵⁶ In this case, incomplete contracts are understood as contracts that commit states to a general purpose of governance that is flexible in responding to unforeseen events in comparison to complete contracts that define exactly what should be done under all circumstances.⁵⁷ The research sees contractual incompleteness as a defining feature of EU’s agreements and institutional frameworks which implies that something is either missing from the contract, is open to multiple interpretations, or is unknown at the time of signing. The reason why much of EU law is written in incomplete contracts is that complete contracts would be impossibly long and complicated if they were to include specific guidance for member states in every conceivable situation. Instead, the details describing the appropriate behavior of member states are left to be filled out in the future if necessary.⁵⁸ Therefore, there is a tradeoff between completeness and incompleteness where the latter is more flexible but also more ambiguous than the former.⁵⁹

⁵² Zaun, Natascha. 2017. *States as Gatekeepers in EU Asylum Politics: Explaining the Non-Adoption of a Refugee Quota System*. Journal of Common Market Studies. Date of acceptance 17 July 2017, p. 7

⁵³ Schimmelfennig, 2015, p. 185

⁵⁴ Riddervold, Trondal, and Newsome, 2021, p. 12

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 10

⁵⁶ Stie, Anne Elizabeth. 2021. “Crises and the EU’s Response: Increasing the Democratic Deficit”. In *The Palgrave Handbook of EU Crises*. ED Marianne Riddervold, Jarle Trondal, and Akasemi Newsome: 725-738, p. 725

⁵⁷ Hooghe, Lenz, and Marks, p. 14

⁵⁸ Scipioni, Marco. 2018-B. “Failing forward in EU migration policy? EU integration after the 2015 asylum and migration crisis”. In *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 25, no. 9: 1357-1375, pp. 1358-1359

⁵⁹ Hooghe, Lenz, and Marks, 2019, p. 60

Incomplete contracts can be understood from both a post-functionalistic and liberal intergovernmentalistic perspective. In post-functionalism, identity is considered important when negotiating incomplete contracts. If a contract is highly incomplete and the involved parties have contesting identities, then the ambiguity of the contract will increase the potential for opposing interpretations on how to behave in relation to that contract.⁶⁰ Whereas liberal intergovernmentalism sees incomplete contracts as a product of the lowest common denominator bargains as previously mentioned.⁶¹ The EU thus make incomplete reforms rather than comprehensive ones because more powerful member states perceive comprehensive reforms as counterproductive to their economic self-interests and block them.⁶² Liberal intergovernmentalism further argues that incomplete contracts consistently move in a direction of deeper integration and not disintegration or non-decision. Instead, they result in ‘failing forward’ scenarios where the lowest common denominator bargaining processes produce incomplete contracts on European integration, which are vulnerable to crises. When a crisis exposes this weakness, unequal bargaining processes to mitigate the consequences of that crisis will yet again produce more incomplete contracts.⁶³

Based on the existing research this thesis has therefore identified four variables that are believed to have implications for the outcome of European integration. ‘Dilutive boundary regime’ which is based on the configuration of the EU’s borders, ‘asymmetrical bargaining power’ which is based on the degree to which an exogenous shock has different consequences for the individual member states, ‘contractual incompleteness’ which is based on the comprehensiveness of EU’s contractual agreements that make up EU’s institutional frameworks which are impacted by the crisis, and ‘exclusive identities’ which is based on the salience of tension between EU citizens and European integration followed by the mobilization of these tensions by Eurosceptic political entrepreneurs.

These are the variables that will be examined and compared to each other in the empirical analysis of the Covid-19 Pandemic and the 2015 Refugee Crisis, to determine why the outcome of European integration varied across these two cases.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 61

⁶¹ Jones, Kelemen, and Meunier, 2016, p. 1010

⁶² Ibid. p. 1014

⁶³ Schimmelfennig, 2021-A, p. 76

3. Theoretical framework and application

This chapter introduces the main features of the post-functionalistic and liberal intergovernmentalistic theories of European integration. While both theories constitute the theoretical frameworks that are applied to examine the abovementioned variables, in the analysis of the Covid-19 Pandemic and the 2015 Refugee Crisis, post-functionalism is the theory that shapes this thesis's overall perception of European integration.

3.1. Post-functionalism

The theory of post-functionalism is the most recent grand theory of European integration and was proposed by Liesbeth Hooghe and Gary Marks (2009). The usage of post-functionalism carries certain implications for the author's and this thesis's understanding of European integration. In accordance with post-functionalism, this thesis assumes that the identity of EU citizens is a necessary precondition that can generate support or opposition to supranational governance and result in the expansion or reduction of European integration.⁶⁴ This is due to governance being viewed as serving two different purposes. Governance provides collective benefits by coordinating human activity which allows for the provision of more public goods, characterized as the functional scale of governance. Increasing the functional scale of governance is done by allowing more participants to become a member of the EU or delegating more national authority to the EU's supranational level which increases efficiency by allowing for more public goods to be distributed among its participants. However, governance is also an expression of the territorial scope of the community, or the community of governance, because citizens care about who has authority over them.⁶⁵

People's identity is linked to the territorial scope of community and people can have multiple identities at both the subnational, national, and international levels. As such, a person might have a subnational identity as a weightlifter which is connected to a local weightlifting community, a national identity linked to the country of origin, and then an international identity as an EU citizen. In this case study, the group a person identifies with is not important, what is important is whether the identity is inclusive or exclusive towards other groups.⁶⁶ The territorial scope of the community tends to be stronger at the smaller levels which creates a dilemma for the expansion of the functional

⁶⁴ Hooghe, and Marks, 2009, p. 2

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 2

⁶⁶ Ibid. pp. 12-13

scale of governance since the identity of the participants can become diluted as more participants are allowed in.⁶⁷ Furthermore, because the provision of public goods, by increasing the functional scale, comes at the price of national sovereignty, a conflict between identity and the functional scale of governance can emerge as some participants might begin to feel alienated from the community and perceive supranational governance as foreign interference.⁶⁸

This can result in the mobilization of exclusive identities that opposes the functional scale of EU governance given that it involves delegating national authority to the supranational level.⁶⁹ Consequently, European integration has a disruptive potential when functional scale clashes with exclusive identities, which can prevent European integration and even cause disintegration. A development that liberal intergovernmentalism has difficulty explaining.⁷⁰ It is therefore the belief of this thesis, that the development of European integration is dependent on the continued willingness of its citizens to support it, and since exclusive identities are argued to be predisposed to Euroscepticism, they are expected to be incompatible with European integration.⁷¹

In this context, it is argued that a crisis adds to the importance of considering the absence or presence of exclusive identities because exogenous shocks might heighten security concerns, result in self-helping behavior, and cast doubts on the stability of the institutional frameworks of the EU.⁷² A dilutive boundary regime can reinforce the negative effects of a crisis, since it often fails to protect the member states from the full impact of the exogenous shock, and may create more backlash against integration.⁷³ This can make the tension between expanding European integration and the identities of EU citizens salient. This salient tension can be mobilized by Eurosceptic political entrepreneurs to mobilize exclusive identities against European integration.⁷⁴ This is believed to diminish transnational solidarity and complicate the prospects of expanding European integration to find common solutions at the supranational level.⁷⁵

Hence, this thesis follows the argumentation of Hooghe and Marks (2009) that the desire to provide public goods by increasing functional scale is not the only factor for the outcome of European

⁶⁷ Genschel, and Jachtenfuchs, 2021, p. 350

⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 350

⁶⁹ Hooghe, and Marks, 2009, p.2

⁷⁰ Hooghe, Liesbet, and Gary Marks. 2019. "Grand theories of European integration in the twenty-first century". In *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 26, no. 8: 1113-1133, p. 1116

⁷¹ Hooghe, and Marks 2009, p. 13

⁷² Verhaegen, 2017, p. 873

⁷³ Schimmelfennig, 2021-B, p. 320

⁷⁴ Hooghe, and Marks, 2009, p. 13

⁷⁵ Genschel, and Jachtenfuchs, 2021, p. 352 & Hooghe, and Marks, 2019, p. 1116

integration. Rather, community and self-governance, which are expressed in public opinion and then mobilized by political parties, are the foundation of European integration.⁷⁶ As such, identity is argued to be the primary driver for integration because the EU has integrated into policy areas of core state powers and exposed European integration to the arena of mass politics. The decision-making process during a crisis is not believed to be limited to technocratic interest groups, in which public opinion has little influence, but has become exposed to public opinion and politicization.⁷⁷ This thesis disagrees with the liberal intergovernmentalistic assumption, that European integration is a: “[...] series of rational choices made by national leaders in response to international interdependence.”⁷⁸ Today, party leaders in the position of authority must consider the public opinion of their electorates leading to a ‘constraining dissensus’. Moreover, European integration is seen as a product of a shifting identity among the EU citizens, which is reflected in the public opinion towards the EU and European integration.⁷⁹

Though this thesis’s views on European integration align with those expressed by the post-functional theory, some analytical tools of liberal intergovernmentalism are implemented as well. Post-functionalism claims that identities, as well as economic interest, shape the preferences over European integration.⁸⁰ However, it offers few, if any, theoretical tools to understand economic interests. Liberal intergovernmentalism will then contribute to this area where post-functionalism is limited regarding its theoretical tools.

3.2. Liberal intergovernmentalism

Unlike post-functionalism, the liberal intergovernmentalist theory by Andrew Moravcsik (1993) does not consider public opinion or identity as important variables for driving European integration. Rather it assumes that national preferences are shaped by political interest groups. State behavior is then constrained by these national preferences by which the government defines a set of economic interests and then bargains with other governments to realize them.⁸¹ International agreements then require

⁷⁶ Hooghe, and Marks, 2009, p. 23

⁷⁷ Kuhn, 2019, p. 1214

⁷⁸ Schimmelfennig, 2015, p. 178

⁷⁹ Hooghe, and, Marks, 2009, p. 7

⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 13

⁸¹ Moravcsik, Andrew. 1993. “Preferences and Power in the European Community: A Liberal Intergovernmentalist Approach”. In *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 31, no. 4: 473-524, p. 481

that the preferences of the interest groups in different countries converge. If they diverge, international cooperation is usually expected to be unsuccessful.

While this thesis acknowledges the importance of national preferences and that divergence in these preferences can complicate the outcome of negotiations, it follows the assumption of post-functionalism that it is the public opinion of the citizens, and not political interest groups, that shape these preferences: “Mass politics trumps interest group politics when both come into play. Interest groups are most effective when they have the field to themselves.”⁸² Liberal intergovernmentalism is useful in those cases of European integration where the issue is not politicized and therefore is not exposed to mass politics. However, as European integration has become salient among the public, as it has moved from market integration and into core state power, this thesis argues that liberal intergovernmentalism cannot adequately explain the outcome of European integration in those cases where issues are politicized.⁸³

However, the liberal intergovernmentalist theory of intergovernmental bargaining is useful for this thesis in the analysis of asymmetrical bargaining power. This is because it is expected that states affected by a crisis the hardest, will require the most support from other member states. Consequently, these states are set to gain more from integration, than those states who are least affected by the crisis. The states that benefit most from European integration are then expected to be in a weaker bargaining position compared to those states that benefit the least which can thus cause asymmetrical bargaining power between them.⁸⁴

Though this thesis does not believe that rational economic interests are the chief driver for integration, it is argued that exclusive identities are easier mobilized against integration in those countries that stand to gain the least from integration, as Eurosceptic political entrepreneurs can point to this problem in their narratives. Regarding contractual incompleteness, these are relevant to consider in this context as well, regardless of whether one follows the post-functionalist or liberal intergovernmentalist framework. Both asymmetrical bargaining power and exclusive identities are argued to cause implications for incomplete contracts, potentially resulting in the failure to make new more comprehensive contracts. This is either because governments are unable to find agreements on

⁸² Hooghe, and Marks, 2009, p. 18

⁸³ Ibid. p. 19

⁸⁴ Schimmelfennig, 2018, p. 973

the contract over the lowest common denominator, or because conflicting identities cause the involved parties to disagree on how to achieve the objective of an incomplete contract.⁸⁵

However, identity is argued to be the most important variable given that asymmetric bargaining power becomes irrelevant if EU citizens perceive themselves as part of an inclusive European community. This follows the argument of Gerhard Reese and Oliver Lauenstein (2014): “When individuals identify with a relevant group, they perceive themselves as part of a larger social unit. This redefinition of the self as a group member result in behavior that serves the group’s interest and maintains the group’s welfare.”⁸⁶ Therefore, citizens who are more supportive of European integration and the EU, are expected to be more likely to accept costly decisions and show solidarity with other member states.⁸⁷ Following this argument, symmetric bargaining power is not believed to be a guarantee for integration either. Not if a majority of the public has exclusive identities and therefore, opposes all forms of sovereignty transfer and supranational governance.

Consequently, post-functionalism will be used to examine the salience of tensions between the identity of EU citizens and the development of European integration in burden-sharing policies and to determine if this tension was mobilized by Eurosceptic political entrepreneurs. Liberal intergovernmentalism, on the other hand, will be employed to examine if the two crises had a different impact on EU member states and thus created asymmetrical bargaining power between them, complicating negotiations. The use of post-functionalism and liberal governmentalism has implications for the choice and use of data. Post-functionalism requires an analysis of public opinion among EU citizens regarding solidarity in asylum policies and fiscal policies during the 2015 Refugee Crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic, to determine if there was public support or salient tension. Furthermore, statements and narratives of political entrepreneurs will also have to be considered in the analysis to uncover how, and if, this tension was mobilized. Liberal intergovernmentalism requires an analysis of data that proves that the crises impacted member states unequally to determine if there was asymmetrical bargaining power between them.

⁸⁵ Scipioni, Marco. 2018-B. “Failing forward in EU migration policy? EU integration after the 2015 asylum and migration crisis”. In *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 25, no. 9: 1357-1375, p. 1359

⁸⁶ Reese, Gerhard, and Oliver Lauenstein. 2014. “The Eurozone Crisis: Psychological Mechanisms Undermining and Supporting European Solidarity”. In *Social Sciences*, vol. 3: 160-171, p. 164

⁸⁷ Verhaegen, 2017, pp. 883-884

4. Methodology

This chapter will offer insight into the methodological considerations behind this thesis. In that context, this chapter will provide the reader with a clarification of the objective of the thesis, the research approach, the choice and use of data and its limitations, as well as the operationalization of the variables being analyzed.

4.1. The thesis's objective

In accordance with the research question, the object of this thesis is to uncover why the Covid-19 Pandemic and the 2015 Refugee Crisis resulted in different outcomes for European integration in burden-sharing policies with the successful negotiations of a comprehensive pandemic recovery fund in 2020, and the unsuccessful negotiations on a distribution mechanism for asylum applicants taking place from 2015 to 2016. Based on the existing research, discussed in the literature review, the variables of contractual incompleteness, dilutive boundary regime, asymmetrical bargaining power, and exclusive identities have been identified. These are argued to be the variables that carry implications for European integration and its outcome during these two specific cases.

Following post-functionalist and liberal intergovernmentalist theory, this thesis assumes that the presence of these variables can potentially lead to non-decision in policymaking, or even disintegration when member states negotiate to find agreements that can mitigate the consequences of a crisis. The conceptual framework of post-functionalism functions as a roadmap for this thesis's understanding of European integration when determining why the outcome varied across the two cases.

4.2. Research design

To address the objective of the research question, this thesis's research design follows a deductive comparative case study approach with a most-similar case system design. The thesis is explanatory in nature as it asks why a certain phenomenon happened in the way that it did and seeks to find answers through the analysis. Since this thesis's understanding of European integration is derived from post-functionalism, the identity of EU citizens will have a fundamental role and this thesis will analyze public opinion surveys to uncover salient tension between identity and integration, as well as analyze the strategic narratives of Eurosceptic political entrepreneurs to determine if and how this

tension was mobilized. In this context, strategic narratives are understood by the claim that: [...] political actors can use narratives strategically to shape the behavior of others.”⁸⁸ Regarding post-functionalism, it is expected that these narratives will use priming, framing, and cueing to construct and mobilize exclusive identities against the expansion of European integration. This is understood as a development in which political entrepreneurs prime the considerations of the public to make them salient, then they frame these considerations to the political object of the integration policy being proposed or the EU in general, and finally, a bias towards that policy has been cued, where mobilized exclusive identities prevent successful negotiations.⁸⁹

By seeking to explain how the presence or absence of exclusive identities changed the observed outcome of European integration across the two cases in accordance with post-functionalism, this thesis adopts a ‘causes-of-effects’ approach to: “[...] trace the originating causes of an observed outcome through the establishment of the specific processes and linkages producing it.”⁹⁰ The most-similar case system design has been chosen because this thesis expects exclusive identities to be the causal variable for determining the outcome of European integration following post-functionalism. The alternative variables of contractual incompleteness, dilutive boundary regimes, and asymmetrical bargaining power are believed to influence the outcome of European integration but are not thought to be either necessary or sufficient by themselves to result in non-decision or disintegration in the absence of exclusive identities. At least not when an issue is politicized and exposes the decision-making process to public opinion.

All four variables will be analyzed in both cases to determine if they were present or not. If one of the variables is found to be different in one case compared to the other, when all the others stayed the same, then that variable is concluded to be the causal variable in accordance with the most-similar case system design. The absence or presence of this causal variable is then argued to cause the variation in the outcome of European integration across the Covid-19 Pandemic and the 2015 Refugee Crisis.⁹¹ Because this thesis follows post-functionalist theory, it is hypothetical in nature, as there are predetermined logical conjunctions pointing to exclusive identity as the expected causal variable. As such, deductive logic is applied since the overarching theoretical principles of post-functionalism are

⁸⁸ Miskimmon, Alister, Ben O’Loughlin, and Laura Roselle. 2013. *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order*. New York: Taylor & Francis Group, p. 32

⁸⁹ Hooghe, and Marks, 2009, p. 13

⁹⁰ Lai, Daniela, and Roberto Roccu. 2019. “Case study research and critical IR: the case for the extended case methodology”. In *International Relations*, vol. 33, no. 1: 67-87, p. 70

⁹¹ Seawright, Jason, and John Gerring. 2008: “Case-Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options”. In *Political Research Quarterly*, vol. 61, no. 2: 294-308, p. 304

being used to draw a conclusion about the outcome of the two cases.⁹² If upon further investigation this variable proves to have been similar in both cases, it is then irrelevant in explaining the variation in the outcome of European integration, and the hypothesis, that exclusive identities are the causal variable, must be rejected. If more variables are found to differ across the two cases, then it must be acknowledged that a causal variable cannot be isolated, and if all variables are the same, then this thesis has failed to uncover a still unknown variable. Besides causing the hypothesis to be rejected, it could also prove quite damaging to the theory of post-functionalism given that the theory perceives the identities of EU citizens to be the dominant variable when issues of European integration are politicized.⁹³

By using this research design, the following table has been made. This table constitutes the frame and roadmap for the analysis, with each variable being examined to conclude why the outcome of European integration in burden-sharing policies varied across the Covid-19 Pandemic and the Refugee Crisis. The table will be revisited after the analysis to present an overview of which of the variables that were present or which variables that were absent during the two crises.

Variables argued to influence the outcome of European integration	2015 Refugee Crisis	Covid-19 Pandemic
Dilutive boundary regime		
Contractual incompleteness		
Asymmetrical bargaining power		
Exclusive identities		
A successful outcome of European integration in burden-sharing policies	No	Yes

⁹² O'Leary, Zina. 2017. *The Essential Guide to Doing Your Research Project*, Los Angeles, SAGE), p. 375

⁹³ Hooghe, and Marks, 2009, p. 13

4.3. Choice and use of data, and limitations

The use of post-functionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism has an influence on both the choice and use of data. Since post-functionalism considers identity and public opinion important for determining European integration, surveys from Eurobarometer will be analyzed. The reason for using Eurobarometer is that they are published consistently twice a year during spring and autumn/winter. This makes it possible to trace the overall development of public opinion towards the EU in both cases. However, it does create a limitation since the same question must be a part of the questionnaire in both cases, to make a proper comparison, which is often the case although not always. Furthermore, Eurobarometer asks questions that are specifically related to the 2015 Refugee Crisis, as well as the Covid-19 Pandemic. The answers to these questions are used to determine the public opinion on how these crises should be mitigated, which allows for this thesis to uncover if public support for burden-sharing was high or low.

Another important feature of the Eurobarometer surveys is that they offer a comprehensive amount of data on public opinion with approximately 1000 random respondents represented from each member state.⁹⁴ The data collection method remains somewhat consistent with each released publication, and thus allows for a longitudinal overview of public opinion in the EU, in which respondents from all member states are represented. This is argued to be necessary since the negotiation of burden-sharing agreements in the EU Council involves all member states and as such, public opinion in all member states must be considered. This creates another limitation for this thesis's choice of data. If a survey does not include data from all the member states who are a part of the negotiations on European integration in burden-sharing policies, then that survey will be discarded.

It is important to mention that Eurobarometer has faced some criticism for not asking questions that are critical enough of the EU or phrasing the critical questions in ways that downplay them.⁹⁵ Furthermore, the usefulness of some of its data has been disputed by some researchers who argue that respondents have sometimes not had the appropriate background knowledge to provide a thought-out answer.⁹⁶ For this thesis, it is not considered important whether the respondents have much background knowledge to provide a well-thought-out answer. Following post-functionalism,

⁹⁴ Höpner, Martin, and Bojan Jurczyk. 2015. "How the eurobarometer blurs the Line between research and propaganda". In *Max Planck Institute for Study of Societies*, no. 15/6, p. 1

⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 5

⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 7

individuals are not expected to always have either knowledge or time to figure out their interests in relation to European integration. It is instead believed that the answer provided by the respondent usually relies on cues that are based on their individual identity, ideology, political preferences, media, etc.⁹⁷ Consequently, public opinion is argued not to be based on rational interests, but rather on the respondent's own perception and interpretation of reality, meaning that people will usually have an opinion regardless of background knowledge and that this opinion remains important for the decision-making process.

There is always a chance that a respondent misinterpreted a question so that the answer doesn't reflect the real opinion due to a lack of background knowledge. However, this is a margin of error that must be accepted since there is nothing that can be done to prevent it. Whether the questions are downplayed or not critical enough, which could consequently make public opinion seem more positive of the EU, is something that must be accepted as well since there are no other data sources as comprehensive as Eurobarometer. This can make it difficult to make conclusions based on the individual data sets, however, the goal is not to conclude on individual data sets but instead to compare these data sets to each other to determine if public opinion was different across the two cases and between individual member states.

Statements from Eurosceptic political entrepreneurs are then analyzed to identify the mobilization of exclusive identities. The relevance of strategic narratives of policymakers follows the post-functionalist argument that European integration is tightly connected to domestic political conflict, and that party leaders: "[...] worry about the electoral consequences of their European politics."⁹⁸ The data collection is here limited to debates, speeches, and discussions from the EU Parliament. The reason is that the Parliament arguably provides an appealing political arena, in which political entrepreneurs from all member states are present and are having discussions specifically on European integration policies. It is an appealing stage because Parliament members can influence the decisions of state actors due to the decision-making process of the EU. When the EU Commission makes a proposal, it is the Parliament that is responsible for discussing the proposal and outlining their opinions which are then sent to the EU Council where the state leaders act upon it. Furthermore, transcripts of the discussions in the EU Parliament are publicly available, in contrast to the discussions in the EU Council.

⁹⁷ Hooghe, and Marks, 2009, p. 10

⁹⁸ Ibid. p.21

Since each member of the Parliament is representing a political party from their country, their opinions are argued to reflect the opinions of their electorates, given that they have an interest in being reelected. It is further argued that even if the Parliament is not the most public platform, the opinions expressed within the Parliament reflect the opinions that these political parties promote to their voters nationally. However, it has limitations. It does not show whether a majority of the public supports their arguments, only whether they try to mobilize exclusive identities through their narratives. For these reasons, public opinion surveys must be used as well. Furthermore, while all member states are represented in the Parliament, all political parties are not. Some of the Eurosceptic political parties do not have a representative in the EU Parliament. Nothing can be done to circumvent this, but it is necessary to highlight that the Parliament can only provide a general overview of some of the narratives that Eurosceptic political entrepreneurs try to push but does not show the whole picture, as some politicians primarily use national platforms to promote their narratives to the public.

The use of data from Eurostat, Frontex, Statista, and Our World in Data is used to analyze the asymmetrical bargaining power between member states. Frontex has data on illegal border-crossing, which is necessary to examine to highlight which member states that were located along the primary migration routes and are therefore expected to have been impacted most severely by the uncontrolled migration. Furthermore, it also shows whether the external borders were able to withstand the pressure of immigration or not. Eurostat is used for its vast statistical data on areas such as the economies of member states, the number of asylum applications, and accepted asylum applications, which illustrates how member states were impacted by the crises compared to each other. Statista is used to examine the budget of Frontex to determine the EU's supranational governance of the external borders. Furthermore, it will support statistical data from Eurostat regarding the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the tourist sector of member states. Lastly, Our World in Data collects statistics on Covid-19 cases, deaths, etc., and will, therefore, be used to illustrate the differentiated impact of the pandemic regarding the human costs among member states.

There is a natural limitation regarding the timeframe. Data is included from predominantly 2015 to 2022 since both cases took place within this period. The intermediate years are included because it is thought relevant to illustrate the longitudinal development of public opinion so it can be determined whether changes in opinion can be linked to the cases being analyzed, or if they are merely part of a general tendency. For this reason, there will be times when the quantitative data from the Eurobarometer surveys goes further back than 2015, to clarify if public opinion changed due to the Refugee Crisis itself or was preconditioned by something happening prior to the crisis.

4.4. Operationalization

The empirical analysis seeks to uncover if the four variables, dilutive boundary regime, contractual incompleteness, asymmetrical bargaining power, and exclusive identities, were present or absent across the Covid-19 Pandemic and the 2015 Refugee Crisis. This chapter will explain the decision criteria that are used to determine the presence or absence of each variable in the analysis.

4.4.1 Contractual incompleteness.

Contractual incompleteness depends on whether there is an open-ended or precisely specified way in which member states of the EU should behave in each situation. There is not a set way to determine or measure the ‘incompleteness’. However, this thesis will use the criteria and descriptions of James A. Caporaso (2007) to determine whether a contract is complete or incomplete, though this is usually the case with policies made in the EU. In an incomplete contract, there is either something missing, something that is open to multiple meanings, or something that is unknown.⁹⁹

During the 2015 Refugee Crisis, a contract that was being negotiated was the Dublin III Agreement since it was this contract that defined how member states should behave regarding the asylum policy. During the Covid-19 Pandemic, a comprehensive contract called the Next Generation EU recovery fund was negotiated to provide emergency financial support and public health responses at the supranational level. The incompleteness of a contract will be measured by examining the extent to which the crisis being faced was covered by the existing contracts, if there were multiple interpretations among the member states on how to behave in accordance with these contracts, or if the crisis scenario was covered by the contracts at all. It is also argued that contracts that generally put the responsibility of mitigating the consequences of a crisis in the hands of the member states without supranational governance or coordination are incomplete, as burden-sharing will then be limited to the national preferences of member states due to the absence of specific guidelines or rules.

4.4.2 Asymmetrical bargaining power

Determining whether there was asymmetrical bargaining power between member states is dependent on different criteria across the two cases.

⁹⁹ Caporaso, James A. 2007. “The promises and pitfalls of an endogenous theory of institutional change: A comment”. In *West European Politics*, vol. 30, no. 2: 392-404, p. 393

In the 2015 Refugee Crisis, the number of asylum applications in each member state will be analyzed to determine unequalness in the distribution of asylum-seekers, during the negotiations of mandatory refugee quotas for a fair distribution of asylum-seekers. However, it is also thought necessary to consider the number of positive asylum applications, since it is expected that some member states could have received many asylum-seekers but refused to accept their applications and, therefore, avoided being in a weak bargaining position. Furthermore, geographical location matters as well, which is why the distribution of migrants along the main migration routes is also included.

In the Covid-19 Pandemic, the human and economic costs before the successful negotiation of the Next Generation EU recovery plan will be analyzed to determine the balance of bargaining power. These include the number of Covid-19 related deaths per capita and the economic consequences measured in the real GDP change. Additionally, the distribution of economic recovery funds will also be included, since liberal intergovernmentalism would expect those who gain the least to be less willing to make an agreement.

It is thus expected from a liberal intergovernmentalist perspective that the member states who were burdened the most by asylum-seekers and suffered the worst consequences of Covid-19 in both human and economic costs, would have been in a weaker bargaining position to successfully reach an agreement on burden-sharing through implementing asylum quotas and establishing joint debt to mitigate the crises.

4.4.3 Dilutive boundary regime

Like contractual completeness, boundary configuration cannot be measured statistically. Instead, the criteria for dilutive boundary regimes adopted by this thesis follow those described by Schimmelfennig (2021-B).¹⁰⁰ For a boundary regime to be dilutive, the internal borders and the external borders must be debordered. As such, the criteria for external debordering are that there is openness toward the international environment. If there is limited or no control over the movement of people regarding illegal border-crossings of non-EU citizens or infected people at the external borders, then they are considered debordered. Furthermore, if there is little supranational control with the external borders, and this is instead left to the member states at the periphery, then it is also considered debordered. The EU's supranational capacities and ability to regulate the entry of people

¹⁰⁰ Schimmelfennig, 2021-B, p. 318

from outside the EU are therefore considered a prerequisite for external rebordering. Internal debordering is defined by little control of the borders between member states. As such, there must be free movement of people and goods between member states of the EU. Determining the extent of external and internal debordering is then done on an argumentative basis, based on the movement of people, border control, supranational competencies, etc.

4.4.4 Exclusive national identity

Following the argumentation of post-functionalist theory, it is believed that economic preferences and interest groups are not appropriate for determining European integration, given that party leaders in positions of authority will consider the opinion of the public when negotiating European issues.¹⁰¹ Instead, mass politics trumps interest group politics when both come into play making it necessary to determine if an issue is being politicized.¹⁰² To determine if an issue is politicized, respondents' perceptions of what was perceived to be the biggest issues during the Covid-19 Pandemic and the 2015 Refugee Crisis in the Eurobarometer surveys will be analyzed. If the respondents are not aware or concerned about the issue being faced, then public opinion can be discarded as it becomes irrelevant to the decision-making process, since the issue will not have entered the arena of mass politics. The decision-making process is then expected to have been isolated to be conducted based on the rational preferences of interest groups and state actors, making liberal intergovernmentalism the relevant theory to use.

However, if respondents show concern about the issue, then it is expected that public opinion was influencing the decision-making process, and it must be uncovered whether tensions between identity and European integration were salient. Eurobarometer once asked whether respondents identified themselves as national identity only, unfortunately, this question last made an appearance in the spring of 2019, in the Standard Eurobarometer 91 – European citizenship report. This is unfortunate since there are not any comparable questions being asked during the Covid-19 Pandemic, regarding whether people identify with their nationality only. Instead, this thesis will direct its focus toward analyzing respondents' opinions on the specific burden-sharing policies that are being discussed to determine whether tension is salient on that specific issue, as well as respondents' opinions towards the EU.

¹⁰¹ Hooghe, and Marks, 2009, p. 5

¹⁰² Ibid. p. 18

In accordance with the post-functionalist argument that the debate on European integration is connected to domestic political conflict, it is expected that large variations in public opinion within member states on a specific burden-sharing policy, will indicate that there is a domestic political conflict that can shape the national preference on European integration.¹⁰³ Moreover, it will be analyzed if there are large variations in respondents' opinions between member states, as divergent preferences arguably make it difficult to negotiate incomplete contracts.

If respondents are unsupportive of the policy being negotiated, and if the opinion towards the EU is low, then it is argued that tension between identity and integration is salient. Eurosceptic political entrepreneurs then have an opportunity to construct and mobilize this tension. For example, by blaming the EU and European integration for the crisis and thereby, reinforcing the oppositional concerns of the public. It is thus expected that the narratives of the political entrepreneurs, to some extent, reflect the concerns being expressed by the public in Eurobarometer surveys.

Consequently, it is expected that Eurosceptic party groups in the EU Parliament will try to mobilize exclusive identities by constructing certain narratives which make public concern salient, frames these concerns to the EU, or European integration, and then installs a bias toward the specific agreement being negotiated.¹⁰⁴ If all these criteria are fulfilled, then it is expected that exclusive identities are present and that this carries implications for the outcome of European integration in the discussed policy area.

¹⁰³ Ibid. p. 14

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 13

5. Empirical analysis

In accordance with the research question, the empirical analysis intends to uncover why European integration had different outcomes across the Covid-19 Pandemic and the 2015 Refugee Crisis. The analysis will use the analytical tools from post-functionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism to examine the four variables in accordance with the most-similar case system design. The overarching conceptual framework for analyzing the two cases follows the post-functionalist perceptions of Hooghe and Marks (2009). Each case will be analyzed in its own separate chapter starting with the Refugee Crisis.

5.1. The Refugee Crisis

In accordance with the research question, and the most-similar system design, this chapter will analyze the variables of contractual incompleteness, dilutive boundary regime, asymmetrical bargaining power, and exclusive identities, to uncover why the negotiations on burden-sharing and European solidarity with mandatory refugee quotas failed, and why the targets set by the temporary relocation and resettlement scheme was not reached.

5.1.1 Overwhelmed dilutive borders and incomplete asylum policy contracts

From the legislation on border control, as written in the Schengen Agreement, the member states of the EU had agreed to: “[...] abolish checks at common borders and transfer them to their external borders.”¹⁰⁵ As a consequence, internal borders were debordered, while it was left to the member states at the external borders to enforce the laws, regulations, and administrative provisions. Additionally, member states at the periphery of the EU were tasked with prohibiting and restricting the movement of people and conducting border checks to safeguard the internal security and prevent illegal immigration of people who were not nationals of EU member states.¹⁰⁶

By the Schengen Agreement, the internal borders were debordered to allow for free and uncontrolled movement of people and goods between member states. Simultaneously, the responsibility of controlling the external borders and preventing illegal immigration was put in the

¹⁰⁵ European Council Legislations. 2000. “The Schengen acquis as referred to in Article 1(2) of Council Decision 1999/435/EC of 20 May 1999”. In *Official Journal of the European Communities*, vol. 42, L. 239, p. 15

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

hands of those member states geographically based at the periphery of the EU, with very few capacities being delegated to the EU to support the exertion of effective supranational governance over the external borders.¹⁰⁷ Frontex was established in 2004 to offer some degree of supranational support in areas such as border surveillance, risk analysis, and training of border guards. However, it had a modest budget and few capacities to prevent immigration or strengthen the physical external borders of the member states at the periphery of the EU.¹⁰⁸ It was first after the 2015 Refugee Crisis had peaked, that the budget of Frontex increased, almost doubling from 142 million euros in 2015 to 254 million euros in 2016.¹⁰⁹

From the onset of the Refugee Crisis, member states had difficulty apprehending illegal border crossings. Especially, since the movements of immigrants and refugees were concentrated along predominantly two migration routes. The Western Balkan Route and the Eastern Mediterranean Route, as evident from the following graph:

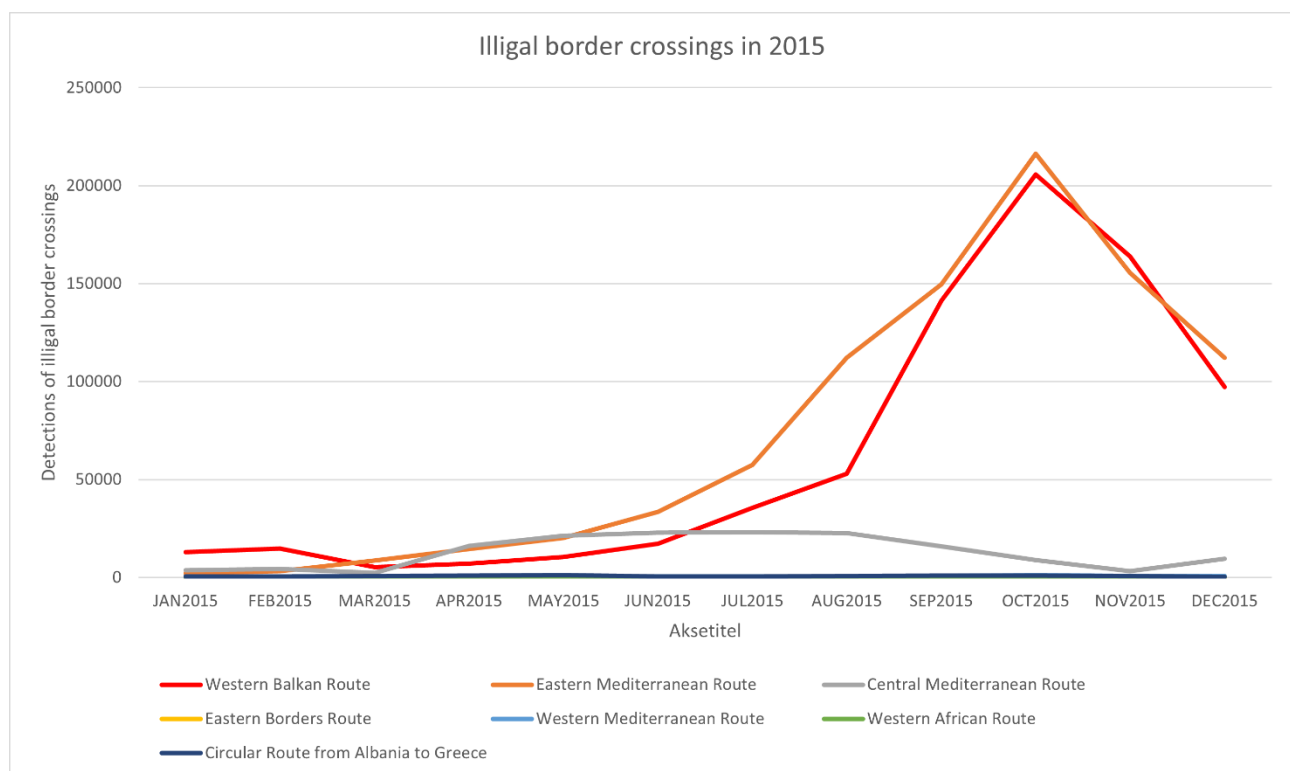


Figure 1: Frontex. Migration Map: Detections of illegal border-crossings statistics download (updated monthly). Retrieved from Frontex website: <https://frontex.europa.eu/we-know/migratory-map/>

¹⁰⁷ Schimmelfennig, 2021-B, p. 312

¹⁰⁸ Scipioni, Marco. 2018-A. "De Novo Bodies and EU Integration: What is the Story behind EU Agencies' Expansion?". In *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 56, no. 4: 768-784, p. 772

¹⁰⁹ Statista Research Department. 2021. *Annual budget of Frontex in the European Union from 2005 to 2021*. Retrieved from Statista website: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/973052/annual-budget-frontex-eu/>

The member states geographically based along these migration routes were effectively overwhelmed by a large and disproportionately distributed number of refugees, many of whom tried to cross the borders illegally. The illegal crossings peaked in October 2015, with approximately 42.000 apprehended illegal border crossings at the Western Balkan Route and the Eastern Mediterranean Route. Especially Italy and Greece became entry points for asylum seekers. These were countries whose economies had already been severely weakened after the Eurozone Crisis.¹¹⁰

The immigration flows put a severe strain on the external borders, which these countries were responsible for protecting. Especially since the Dublin III, asylum policy of 2013 demanded that the first safe country of entry assumed responsibility for an asylum applicant.¹¹¹ This caused the external borders to collapse, essentially, turning Italy and Greece into transit countries where immigrants would be allowed to pass through to other member states unhindered.¹¹² As evident from the chart, the number of illegal border crossings took a steep increase beginning in the mid-late summer of 2015, as frontline states were overwhelmed. This development continued until around winter when it began declining, arguably, because the weather conditions made the migration to Europe unfeasible. As the immigration pressure increased, the external borders, meant to restrict the movement of people from non-EU countries, were essentially debordered as neither the EU nor the member states had the necessary capacities or desire to protect them. The external debordering combined with the internal debordering of the Schengen Agreement arguably constitutes a dilutive boundary regime from the definition of Schimmelfennig (2021-B). This would then have left the member states without supranational protection of their internal borders and made them vulnerable to uncontrolled immigration.¹¹³ This is also evident from unilateral decisions in September 2015 when the number of illegal border crossings climbed to reach its peak and multiple member states, including Germany, Sweden, and Austria closed their internal borders.¹¹⁴

Arguably, a fundamental issue leading to this collapse of the external borders was the contractual incompleteness of the EU's asylum system. The Dublin III Agreement of 2013 put responsibility for asylum applications on those member states where the applicant first lodged his or her application for

¹¹⁰ Trauner, Florian. 2016. "Asylum policy: the EU's 'crises' and the looming policy regime failure". In *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 38, no. 3: 311-325, p. 314

¹¹¹ Schilde, and Goodman, 2021, p. 456

¹¹² Zaun, 2017, p. 8

¹¹³ Schimmelfennig, 2021-A, p. 72 & Schimmelfennig, 2021-B, p. 319

¹¹⁴ Bosilca, 2021, p. 475

international protection.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, if an asylum applicant left for another member state while awaiting the examination of an application, or if the application had been withdrawn or rejected, the applicant, upon apprehension, would be returned to the first country of entry.¹¹⁶ Arguably, this system was not designed to handle a large number of asylum-seekers and put disproportionate pressure on those member states geographically located at the periphery of the EU. The same countries that were responsible for protecting the EU from uncontrolled immigration, were also responsible for all the asylum applicants. Those member states that were positioned along the major immigration routes were exceptionally exposed as they would in most instances be the first countries immigrants reached, making them legally responsible for handling the asylum applicants and resettling them if their application was accepted in accordance with the Dublin III Agreement.¹¹⁷

The incompleteness of the asylum policy had already been noticed before the 2015 Refugee Crisis peaked. Seeing that immigration to Europe was increasing and being aware that the Dublin III Agreement lacked any mechanisms to fairly distribute asylum applicants among member states, a pilot project to increase European integration in the asylum policy had been discussed at an EU Council meeting on the 23rd of April 2015.¹¹⁸ The purpose was to reinforce internal solidarity and burden-sharing among member states, by setting up a: “[...] first voluntary pilot project on resettlement across the EU, offering places to persons qualifying for protection.”¹¹⁹ In July, an initial goal of relocating and resettling 40.000 refugees over two years was negotiated. The President of the EU Council, Donald Tusk, could confirm that the resettlement of refugees would be on a voluntary basis, stating: “There is a balance to be struck between national sovereignty and action at the European level in this matter.”¹²⁰ The discussions among the member states had reportedly been highly conflictual, with heated debates and name-calling.¹²¹ Even as the asylum situation was escalating, the Dublin III Agreement still lacked any permanent mechanism to cope with it. Consequently, the outcome of the July negotiations was another incomplete contract with a voluntary

¹¹⁵ Regulation (EU) NO 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013. 2013. “Establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person (recast)”. In *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 130/31, Article 3, paragraphs 1 and 2

¹¹⁶ Ibid. Chapter V Article 18, paragraph (b), (c), and (d)

¹¹⁷ Ibid. Chapter II Article 3, paragraphs 1 and 2.

¹¹⁸ Council of the EU. 2015. *Special meeting of the European Council*, 23 April 2015 – statement. Press Release 204/15

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Council of the EU. 2015. Report by President Donald Tusk to the European Parliament on the June European Council and the situation in Greece: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/07/08/tusk-report-european-parliament/>

¹²¹ BBC NEWS. 27 May 2015. Migrant crisis: *EU asks states to accept 40,000 asylum seekers*: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32894624>

distribution instrument that provided member states with a slight financial compensation of 6.000 euros for each asylum seeker relocated as an incitement to receive refugees.¹²²

Because incomplete contracts do not dictate exactly how member states should behave in a certain situation, and allow for flexibility of choice for its signatories, it creates issues if member states have different preferences and can't find common ground on how to behave according to the contract.¹²³ Furthermore, a highly incomplete contract like the voluntary relocation instrument was flexible enough that member states could refuse to receive any refugees. Arguably, this was the reason why the EU Commission proposed a temporary solidarity clause for relocating 120.000 refugees in September 2015 on top of the 40.000 negotiated in July bringing the total number up to 160.000. To ensure that all member states participated equally in the burden-sharing, a quota system was proposed.¹²⁴

The agreement was pushed through on the 22nd of September 2015 by a majority vote, causing much dispute during discussions in the EU Council given that the relocation of 160.000 asylum applicants from Italy and Greece, over a period of two years, would be accomplished with mandatory quotas.¹²⁵ A blocking minority of Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic had voted against this mandatory distribution instrument but were overruled, which was controversial since the majority vote is rarely used in contested policy areas like asylum.¹²⁶ The agreement was met with fierce opposition from Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. They were later joined by Poland which had initially agreed to the instrument but refused to receive asylum applicants after terror attacks in multiple European capital cities.¹²⁷

However, it was not just the member states, who had been overruled, that were unsupportive of the agreement. The overall willingness of member states to fulfill their quotas was lacking and many backed down from their commitments. Less than 20% of the agreed relocations had taken place when the deadline was reached in 2017.¹²⁸ Furthermore, it was a one-time scheme with no permanent and

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Hooghe, Lenz, and Marks, 2019, p. 14

¹²⁴ European Commission. 2015. Refugee Crisis: European Commission takes decisive action: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_15_5596

¹²⁵ Council Decision (EU) 2015/1601 of 22 September 2015. 2015. *establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and Greece*. L 248/80, Article 4

¹²⁶ Karolewski, Ireneusz Pawel. 2017. "Europe's Migration Predicament: The European Union's Refugees' Relocation Scheme versus the Defiant Central Eastern European Visegrád Group". In *Journal of Inter-Regional Studies: Regional and Global Perspectives (JIRS)*, vol. 1: 40-52, p. 44

¹²⁷ Ibid. P. 45

¹²⁸ Schimmelfennig, 2021-A, p. 72

fundamental changes to the existing asylum policy. Arguably, the temporary relocation and resettlement scheme was thus yet another incomplete contract that did not provide any permanent, long-term solutions to the lack of distribution mechanisms in the Dublin III Agreement, in the face of uncontrolled immigration, due to the collapse of the external borders.

5.1.2 Asymmetrical asylum distribution and bargaining power

The dilutive boundary regime made the EU vulnerable to the exogenous shock of uncontrolled immigration and exposed the contractual incompleteness of its asylum policy. Though it was possible for the EU to push through a temporary mandatory relocation and resettlement scheme through a majority vote, it is debatable whether this policy qualifies as a deepening of European integration. Even if incomplete contracts are by some argued to be a driver for integration, multiple member states remained highly opposed to expanding integration in the asylum policy.¹²⁹

What was accomplished by the relocation and resettlement scheme was far from the aspired targets that were set in September 2015, and the EU's faith in the willingness of the member states to put in the work needed to solve the crisis was fading. The belief in a European solution was arguably abandoned already in the first quarter of 2016, merely six months after the conception of the temporary relocation and resettlement scheme, as it was made clear in the EU Parliament on March 9th, 2016, that Donald Tusk was having discussions with Turkey's foreign minister on facilitating an agreement where Turkey would take responsibility for all refugees arriving on Greek shores in return for financial compensation.¹³⁰

Having arguably accepted that the member states were unable to solve the issue of migration internally in the EU, it was instead decided to externalize the issue to Turkey which, according to a speech by Donald Tusk to the Parliament, was necessary to avoid the total collapse of the Schengen Agreement with all the problems that would have followed:

“As I have frequently said, without this, and without restoring control over European migration policy, we would be unable to prevent political catastrophes. Here I mean the collapse of the Schengen; the loss of control over our external borders, with all its implications for our security;

¹²⁹ Stie, 2021, p. 725

¹³⁰ European Parliament. 9 March 2016. Preparation of the European Council meeting of 17 and 18 March 2016 and outcome of the EU-Turkey summit (debate): https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-8-2016-03-09-ITM-007_EN.html

political chaos in the EU; a widespread feeling of insecurity, and, ultimately, the triumph of populism and extremism.”¹³¹

From Tusk’s statement, it becomes evident why a deal was struck with Turkey as the crisis was threatening the stability of the fundamental institutions of the EU, and non-decision had reinforced Eurosceptic tendencies. As a consequence, an agreement with Turkey was struck among protests from many members of the parliament, who expressed concerns about the prospects of Turkey following the rules and values of the EU in their treatment of refugees and highlighted the potential danger of Turkey using immigrants to gain leverage over, and blackmail, the EU.¹³² However, it had become clear that non-decision and muddling through were not a durable solution if the fundamental institutional frameworks of the EU should survive. Though this still begs the question as to why member states were unable to collaborate on a fair distribution of asylum seekers.

From a liberal intergovernmentalistic perspective, the failure to mitigate the 2015 Refugee Crisis through deeper European integration in migration policies can be boiled down to the national preferences of interest groups and state actors, which are brought forward in interstate negotiations. Simply put, the unequal impact of the Refugee Crisis on EU member states is assumed to have put countries with many asylum-seekers in a situation where their potential gains from cooperation were greater than member states who had little or nothing to gain, putting them in a weaker bargaining position.¹³³ The preferences of each member state would have been defined by whether they would benefit from an agreement or not. In this regard, the distribution of asylum applications was very unequal between member states, as evident from the Eurostat data collected in the following chart:

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Moravcsik, 1993, p. 499

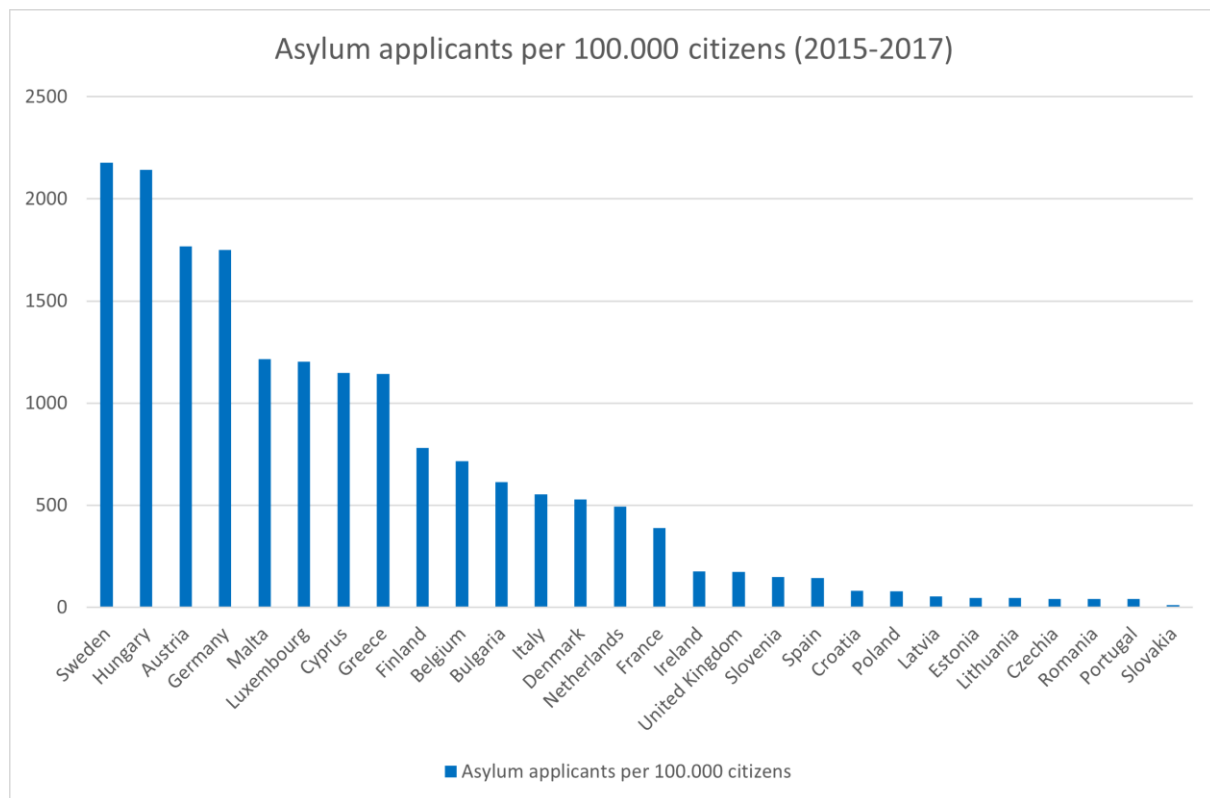


Figure 2: Eurostat Data Browser. 2022. Asylum and first asylum applicants – monthly data. Retrieved from Eurostat website: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00189/default/table?lang=en>

A few things must be taken into consideration when using this chart. Firstly, Greece and Italy are not among the countries that have received the most asylum applications. The reason for this is that they were transit countries in which asylum seekers first entered but as their asylum system and external borders collapsed, most asylum seekers were waived through to other member states, such as Germany and Sweden, who did not insist on returning them to the first country of entry.¹³⁴ Regardless of the number of applications, it is still expected that state actors and interest groups in Italy and Greece were supportive of deeper integration and burden-sharing in migration policies due to their geographical placement at the biggest migration routes.¹³⁵ Secondly, a country receiving numerous applications does necessarily mean that it is resettling many asylum-seekers if they choose to reject a majority of the applications. This is visible by looking at the number of total positive asylum applications per capita, which translate to the total amount of decisions that concluded with

¹³⁴ Schilde, and Goodman, 2021, p. 456 & Zaun, 2017, p. 8

¹³⁵ Anderson, Jeffrey J. 2021. "A Series of Unfortunate Events: Crisis Response and the European Union After 2008". In *The Palgrave Handbook of EU Crises*. ED Marianne Riddervold, Jarle Trondal, and Akasemi Newsome: 765-789, p. 778

the granting of refugee status, subsidiary protection status, authorization to stay for humanitarian reasons or temporary protection:

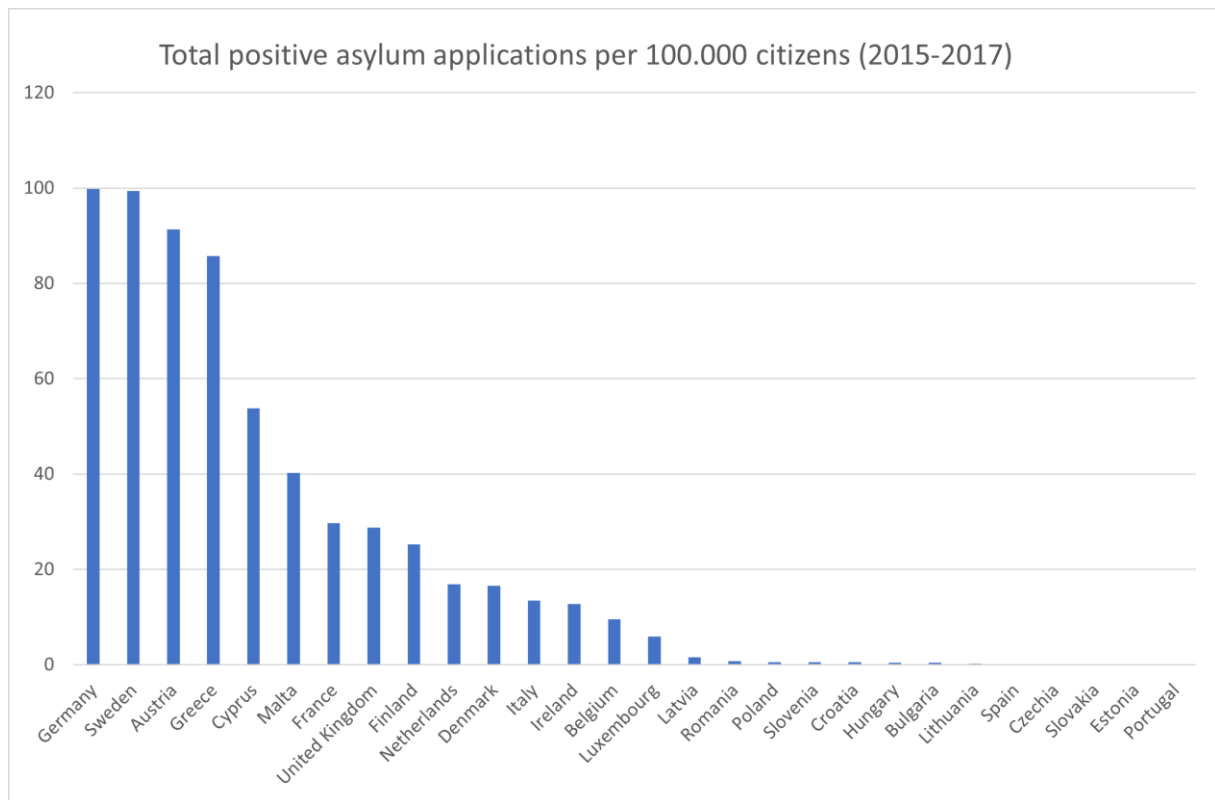


Figure 3 Eurostat Data Browser, 2022. Final decisions on asylum applications – annual data. Retrieved from Eurostat website: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00193/default/table?lang=en>

As can be seen from this chart, a country like Hungary which received many asylum applications had very few positive asylum applications. The reason for this is that Hungary was a frontline state where many asylum seekers would enter firstly and lodge their applications. Hungary would then reject almost all of them and instead allow asylum seekers to walk further into Europe.¹³⁶ There is also a clear pattern where the richer Western and Northern European member states, which were not located at the external borders, are those who accepted most asylum applications. Showing that neither the external borders nor the asylum system worked as intended. Due to this unequal distribution, negotiations in the EU Council and Commission took place during the autumn of 2015 and winter of

¹³⁶ Crawford, Beverly. 2021. "Moral Leadership or Moral Hazard? Germany's Response to the Refugee Crisis and Its Impact on European Solidarity". In *The Palgrave Handbook of EU Crises*. ED Marianne Riddervold, Jarle Trondal, and Akasemi Newsome: 489-505, p. 497

2016 to establish: “[...] a permanent system for burden-sharing through a distribution key: [...]”¹³⁷ Such an agreement would delegate national authority over the asylum policy to the supranational level and allow the EU to permanently distribute asylum seekers among member states to counter the disproportionate pressure, created by the incomplete Dublin III Agreement. The distribution key would calculate the individual capacity of each member state, based on GDP and population size so that a fair distribution would automatically be conducted, based on a pre-calculated quota.¹³⁸

Unsurprisingly, the member states who pushed for this permanent relocation mechanism were Germany, Sweden, and Austria.¹³⁹ The same countries that had accepted the largest amount of asylum seekers per capita as evident from *Figure 3*. From the perspective of bargaining power, this is not surprising. In accordance with the assumption of liberal intergovernmentalism, European integration is a product of intergovernmental bargaining, and the chances of reaching a compromise and making a successful agreement are dependent on the relative bargaining power between the negotiating states. In this case, the bargaining power between member states was asymmetrical. Germany, Sweden, and Austria had obvious functional interests which would be realized with a permanent relocation mechanism based on quotas. A quota system would result in them having to accept fewer refugees and they would receive substantial financial solidarity contributions from those member states who refused to fulfill their asylum quotas according to the regulation proposed by the EU Commission.¹⁴⁰

However, member states who received and accepted few asylum applications formed an opposition group consisting of up to 15 member states, including France, Spain, Romania, the Baltic states, and the Visegrád group.¹⁴¹ Arguably, these states had little functional gains to be made from such an agreement as they would become responsible for more applicants, and lose control over who, as well as how many asylum applicants they should receive. Maintaining the status quo was thus preferred as the agreement was seen as a zero-sum outcome which is often the case with the integration of core state powers, compared to market integration. This is problematic for integration

¹³⁷ European Commission, COM (2016) 270 final, 2016/0133(COD), Brussels, 4.5.2016. *Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council – establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person (recast)*.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Zaun, 2017, p. 14

¹⁴⁰ European Commission, COM (2016) 270 final, 2016/0133(COD), Brussels, 4.5.2016

¹⁴¹ Zaun, 2017, pp. 14-15

as there is a great potential for raising an identity-based conflict when pushing into core state power.¹⁴²

5.1.3 Mobilization of tension between identity and integration

Following a post-functionalistic perspective, Euroscepticism and exclusive identities are something one must consider when examining why member states were unable to find a European solution to mitigate the 2015 Refugee Crisis. Asymmetrical bargaining power and functional pressure cannot explain the outcome of European integration alone. While functional interests are certainly a factor, national preferences over European integration are usually a product of the identity of the citizens in those cases where a policy issue is politicized and enters the arena of mass politics.¹⁴³ If this happens the decision-making process is no longer isolated to interest groups or state actors, and as evident from this chart, immigration was politicized:

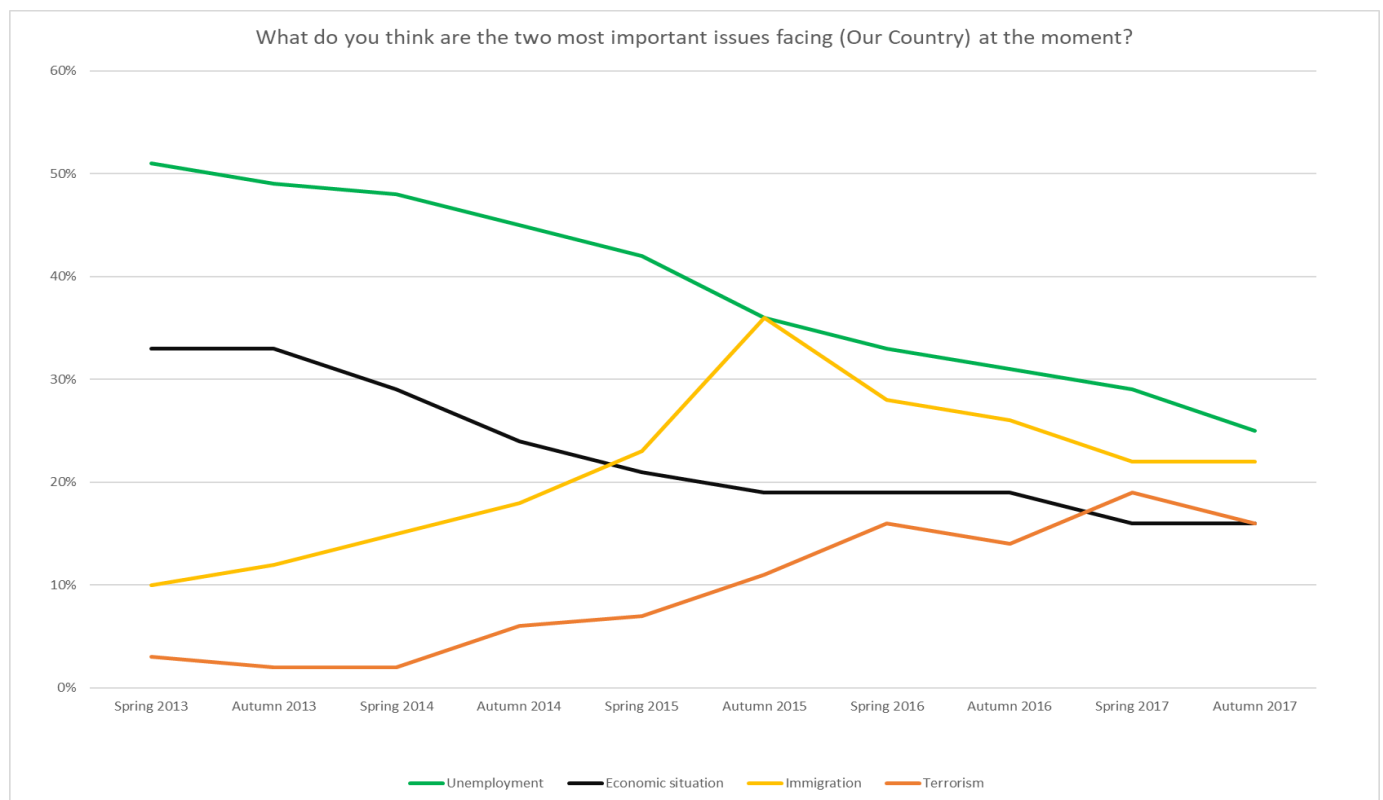


Figure 4: Data from: European Commission. "Public opinion in the European Union". In *Standard Eurobarometer 79 – 88* (Respondents had a maximum of two answers, and 16 different categories to choose from)

¹⁴² Kuhn, and Nicoli, 2020, p. 9

¹⁴³ Hooghe, and Marks, pp. 8-9

EU citizens viewed immigration, as a minor issue that was of less importance to their country in the spring of 2013. The concern steadily increased, from mid-2014 before intensifying during the 2015 Refugee Crisis, to be perceived as one of the biggest national issues tied with unemployment in the autumn of 2015, which had, by far, been the biggest concern before. Concerns about immigration thus saw an increase from 10% to 36% in two and a half years. Fear of terrorism also increased, albeit at a slower pace, but eventually became a bigger concern than the economic situation. Therefore, it is argued that the issue of immigration and terrorism had become politicized among the public, making their opinion relevant to the decision-making process on European integration in these policy areas. That an issue is politicized is not problematic for European integration by itself if the public supports the proposed changes. Furthermore, people having concerns about the issue does not necessarily have to translate into opposition against finding a common solution to mitigate it. Quite the opposite, politicization of an issue might motivate people to put pressure on the policymakers to find common solutions if people have an inclusive identity that promotes empathy with strangers.¹⁴⁴

However, the unwillingness of member states to expand European integration in the asylum policy as seen during the EU Council negotiations of a permanent and mandatory quota system for the distribution of asylum seekers, indicates that public support was low. This arguably follows the argumentation of Genschel and Jachtenfuchs (2018) that asylum and migration are seen as areas of core state power in which supranational governance often conflicts with domestic interests and triggers questions of sovereignty. The tension between EU citizens and the prospects of receiving large influxes of immigrants had even been salient before the 2015 Refugee Crisis began, and public opinion surveys by Eurobarometer show that in a majority of EU member states the respondents had negative perceptions of immigrants:

¹⁴⁴ Genschel, and Jachtenfuchs, 2021, p. 351

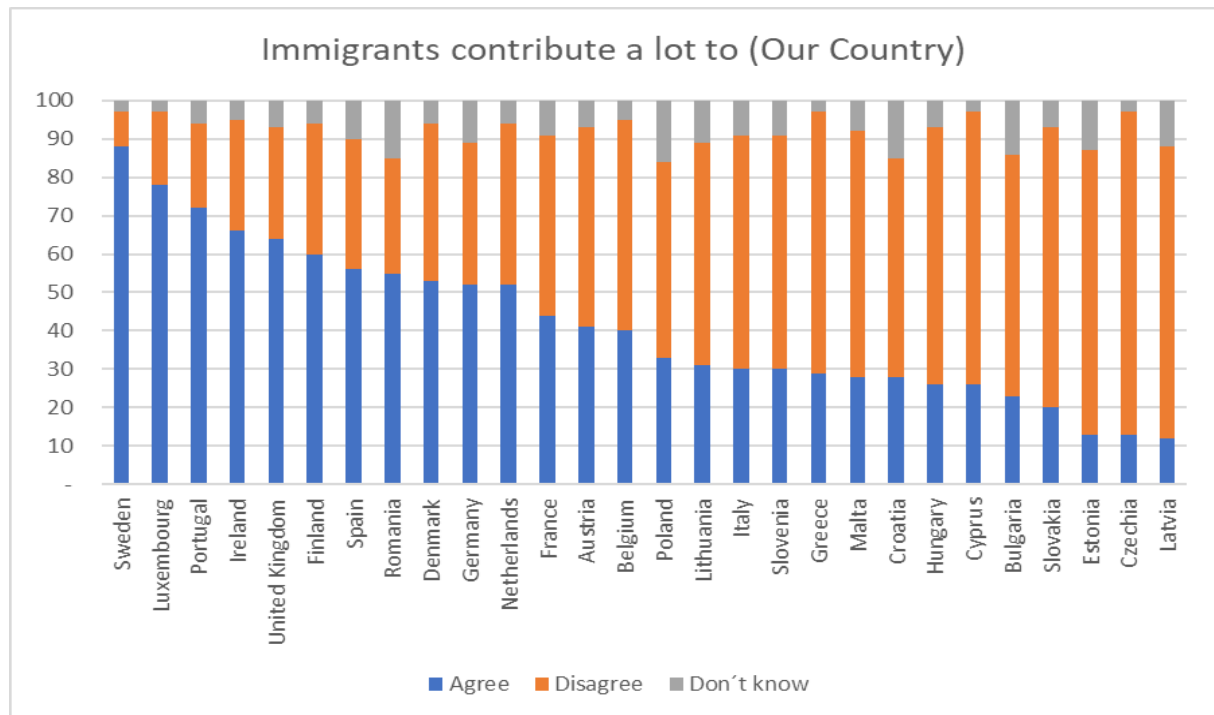


Figure 5: European Commission. (2015). "European Citizenship". In *Standard Eurobarometer 83 – Spring 2015*.

Respondents in most member states disagreed that immigrants contributed to their country. This is argued to complicate the prospects for further integration in asylum policies since anti-immigration sentiments are more likely to also be Eurosceptic.¹⁴⁵

Opinion polls also show that people in multiple member states were unsupportive of the thought that their country should help refugees at all:

¹⁴⁵ Vreese, Claes H. and Hajo G. Boomgaarden. 2005. "Projecting EU Referendums: Fear of Immigration and Support for European Integration". In *European Union Politics*, vol. 6, no. 1: 59-82, p. 72

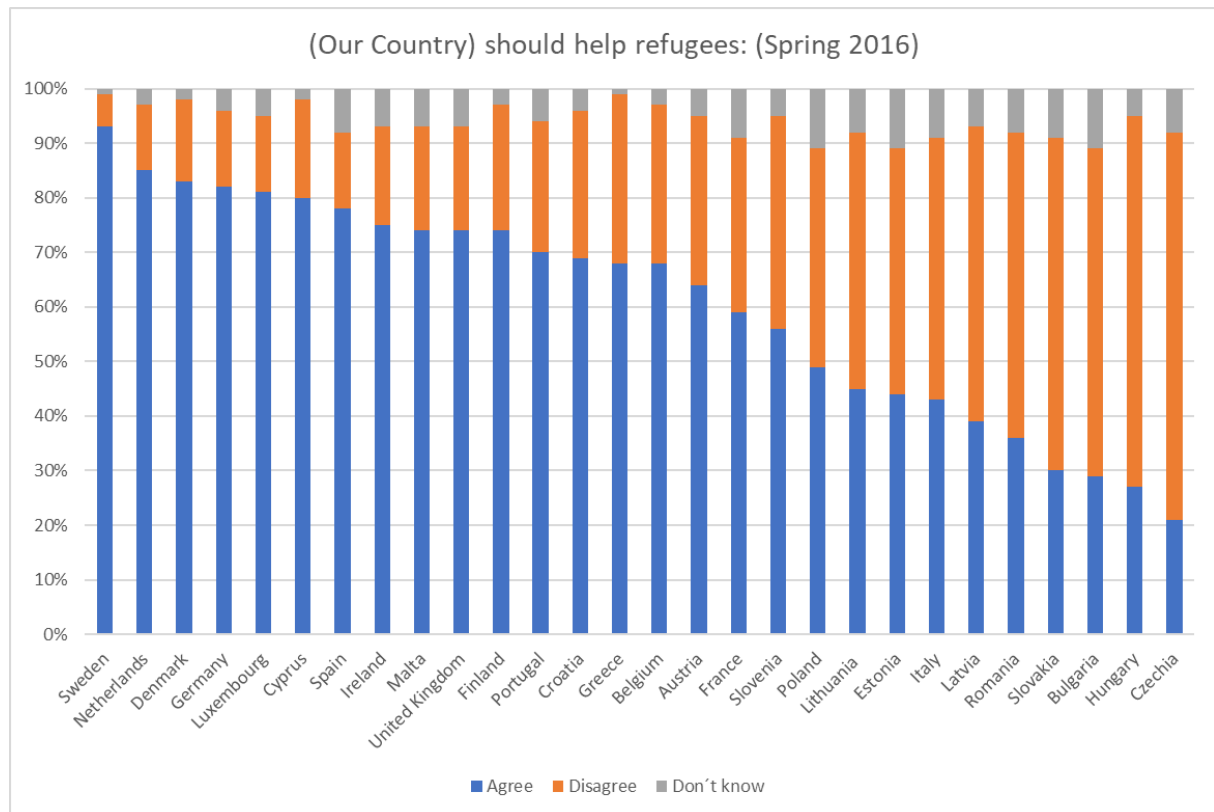


Figure 6: Data from, European Commission. (2016). "European Citizenship". In *Standard Eurobarometer 85 – Spring 2016*.

The identity and opinion of EU citizens are here argued to have had a substantial influence on the outcome of European integration during the 2015 Refugee Crisis. The perceived territorial scope of community defines who belongs to the in-group, and who belongs to the out-group. European citizens are likely to view others in terms of in-group and out-group processes, and the cultural, economic, and socio-demographic characteristics of immigration in European countries are very clear clues to defining who belongs outside of one's territorial scope of community.¹⁴⁶

Arguably, Non-Western immigrants and refugees are often perceived as belonging to the out-group. This is not problematic if the public has an identity that is inclusive of this specific out-group. However, if immigrants and refugees are perceived as threats to one's community, then the tension between identity and further integration in asylum policies is expected to become salient. Rising security concerns due to fears of migration and terrorism might also trigger a contraction of functional

¹⁴⁶ Kentmen-Cin, Cigdem, and Cengiz Erisen. 2016. "Anti-immigration attitudes and the opposition to European integration: A critical assessment". In *European Union Politics*, vol. 18, no. 1: 3-25, p. 20

scale making European integration difficult.¹⁴⁷ As evident from public opinion surveys, immigration was growing to become a major concern for EU citizens from the onset of the 2015 Refugee Crisis.

Comparing the data from *Figure 6* with that of *Figure 3* there are many similarities and connections between member states who accept a few asylum applications and member states where opinion polls show low support for helping refugees. For example, countries such as those forming the Visegrád Group and the Baltic state who accepted few applications are all among those member states where public opinion on helping refugees is lowest. This arguably reinforces the post-functionalist assumption that there is a linkage between the public opinion of the citizens and the decision-making process of state actors on European integration.¹⁴⁸

There are exceptions such as Spain, where a clear majority wanted to help refugees, but few applications were accepted. However, as can be seen from *Figure 2*, Spain did not receive many asylum applications which is probably due to the country's geographical location on the Western African and Western Mediterranean migration route, which only a fraction of the migrants used during the 2015 Refugee Crisis as evident from *Figure 1*. Furthermore, Spain was not the desired country for asylum-seekers, due to economic issues and high unemployment, even if the population was acceptive of taking in refugees.¹⁴⁹

There is also a connection between the most critical countries Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia, who all refused to abide by the temporary relocation and resettlement instrument, and the public opinion towards the establishment of a common European policy on immigration:

¹⁴⁷ Genschel, and Jachtenfuchs, 2021, p. 351

¹⁴⁸ Hooghe, and Marks, 2009, p. 23

¹⁴⁹ Soussi, Alasdair. 2015. "Safety for refugees in Spain – but at a cost" In *Al Jazeera*, 21-09-2015: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2015/9/21/safety-for-refugees-in-spain-but-at-a-cost>

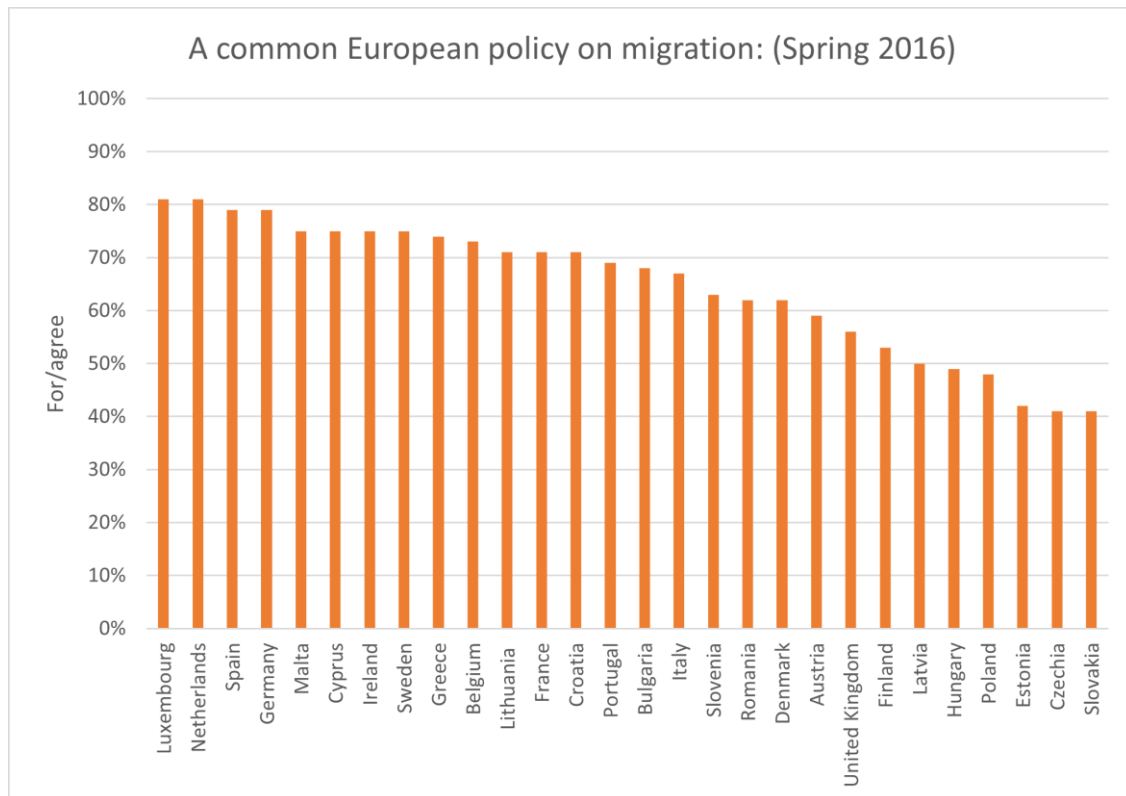


Figure 7: European Commission. (2016). "Priorities of the European Union". In *Standard Eurobarometer 85 – Spring 2016*.

Since average support is higher, compared to *Figure 6*, it is argued that several member states were supportive of a common European policy on immigration but preferred to free-ride and not contribute to the distribution of refugees, hence the opposition to a quota system. Exclusive identities are also argued to be stronger in countries where political divisions on European integration between the population are prominent.¹⁵⁰ On basis of the opinion polls, which show both clear divisions within and among member states, it is expected that political division was high, and that exclusive identities were therefore strong.

Immigration issues were thus politicized among the public as concerns about immigration and terrorism were rising, and empathy with refugees and support for burden-sharing policies was low in multiple member states. This points to salient tension between identity and integration since people with an inclusive identity, and a European identity, would be expected to have accepted to help refugees and share the burden with other member states. In accordance with post-functionalism, Eurosceptic political entrepreneurs should then seek to mobilize identities that are exclusive to the

¹⁵⁰ Mark, Gary, and Liesbet Hooghe. 2003. *National identity and support for European integration*. Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, Köln, p. 24

EU and to immigration which will then influence the decision-making process on the proposed expansion of European integration in asylum policies. This was also the case as evident from multiple debates on immigration in the EU Parliament in which the Eurosceptic, and right-wing populist parliament groups, Europe of Freedom, and Direct Democracy (EFDD), and Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF), sought to prevent more European integration in asylum policies.

Opposition was directed towards immigration and quotas, but also the EU more generally. Furthermore, research on European populism has shown that Eurosceptic and populist political entrepreneurs often construct exclusive in-groups around the notion of the common man, who is portrayed in the narrative as an unjust victim of change thus appealing to the public. These harmful changes are caused by non-native out-groups, including refugees and immigrants, and by powerful elites, such as politicians.¹⁵¹ These narratives are seen promoted in discussions by the ENF on the quota system in September 2015 where the Commission was accused of forcing a: “[...] compulsory distribution in defiance of the will of sovereign peoples who will have to suffer an influx of immigrants from countries with very different cultures and traditions.”¹⁵²

Besides immigrants, the Schengen Agreement was also targeted by the Eurosceptic parties. This is arguably not surprising since border policies are often seen as a policy area of core state power, closely linked to the question of national sovereignty by which Eurosceptic parties are opposed to handing over authority to the EU. Especially, since the external borders had collapsed and Frontex had been unable to prevent the uncontrolled immigration, the Schengen Agreement was primed and framed as the reason why member states were experiencing terrorist attacks and accused of being yet another failed EU policy of European integration which had made member states vulnerable:

“[...] terrorists now control territory from which to export their violent ideology and have access to millions of dollars to fund their activities. Within the EU, as well as the UK, their best resource is Schengen. Borderless travel facilitates weapons, explosives, and unfettered terrorist—ideology exportation as well as people.”¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Menke, Manuel, and Tim Wulf. 2021. “The Dark Side of Inspirational Past: An Investigation of Nostalgia in Right-Wing Populist Communication” In *Media and Communication*, vol. 9, no. 2: 237-249, p. 239

¹⁵² European Parliament. 2015. “Migration and refugees in Europe”. Debates, Thursday, 10 September 2015 – Strasbourg: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-8-2015-09-10-ITM-009-07_EN.html

¹⁵³ European Parliament. 2016. “Increased terrorism threat”. Debate, Thursday, 21 January, 2016 – Strasbourg: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-8-2016-01-21-ITM-004_EN.html

The ENF, therefore, called for the: “[...] suspension of the Schengen agreement and the restoration of competences for the surveillance of the external borders of the Union to each Member State.”¹⁵⁴

A clear bias was installed towards European integration and the Schengen Agreement in a debate taking place ten weeks after the Paris terrorist attack in November 2015. Parliament members from the EFDD highlighted the perceived issues with the Schengen Agreement, stating that:

“[...] part of the problem, you must understand, is that the open borders that you have created and are not willing to challenge – you do not know who has come in, you do not know where they are and you do not know how they get here – creates the last form of terrorism, the internal terrorism that the women in Cologne and Bonn and Berlin and Sweden and all other parts of Europe that suffered over New Year’s Eve will have to face. That is your problem.”¹⁵⁵

They were backed up by other parliament members from the ENF who through their narratives arguably sought to construct a perception of asylum seekers as terrorists who threatened the society, culture, and freedom of Europe, and shunned the ‘European elite’ for holding on to the belief of a functional EU which they themselves thought unachievable and they concluded that: “[...] Schengen is bankrupt! The European Union is a fiasco!”¹⁵⁶

The opinions expressed by several members in the Parliament were matched by the unwillingness of member states to abide by the Council’s decision to relocate asylum applications and arguably, reflected the domestic political conflict among EU citizens on whether to help refugees or not. An issue that was brought forward by Dutch Minister of Foreign affairs, Bert Koenders, in a speech to the Parliament on February 2nd, 2016, leading up to the discussions regarding the EU-Turkey deal, where it was highlighted that only 400 applicants had been relocated by the temporary relocation and resettlement scheme. Furthermore, he could reveal that a high number of member states had not pledged to take any refugees yet.¹⁵⁷ The quotas were already a highly disputed issue with many parliament members claiming that they were a violation of sovereignty and that they would

¹⁵⁴ European Parliament. 2015. “Recent terrorist attacks”. Debate, Wednesday, 8 July 2015 – Strasbourg: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-8-2015-07-08-ITM-009_EN.html

¹⁵⁵ European Parliament. 2016. “Increased terrorism threat”. Debate, Thursday, 21 January 2016 – Strasbourg: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-8-2016-01-21-ITM-004_EN.html

¹⁵⁶ European Parliament. 2016. “Refugee emergency, external borders control and future of Schengen – Respect for the international principle of non-refoulement – Financing refugee facility for Turkey – Increasing racist hatred and violence against refugees and migrants across Europe”. Debate, Thursday, 2 February 2016 – Strasbourg: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-8-2016-02-02-ITM-010_EN.html2016

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

encourage more refugees to seek asylum in the EU.¹⁵⁸ The public's trust in the EU also declined in the same period:

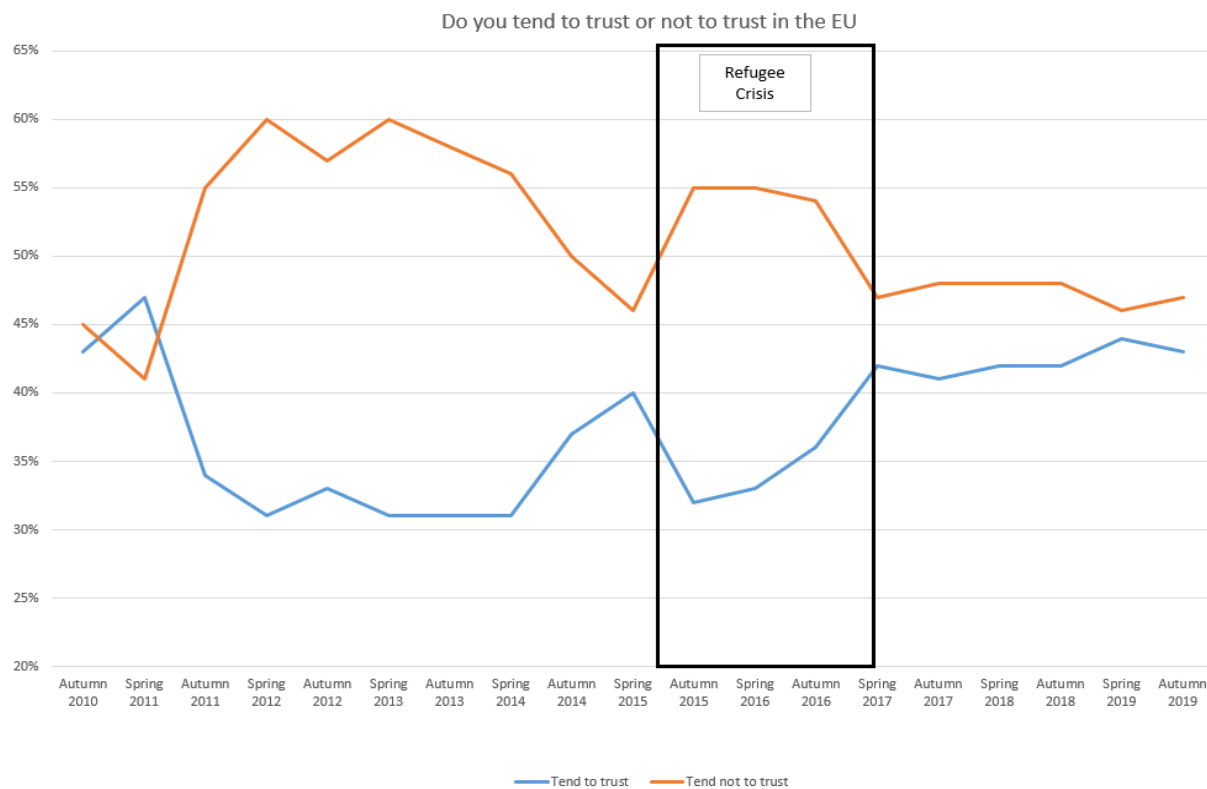


Figure 8: Data from, European Commission. "Public Opinion in the European Union". In Standard Eurobarometer 74 - 92

Public trust in the EU had been low for a long time, arguably, due to the Eurozone Crisis, but from the onset of the Refugee Crisis, public trust declined again. When contracts are incomplete, such as the temporary relocation and resettlement mechanism, trust becomes a necessity. If people do not trust the community in which they partake, it will diminish the potential for finding common ground on how to behave according to the contract, which was arguably what happened when multiple member states failed on their commitment to relocate asylum applicants from Italy and Greece.¹⁵⁹ Interestingly, when respondents were asked whether they felt like citizens of the EU, a large majority

¹⁵⁸ European Parliament. 2015. "Migration and refugees in Europe". Debates, Thursday, 10 September 2015 – Strasbourg

¹⁵⁹ Hooghe, Lenz, and Marks. 2019, pp. 61-62

still answered positively and the average opinion seemed largely unaffected by the crisis with only a small decrease in autumn of 2015:

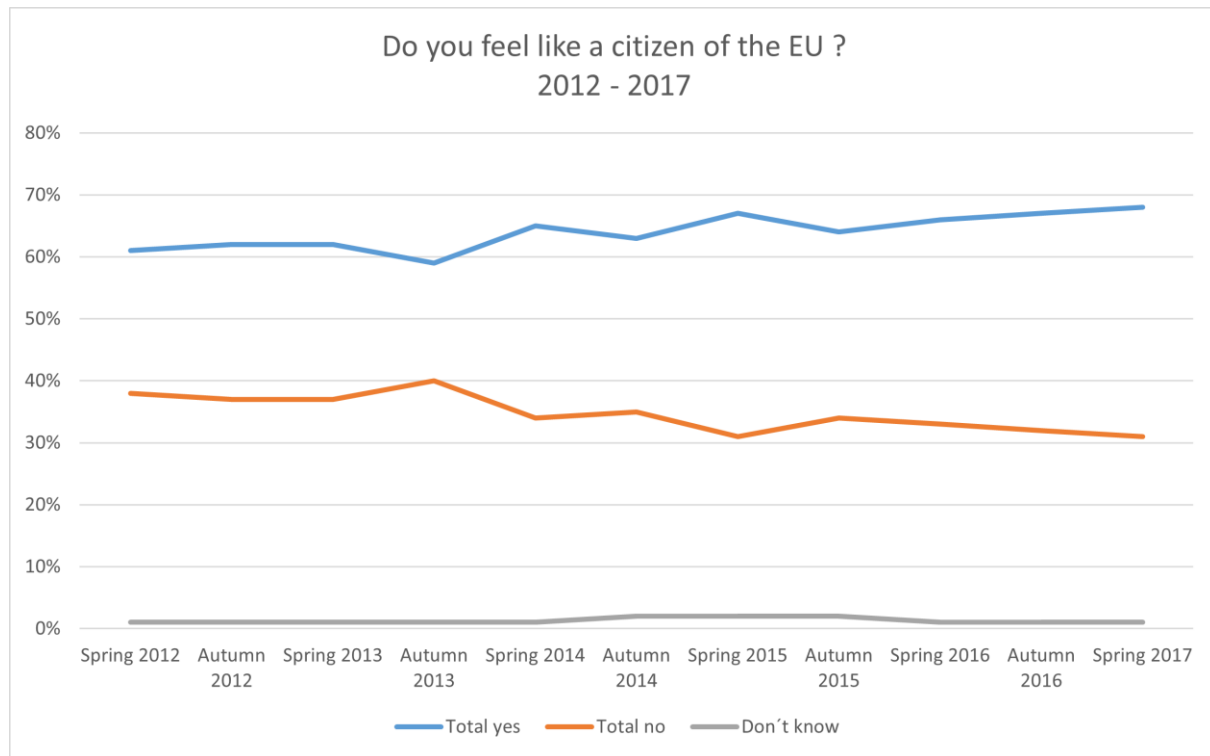


Figure 9: Data from, Standard Eurobarometer: European citizenship report 74 – 87

Arguably, the identities of EU citizens were exclusive only to immigrants, and thus Euroscepticism and a lack of trust in the EU were specifically directed towards integration in asylum policies, and not against other member states, or the EU more generally. Regardless of some attempts by hard-Eurosceptic party groups in the EU Parliament to do so.

5.1.4 The failure of solidarity and burden-sharing during the Refugee Crisis

Based on the analysis of the variables of contractual incompleteness, dilutive boundary regime, asymmetrical bargaining power, and exclusive identities it is argued that all four variables were present during the Refugee Crisis. The dilutive boundary regime facilitated by the Schengen Agreement, which combined internal debordering with deficient external borders ultimately causing external debordering as well, made the EU vulnerable to the exogenous shock of mass immigration

as would be expected from the assumption of Schimmelfennig (2021-B). EU's contractually incomplete asylum policy was ambiguous to its participants, which can potentially cause member states to interpret the rules differently if their preferences do not align.¹⁶⁰ Arguably, this was what happened during the 2015 Refugee Crisis, as there were both different functional interests, as well as different identities present among member states. Following the liberal intergovernmentalist assumption of interstate bargaining as it is promoted by Moravcsik (1993), the asymmetrical national preferences gave member states who had received few asylum seekers, bargaining leverage over those who had received many and tried to push for a permanent redistribution mechanism.¹⁶¹

The tension between identity and integration became salient and Eurosceptic exclusive identities were mobilized specifically against immigrants and further integration in asylum policies. From the post-functionalist theory by Hooghe and Marks (2009), it is argued that the politicization of immigration and terrorism moved the decision-making process into the arena of mass politics where state actors, who care about being reelected, made their decisions based on the national preferences of their electorates. The contractual incompleteness of the asylum policy combined with the negative perception of immigrants and the unwillingness of the public to help refugees is consequently, argued to be a reason, why member states could not negotiate an agreement on a permanent relocation mechanism, and why the goals of the temporary relocation and resettlement scheme were not reached by the deadline in 2017.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Hooghe, Lenz, and Marks. 2019, p. 14

¹⁶¹ Moravcsik, 1993, p. 499

¹⁶² Hooghe, and Marks, 2009, pp. 8-9

5.2. The Covid-19 Pandemic

In accordance with the research question and the most-similar system design, this chapter will analyze the variables of contractual incompleteness, dilutive boundary regime, asymmetrical bargaining power, and exclusive identities to uncover why the negotiations, on the Next-generation EU recovery fund, were successful in a show of fiscal solidarity and burden-sharing.

5.2.1 Uncoordinated responses in the pandemic's epicenter

One could argue that the openness of the EU, facilitated by the Schengen Agreement, contributed to the conditions of a supersized superspreading event. Leading up to the Covid-19 Pandemic, the EU-27 countries accounted for more than a quarter of all world trade with the largest internal market in the world.¹⁶³ In 2018, more than 2 million people crossed an internal EU border every day when going to work, 1 billion airline passengers landed or took off from within the EU, and 410 million maritime ship passengers disembarked and embarked in European ports.¹⁶⁴ Despite the danger of Covid-19 being sensed in January 2020, the EU did not convey real urgency before March 2020 and had very few capacities to do so.¹⁶⁵

Arguably, the EU did not have institutional frameworks in health and fiscal policies that were strong enough to mitigate the consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic. The health emergency systems were limited due to staff shortages and low budgets. Member states thus relied more on state-level institutions or the WHO for health information, instead of the EU.¹⁶⁶ Preparedness in the face of a health crisis was left mostly in the hands of member states, with the EU having few capacities for supranational governance. Some contracts on public health preparedness had been negotiated prior to the Covid-19 Pandemic, including a Council decision on preventing the spread of serious cross-border health threats in 2013.¹⁶⁷ However, these contracts were arguably highly incomplete. They had opaque descriptions of how member states should behave and there was little supranational governance to coordinate or prepare for a response to a health crisis of pandemic proportions. Member

¹⁶³ Eurostat Statistical Book. 2020. *The EU in the world – 2020 edition*. Belgium, Imprimerie Bietlotp, p. 78

¹⁶⁴ Eurostat. 2020. *People on the move: Statistics on mobility in Europe – 2020 edition*:
<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/digpub/eumove/index.html?lang=en>

¹⁶⁵ Herszenhorn, David M. and Sarah Wheaton. "How Europe Failed the coronavirus test – Contagion's spread is a story of complacency, overconfidence and lack of preparation" in, *Politico*, 7 April 2020
<https://www.politico.eu/article/coronavirus-europe-failed-the-test/>

¹⁶⁶ Greer, Ruijter, and Brooks, 2021, p. 757

¹⁶⁷ Decision No 1082/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2013. 2013. "on serious cross-border threats to health and repealing Decision No 2119/98/EC". In *Official Journal of the European Union* 5 November 2013, L 293/1

states themselves were responsible regarding preparing for, and responding to, public health threats and should inform the EU Commission with an update only every three years on their preparedness levels. As a consequence, the response from the member states was uncoordinated and protectionist, as unilateral measures were implemented to protect one's own population, such as reintroducing border control which disrupted vital supply chains and left citizens abroad stranded.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, no specific procedures existed at the EU level to recognize when there was a health emergency or pandemic situation, and this was left to be decided ad hoc.¹⁶⁹ When faced with a pandemic, the EU's institutional framework in health policy was simply not geared to tackle a situation in which all member states faced the same threat at the same time.¹⁷⁰ EU's supranational capacities were thus limited to complementing national policies and supporting cooperation between member states but had had few explicit health competencies to adopt legal measures on health policies.¹⁷¹

An issue with the EU's governance in fiscal policies was that it asked member states to pursue strict policies of internal devaluation and that deficits and debt were seen as failings of individual governments. Problems with this existing fiscal policy were already evident as many member states, who had suffered under the strict conditionality and debt in the past, opposed it from the beginning of the Covid-19 Pandemic.¹⁷² Specifically, the loans-based approach had been criticized by Southern European member states, such as Spain, given that it would further increase the debt to GDP ratios of the Southern European member states.¹⁷³ Member states who were already indebted prior to the Pandemic due to the Eurozone crisis as evident from this chart:

¹⁶⁸ Amand-Eeckhout, Laurence. 2021. *Building up resilience to cross-border health threats – Moving towards a European health union*. European Parliamentary Research Service:

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/690565/EPRS_BRI\(2021\)690565_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/690565/EPRS_BRI(2021)690565_EN.pdf), p. 8

¹⁶⁹ Decision No 1082/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2013. 2013. "on serious cross-border threats to health and repealing Decision No 2119/98/EC". In *Official Journal of the European Union* 5 November 2013, L 293/1

¹⁷⁰ Greer, Ruijter, and Brooks, p. 757

¹⁷¹ Naumann, Anja. "EU Response to Fighting the Coronavirus – Coordination, Support, Action – Heeding its Citizens' Calls?". In *Pandemocracy in Europe – Power, Parliaments and People in Times of COVID-19*. ED Matthias C Kettemann, and Konrad Lachmayer: 243-262, pp. 247-249

¹⁷² Greer, Ruijter, and Brooks, p. 756

¹⁷³ Genschel, and Jachtenfuchs, 2021, p. 363

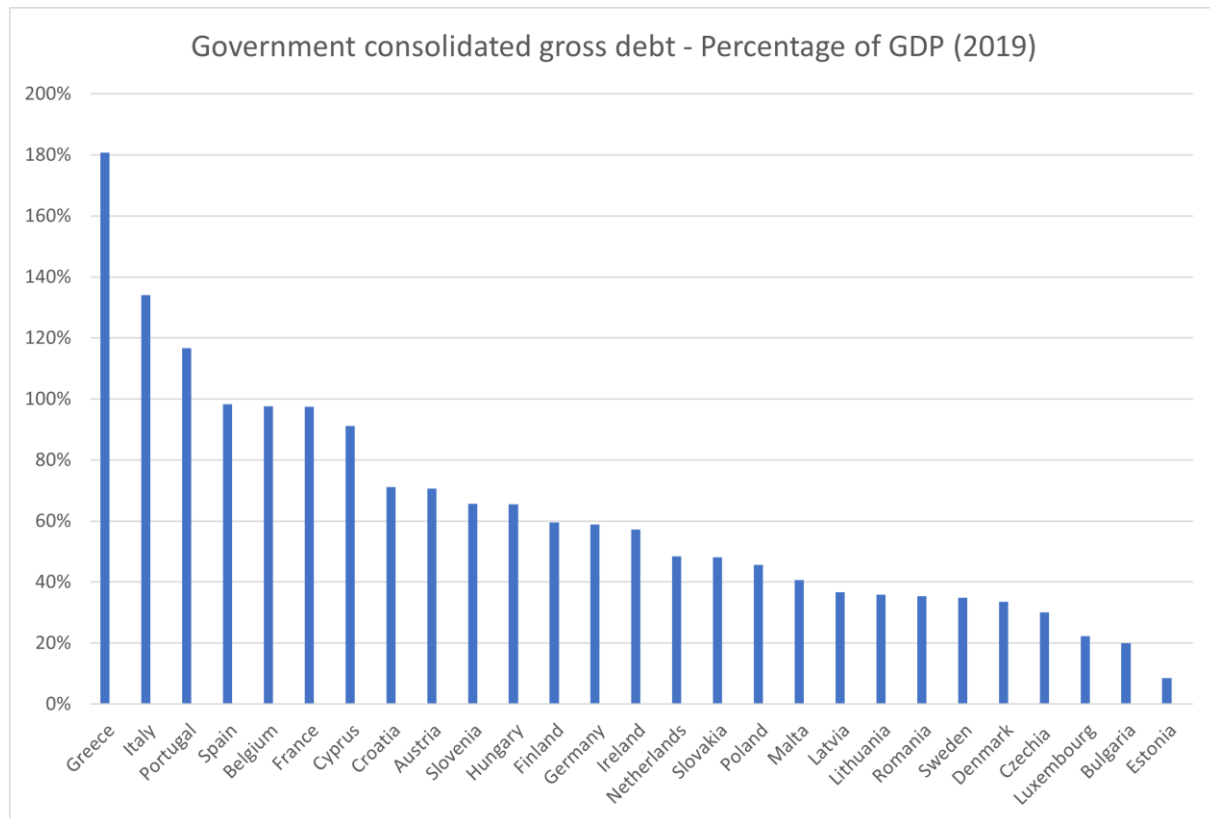


Figure 10: Eurostat Data Browser. 2022. General government gross debt. Retrieved from Eurostat website: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_17_40/default/table?lang=en

One could argue, in accordance with the argumentation of Schimmelfennig (2021-B), that the exogenous shocks of the pandemic exposed the already existing deficits of weak supranational control in the EU's dilutive boundary regime. From the onset of the Covid-19 Pandemic, the dilutive boundary regime with internal and external debordering was put under immense pressure which the EU had no capacity to manage. On March 13th, 2020, six weeks after the first confirmed Covid-19 case in France, the World Health Organization labeled Europe: "[...] the epicenter of the pandemic, with more reported cases and deaths than the rest of the world combined, apart from China."¹⁷⁴ To limit the spread of the virus, the member states, who had signed the Schengen Agreement, unanimously approved closing the external borders for all non-essential travel in and out of the EU on March 17th.¹⁷⁵ The initial effectiveness of this decision was questionable. The premise was that external rebordering could be combined with internal policy coordination to provide more security

¹⁷⁴ World Health Organization. 2020. *WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 – 13 March 2020*: <https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-mission-briefing-on-covid-19---13-march-2020>

¹⁷⁵ Schengen visa info News. 2020. *Breaking: EU Decides to Close All Schengen Borders For 30 Days*: <https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/news/breaking-eu-decides-to-close-all-schengen-borders-for-30-days/>

for member states and make the internal borders less restrictive. However, member states continued to introduce new bans on entry and border control internally.¹⁷⁶

France and Germany banned the export of personal protective equipment which many other member states were dependent on, leading to shortages of vital equipment. One of the hardest-hit countries was Italy, which lacked basic protective equipment for its medical staff and had to depend on deliveries from China, as other member states hoarded equipment for themselves. Furthermore, there were no adequate health security funds for managing the financial and health-related issues.¹⁷⁷ The dilutive boundary regime began taking the shape of a disintegrative regime where internal borders were rebordered, as member states temporarily abolished the Schengen Agreement, closed their internal borders, made export bans, hoarded essential equipment, and generally engaged in self-helping behavior reminiscent of that shown during the 2015 Refugee Crisis.¹⁷⁸ Behavior that the President of the Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, was disappointed with as evident from her opening speech at the European Parliament debate on March 26th, 2020. Addressing the member states regarding the pandemic, she blamed them for only looking after themselves and not showing solidarity in a crisis that necessitated coordination and burden-sharing.¹⁷⁹

The contractual incompleteness of the EU's health crisis response and emergency fiscal policy had been exposed by the Covid-19 Pandemic. One could argue that this created functional pressures for more European integration with more complete and comprehensive contracts that incorporated emergency fiscal policy that would provide economic support to those member states who needed it, without indebting them, as well as a larger budget for public health preparedness. However, from a post-functionalist perspective, the highly incomplete nature of these contracts made these policy areas very ambiguous. When this is the case, the sociality of governance is expected to influence the outcome since cooperation or defection regarding the contract becomes a matter of judgment. A mutual perception between the member states on how to behave is thus necessary for cooperation on incomplete contracts.¹⁸⁰ Consequently, the EU Commission was tasked with preparing a comprehensive package to mitigate the economic consequence of the pandemic and ensure future health preparedness. On May 27th, 2020, this package was presented by von der Leyen in the EU

¹⁷⁶ Genschel, and Jachtenfuchs, 2021, pp. 356-357

¹⁷⁷ Forman, Rebecca, Rifat Atun, Martin McKee, and Elias Mossialos. 2020. "12 Lessons learned from the management of the coronavirus pandemic". In *Health Policy* 124: 577-580, p. 578

¹⁷⁸ Schimmelfennig, 2021-b, p. 325

¹⁷⁹ European Parliament. 2020. "European coordinated response to the COVID-19 outbreak". Debates, Thursday, 26 March 2020 – Brussels: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2020-03-26_EN.html#creitem19

¹⁸⁰ Hooghe, Lens, and Marks, 2019, p. 16

Parliament: “[...] the Commission is today proposing a new recovery instrument called NextGenerationEU, worth EUR 750 billion. It will sit on top of a revamped long-term EU budget of EUR 1.1 trillion.”¹⁸¹ The comprehensive recovery instrument was planned to distribute 500 billion euros in grants, and 250 billion in loans, and it would be financed by the EU member states establishing joint debt. Furthermore, it would prepare the EU for future health crises by increasing the EU’s capacities to work with member states on protection against health threats, develop vaccines, modernize health systems, and educate health personnel.¹⁸²

While the proposal was received with support from a majority of the EU Parliament it met opposition from the newly established far-right, and Eurosceptic ‘Identity and Democracy Group’ (ID) which had been founded in 2019 by members of the far-right groups of the prior parliamentary term. Speaking on behalf of the ID group, Jörg Meuthen argued that the recovery instrument was madness and akin to throwing away taxpayers’ money: “They just throw the money – not yours, but the taxpayer’s money – like there is no tomorrow. What you are doing is completely irresponsible. It is knowledge-free voodoo economics that you burden the citizens with here. It is both monetary and fiscal hara-kiri.”¹⁸³ The rest of the parliament generally applauded the proposal for more integration in European fiscal and health policies to mitigate the contractual incompleteness that had been exposed by the Covid-19 Pandemic. Though concerns were expressed by the thought of establishing joint debt.

However, in accordance with the argumentation of Hooghe and Marks (2009), it was clear that the Eurosceptic ID group was preparing to mobilize public opinion against more integration in what they perceived as financial suicide and a burden on the EU citizens. As seen during the 2015 Refugee Crisis, the common man, paying his taxes, was once again portrayed as an unjust victim of the EU’s irresponsible policies.¹⁸⁴ Reflecting the opinion of the ID Group, the proposal to establish joint debt and primarily provide non-repayable grants was met with opposition from multiple member states who insisted on a loan-based approach.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ European Parliament. 2020. “EU Recovery package”. Debates, Thursday, 27 Maj 2020 – Brussels: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2020-05-27-ITM-009_EN.html

¹⁸² European Union. Next Generation EU: https://europa.eu/next-generation-eu/index_en,

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Menke, Manuel, and Tim Wulf, 2021, p. 239

¹⁸⁵ Reuters. 2020. “EU ‘frugals’ formally oppose Merkel-Macron plan for coronavirus grants”: <https://www.reuters.com/article/france-germany-eu-frugals-idINKBN22Z0GL>

5.2.2 Unequal human and economic consequences

The negotiations of the Next Generation EU recovery instrument were difficult. The economic and human consequences of the pandemic varied hugely between member states. This was also highlighted by the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, who specifically emphasized that the idea of financing loans and grants by borrowing from the capital market and establishing joint debt was very hard to accept for some member states.¹⁸⁶ Because the pandemic had impacted member states to varying degrees, the EU Commission proposed that the distribution of non-repayable financial support in the form of grants should be done in a way that benefitted those member states who were hit the hardest by the pandemic. Multiple factors were considered but the primary ones were GDP, population size, and unemployment rate. Secondary factors like the stability of labor markets in the wealthier member states were also considered.¹⁸⁷ Based on these calculations they came to the following distribution:

¹⁸⁶ European Parliament. 2020. “Conclusions of the European Council meeting of 19 June 2020 – Preparation of the European Council meeting of 17-18 July 2020”. Debate, Wednesday, 8 July 2020 – Brussels: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2020-07-08_EN.html

¹⁸⁷ European Commission Brussels, 2.6.2020 COM(2020) 408 final/3 Annexes 1 to 3. 2020. “Annexes to the Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council - establishing a Recovery and Resilience Facility”

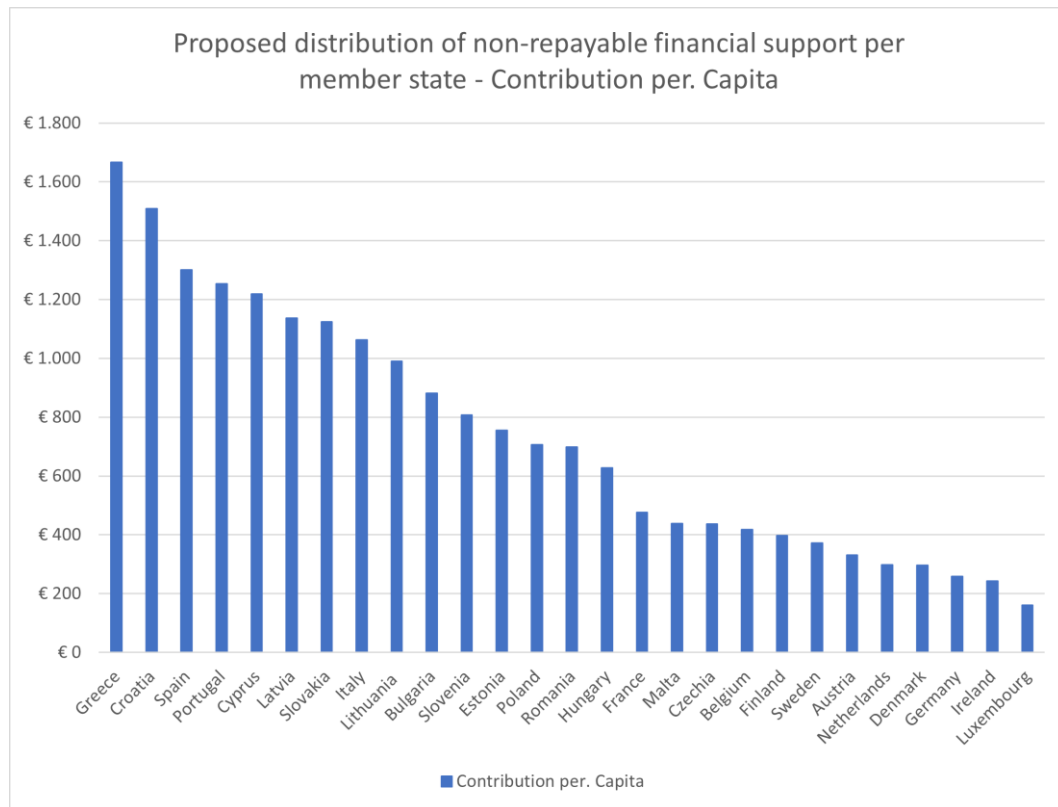


Figure 11: Data from European Commission Brussels, 2.6.2020 COM(2020) 408 final/3 Annexes 1 to 3. 2020. "Annexes to the Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council - establishing a Recovery and Resilience Facility", & - Eurostat Data Browser. 2022. Population on 1 January. Retrieved from Eurostat: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00001/default/table?lang=en>

The main beneficiaries would thus be predominantly the Southern European member states. These were also the ones who had suffered the most from the pandemic economically, in terms of real GDP growth:

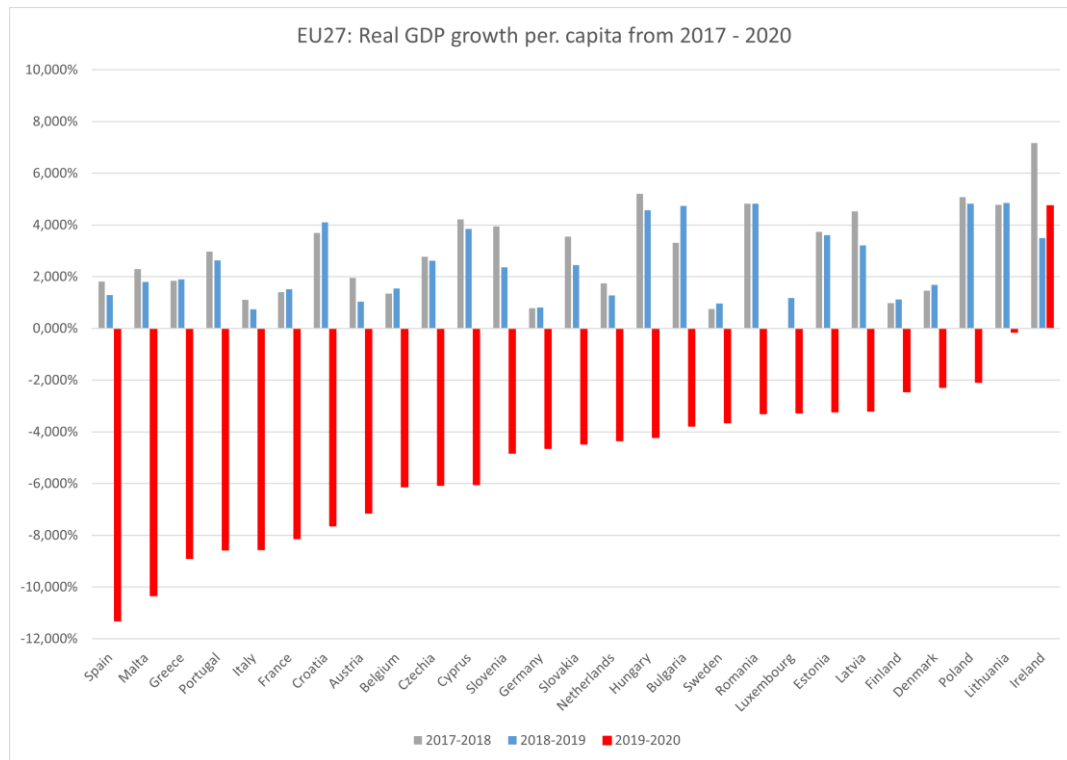


Figure 12: Data from Eurostat Data Browser. 2022. Real GDP per capita. Retrieved from Eurostat: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_08_10/default/bar?lang=en

Compared to previous years, the growth of the real GDP, that is the total final output of goods and services produced by an economy within a year, went from a positive to negative growth in every member state, except for Ireland. From a liberal intergovernmentalist perspective and in the context of intergovernmental bargaining, it can be derived from this development that the unequal impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic, made the Next Generation EU recovery instrument more necessary for the Southern European member states, who were also the main beneficiaries of grants, as seen in *Figure 11*, compared to the Western and some Eastern European member states. The economic impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic was differentiated for multiple reasons. For example, countries with economies that were heavily dependent on tourism were arguably more affected due to the internal and external rebordering that restricted the movement of people by preventing non-essential travel. This is also evident when looking at the share of GDP from travel and tourism in the EU:

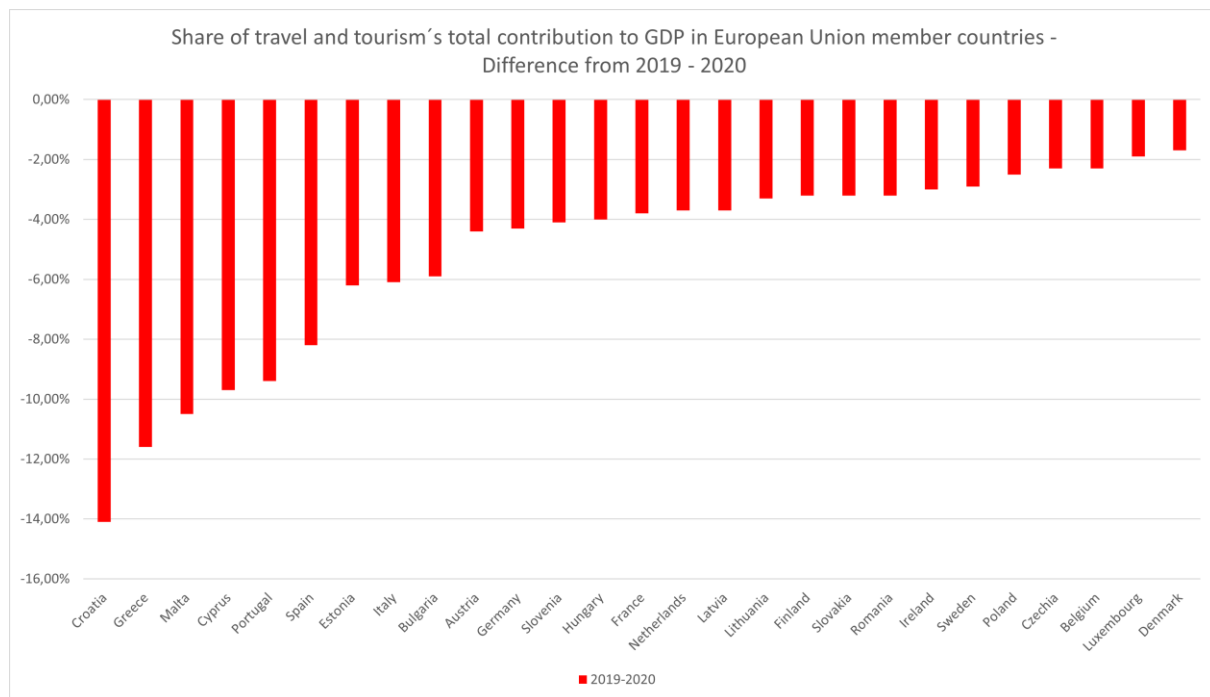


Figure 13: Statista Research Department. 2022. Share of travel and tourism's total contribution to GDP in European Union member countries (EU28) in 2019 and 2020. Retrieved from Statista: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1228395/travel-and-tourism-share-of-gdp-in-the-eu-by-country/>.

Southern European member states with a large proportion of their GDP coming from the tourism sector were more severely impacted by the pandemic than member states less dependent on the tourist industry. These countries were also predominantly those who would benefit the most from the proposed distribution of non-repayable grants in the Next Generation EU recovery instrument, as seen in *Figure 11*.

When negotiating for further European integration with the establishment of a recovery fund through mutual debt and by delegating authority to the EU to manage and distribute the funds at the supranational level, it is expected that the Southern European member states were in a weaker bargaining position. Just like frontline and destination countries during the 2015 Refugee Crisis faced a more severe impact on asylum applicants, so did the Southern European member states face a more severe economic impact during the pandemic. Especially given the economic decline of the tourist industry. Contrastingly, the economic preferences of rational state actors and interest groups in the richer Western European member states, who were less impacted by the pandemic, are expected to be unwilling to make an agreement above the lowest common denominator in accordance with the liberal intergovernmentalist theory of Moravcsik (1993).

To some extent, this was also the pattern that was seen leading up to, and during the EU Council negotiations on July 17th and 21st, 2020. The four-day-long negotiations were highly conflictual, and a significant amount of flexibility was necessary to find a compromise. As expected, a group of richer member states, whose economies had been less impacted by the pandemic and who would receive a smaller proportion of the proposed recovery package, were less fond of the idea to establish mutual debt to finance the recovery of other member states. Especially, opposed were the countries of Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Austria, the so-called ‘frugal four’ also joined by Finland, who initially refused the proposal of establishing joint debt and providing grants. Before entering the negotiations, on July 17th, 2020, they insisted on a loans-based approach as they had done since the Next Generation EU recovery fund was first proposed.¹⁸⁸ Demands that were arguably not surprising since they would benefit less from the agreement and given that integration in fiscal policy is considered a core resource of sovereign governance which had met similar resistance during the Eurozone crisis.¹⁸⁹

However, despite the conflictual preferences of member states and the unequal bargaining power between them, a compromise that maintained the fundamentals of the original proposal was found. Addressing the EU Parliament, on July 23rd, 2020, two days after the negotiations in the EU Council had ended, the Council President, Charles Michel, could announce that for the first time in European history, a supranational agreement on borrowing collectively to finance expenditure had been made. A majority vote had not been necessary to push the agreement through as had been the case during the 2015 Refugee Crisis on the negotiations on a temporary relocation and resettlement scheme. All 27 member states had endorsed the agreement unanimously. A compromise of solidarity had been found where 390 billion euros would be provided in grants and 360 billion in loans, compared to the original proposal of 500 billion in grants and 250 billion in loans.¹⁹⁰

The frugal four-plus Finland, who had initially demanded strict conditionality and a loan-based approach, agreed to a scaling down of the original grants and the implementation of a system in which a beneficiary should prepare a recovery and resilience plan. The plan should then be assessed by the EU Commission and the usage of grants monitored according to that plan. Future payment could then

¹⁸⁸ Genschel, and Jachtenfuchs, 2021, p. 364

¹⁸⁹ Genschel, and Jachtenfuchs, 2019, p. 179

¹⁹⁰ European Parliament. 2020. “Conclusions of the extraordinary European Council meeting of 17-21 July 2020”. Debate, Thursday 23 July, 2020 – Brussels: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2020-07-23-ITM-008_EN.html

be subject to suspension if another member state considered that the relevant milestones and targets were not reached.¹⁹¹

From a bargaining perspective, it is arguably a surprising outcome of European integration that such an expansive and comprehensive agreement on economic burden-sharing and fiscal solidarity between member states was accepted. Especially considering the asymmetrical bargaining power between member states due to the differentiated economic impact of the pandemic, the unequal distribution of grants, and the depressing history of solidarity in past crises. With the contractual incompleteness of health and fiscal policies, combined with asymmetrical bargaining power and divergent preferences of member states, ‘failing forward’ would arguably have been an obvious scenario. As seen during the 2015 Refugee Crisis where the negotiating parties were unable to reach an agreement over the lowest common denominator, resulting in yet another incomplete contract.¹⁹²

On top of the economic costs, the pandemic also had severe human consequences, as the death toll started to climb following the growing infection numbers:

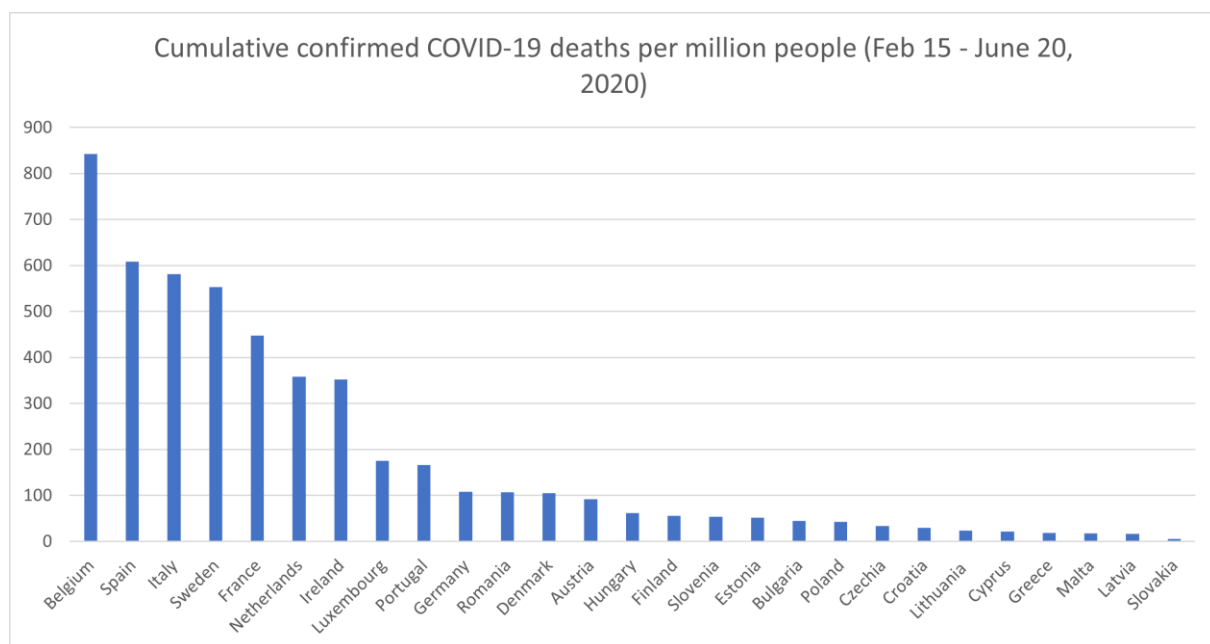


Figure 14: Our World in Data. 2022. Cumulative confirmed COVID-19 death per million people. Retrieved from Our World in Data: <https://ourworldindata.org/explorers/coronavirus-data-explorer?facet=none&uniformYAxis=0&Metric=Confirmed+deaths&Interval=Cumulative&Relative+to+Population=true&Color+by+test+positivity=false>

¹⁹¹ Sapir, André. 2020. “Why has COVID-19 hit different European Union economies so differently?”. In *Policy Contribution Issue*, no. 18, p. 2

¹⁹² Scipioni, 2018-B, p. 1359

In this case, it is important to consider that due to varying protocols and challenges in the attribution of the cause of death, the number of confirmed deaths may not accurately represent the true number of deaths caused by Covid-19. However, it does show that Sweden and the Netherlands, which had strong bargaining positions from an economic perspective, as can be seen in *Figure 12*, had a weaker bargaining position from a health perspective, as their death toll was high. This could have made these countries more willing to show flexibility in their preferences during the negotiations of the Next Generation EU recovery instrument. This follows the argumentation of liberal intergovernmentalism, that states are driven primarily by economic interests.¹⁹³ Arguably, national leaders are expected to have an interest in mitigating the human costs of the pandemic, to prevent this from damaging their economies. Still, it does not sufficiently explain why countries such as Denmark, Finland, and Austria, which suffered neither severe economic nor human costs due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, would agree to establish joint debt for the benefit of predominantly Southern European member states. Especially considering that these countries had relatively little governance consolidated debt, as evident from *Figure 10*.

5.2.3 Fiscal solidarity and European identity

From the post-functional perspective of Hooghe and Marks (2009), the outcome of more European integration in health and fiscal policies would only have been possible in the absence of exclusive identities. Arguably, if Eurosceptic movements had been successful in mobilizing exclusive identities as the pandemic exposed contractual incompleteness and increased security concerns, then public opinion would be opposed to the decision of establishing joint debt to offer grants and loans to other EU member states. In that case, the outcome would have been non-decision and perhaps even disintegration as state actors would be predisposed to follow the exclusive opinions of their electorates. As was also the case during the 2015 Refugee Crisis, an issue must first be politicized in the arena of mass politics, and tension between identity and integration must be salient if political entrepreneurs are to mobilize it against European integration.

From the onset of the Covid-19 Pandemic, public concerns about health and the economy were immediately politicized:

¹⁹³ Hooghe, and Marks, 2019, p. 1116

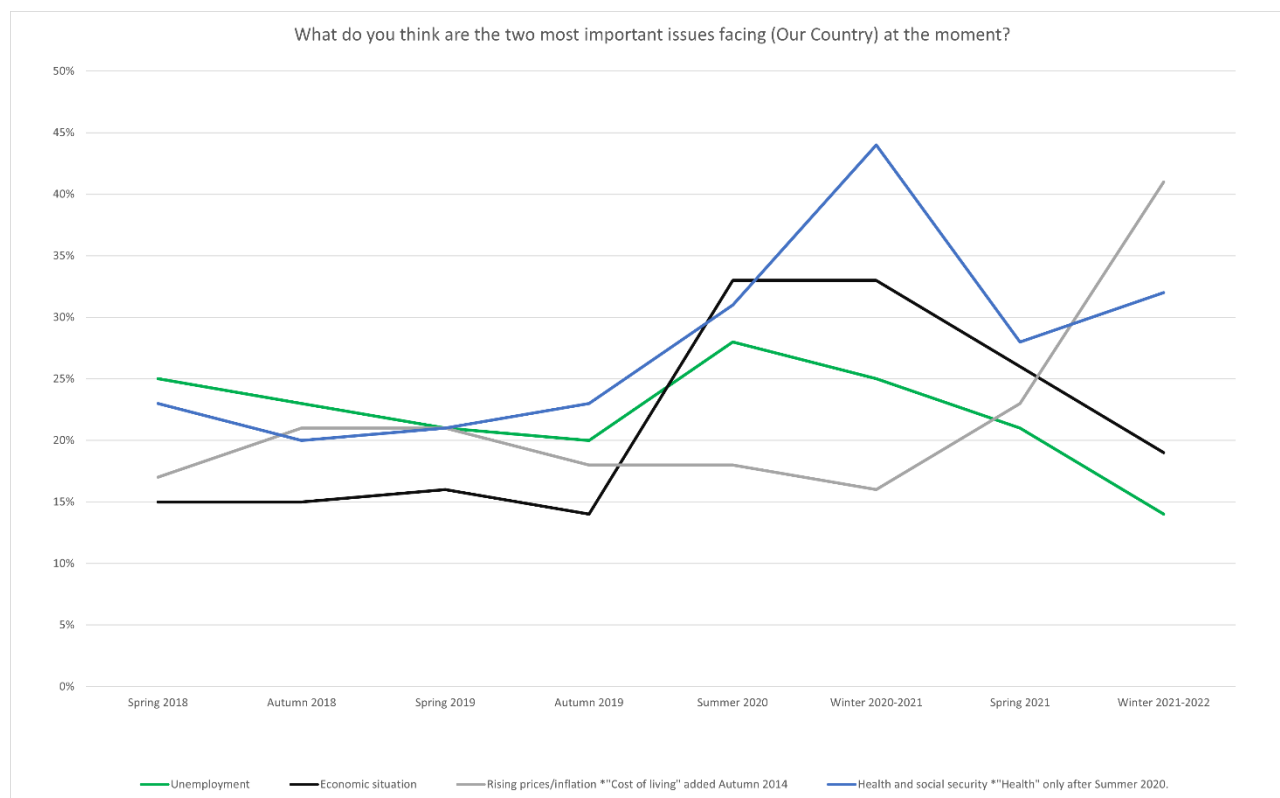


Figure 15: Data from: European Commission. "Public Opinion in the European Union". In *Standard Eurobarometer 89 – 96*. (Respondents had a maximum of two answers, and 15 different categories to choose from. Health, Unemployment, Economic situation, and Rising/Inflation/Cost of living, saw the biggest changes.)

As evident from the chart, 'Health' quickly grew to become one of the biggest concerns of EU citizens. Peaking in the winter of 2020-2021, almost 45% of all respondents chose health as their first or second-biggest concern out of 15 different answer possibilities. Concerns about the economic situation and unemployment also increased and remained high during the first year of the crisis. Presumably, because people initially feared for their jobs and the economy in their country as governments commenced strict national lockdowns. Health concerns then began declining around the spring of 2021. At the same time as the distribution of the first vaccines started.¹⁹⁴ Simultaneously, concerns about rising prices, inflation, and cost of living increased dramatically. A development that is continuing at the time of writing this thesis.

The level of concern for health and economic issues expressed in the public opinion survey indicates that the issue was politicized in the arena of mass politics, making public opinion relevant to the decision-making process. However, compared to the 2015 Refugee Crisis, it was arguably more

¹⁹⁴ Danish Medicines Agency. 2021. *First COVID-19 vaccine authorized in the European Union – 1 March 2021*: <https://laegemiddelstyrelsen.dk/en/news/2020/first-covid-19-vaccine-authorised-in-the-european-union/>

difficult for Eurosceptic parties to mobilize exclusive identities against more European integration in health and fiscal policies. In contrast to the Refugee Crisis, there were no foreign and culturally dissimilar people that challenged the European and national identity. Instead, far-right Parliament members from the ID Group directed their focus toward mobilizing the economic concerns that were present at the time of negotiating the Next Generation EU as evident from *Figure 15*.

When the Next Generation EU was first proposed on May 27th, 2020, the collective response from the ID Group blamed the Commission for trying to push an agreement that lacked a legal basis and would first be credit-based and then tax-refinanced, emphasizing their opinion of the proposal by calling it “[...] completely insane. The price to be paid by the citizens of the Union for this madness will be enormous.”¹⁹⁵ Similar to the 2015 Refugee Crisis, the common man was highlighted as the victim of the agreement given that they would have to pay its, presumably, enormous costs. The political entrepreneurs of the far-right would continue to promote this narrative during the discussions of the recovery fund, arguably, to construct tension between the public and what they perceived as being a contraction of national sovereignty over fiscal policies. More generally, they argued that joint debt would be a new step toward a European federal state and that member states would have to reduce pensions and health expenditures to finance it. They proposed that solutions were better found at the national level and the EU was framed as the reason for the pandemic, as being a part of a general problem, which was: “[...] the idea of internationalization and globalization [...]”.¹⁹⁶

Regardless of the efforts of the Eurosceptic far-right to prime, frame, and cue European integration in fiscal policies as an accelerator of economic problems, public support for fiscal solidarity was high according to surveys:

¹⁹⁵ European Parliament. 2020. “EU Recovery package”. Debates, Thursday, 27 May 2020 – Brussels: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2020-05-27-ITM-009_EN.html

¹⁹⁶ European Parliament. 2020. “Conclusions of the European Council meeting of 19 June 2020 – Preparation of the European Council meeting of 17-18 July 2020”. Debate, Wednesday, 8 July 2020 – Brussels: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2020-07-08_EN.html

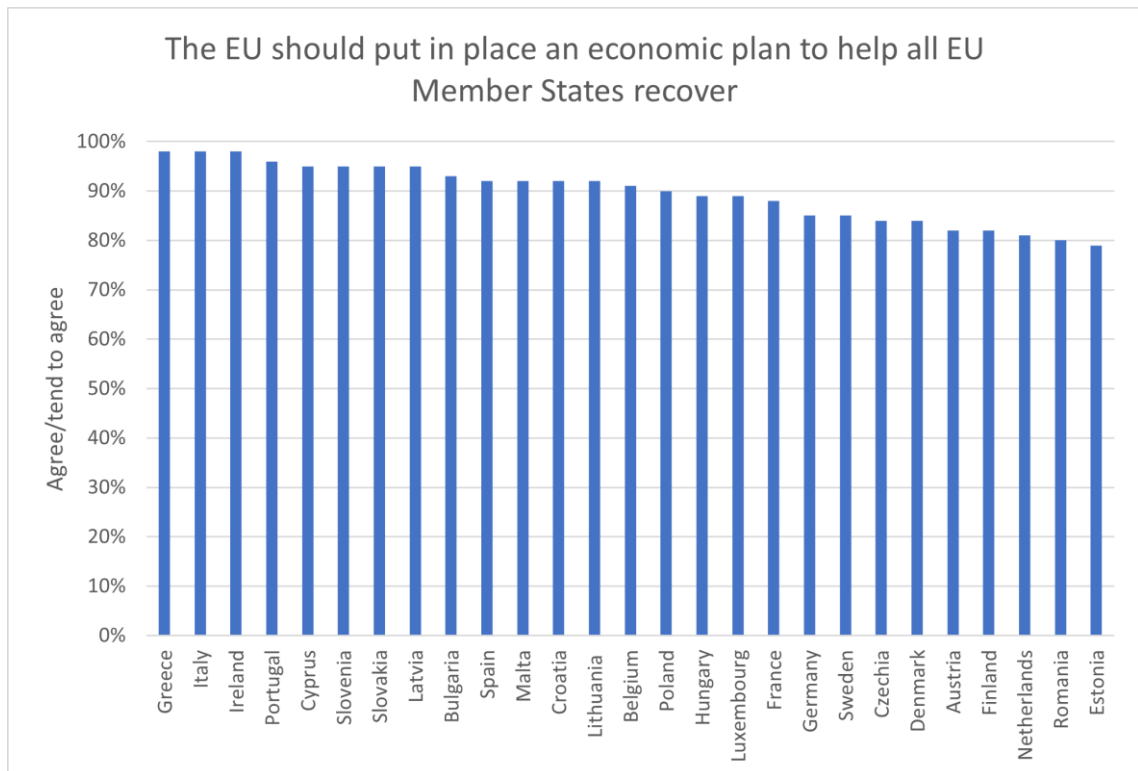


Figure 16: Data from European Commission. (2020). "Summer 2020: the EU and the coronavirus outbreak". In *Standard Eurobarometer 93 – Spring 2020*

As evident from this chart, neither domestic nor transnational political conflict was salient in the summer of 2020 shortly before the negotiations of the Next Generation EU. While public opinion in the frugal four-plus Finland was at the low end of the spectrum, there was still a clear majority of respondents who supported the notion of establishing an economic plan to help all member states recover from the Covid-19 Pandemic. A very different show of solidarity than what was shown during the 2015 Refugee Crisis, where respondents were highly divided on the question of whether their country should help refugees, as seen in *Figure 6*.

Furthermore, both the Refugee Crisis and the Eurozone Crisis had severe implications for the respondent's trust in the EU. However, the Covid-19 Pandemic caused trust in the EU to increase and for the first time in a decade a majority of the respondents showed trust in the EU:

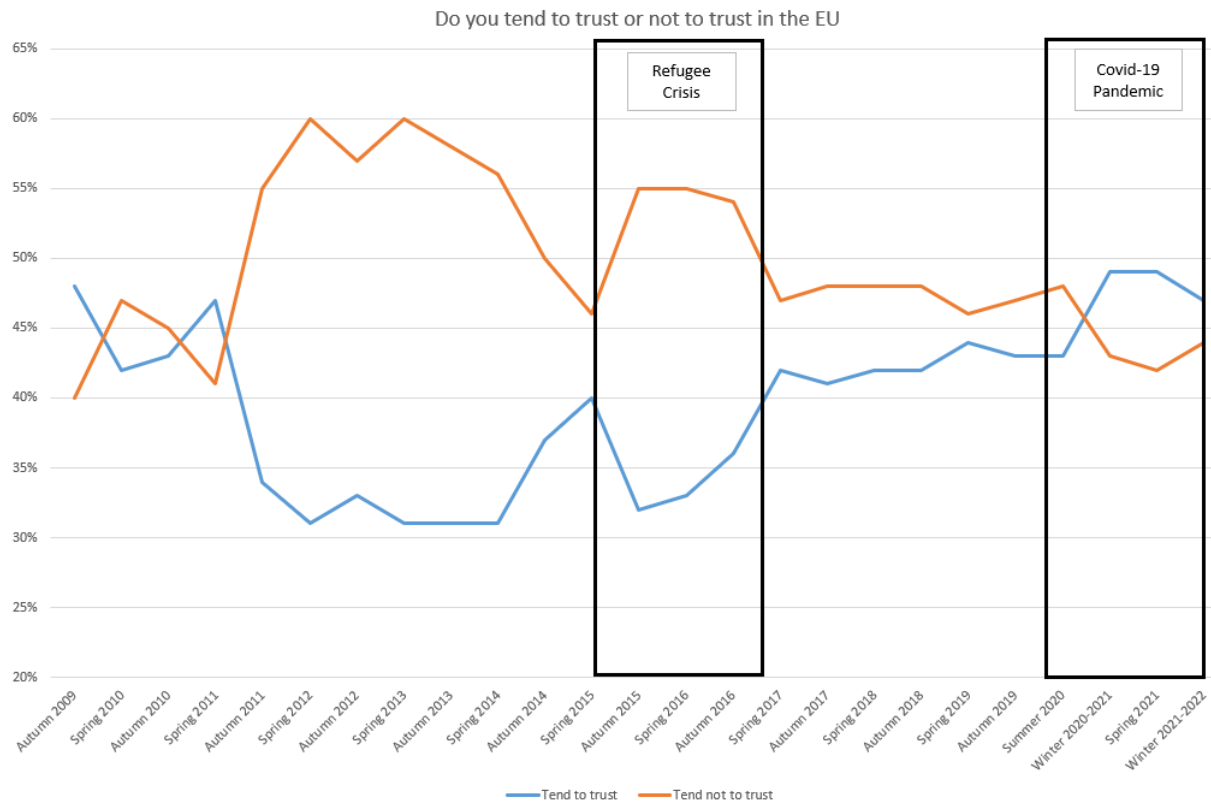


Figure 17: Data from, European Commission. (2020). "Public Opinion in the European Union". In Standard Eurobarometer 72 - 96 (respondents answering "don't know" are not included)

It is important to mention that the UK left the EU in 2020, and is thus no longer represented in the Eurobarometer surveys, which can explain some, but not the entire increase in trust towards the EU. As such, it seems that despite the negative developments in public opinion towards the EU, which one has come to expect during a crisis, the Covid-19 Pandemic had an adverse positive effect shown by the highest measured trust rating since 2008, and for the first time in almost a decade the public's trust towards the EU was higher than distrust.

Generally, when comparing public opinion during the Covid-19 Pandemic to the 2015 Refugee Crisis, a different pattern is visible as illustrated by a collection of opinion polls:

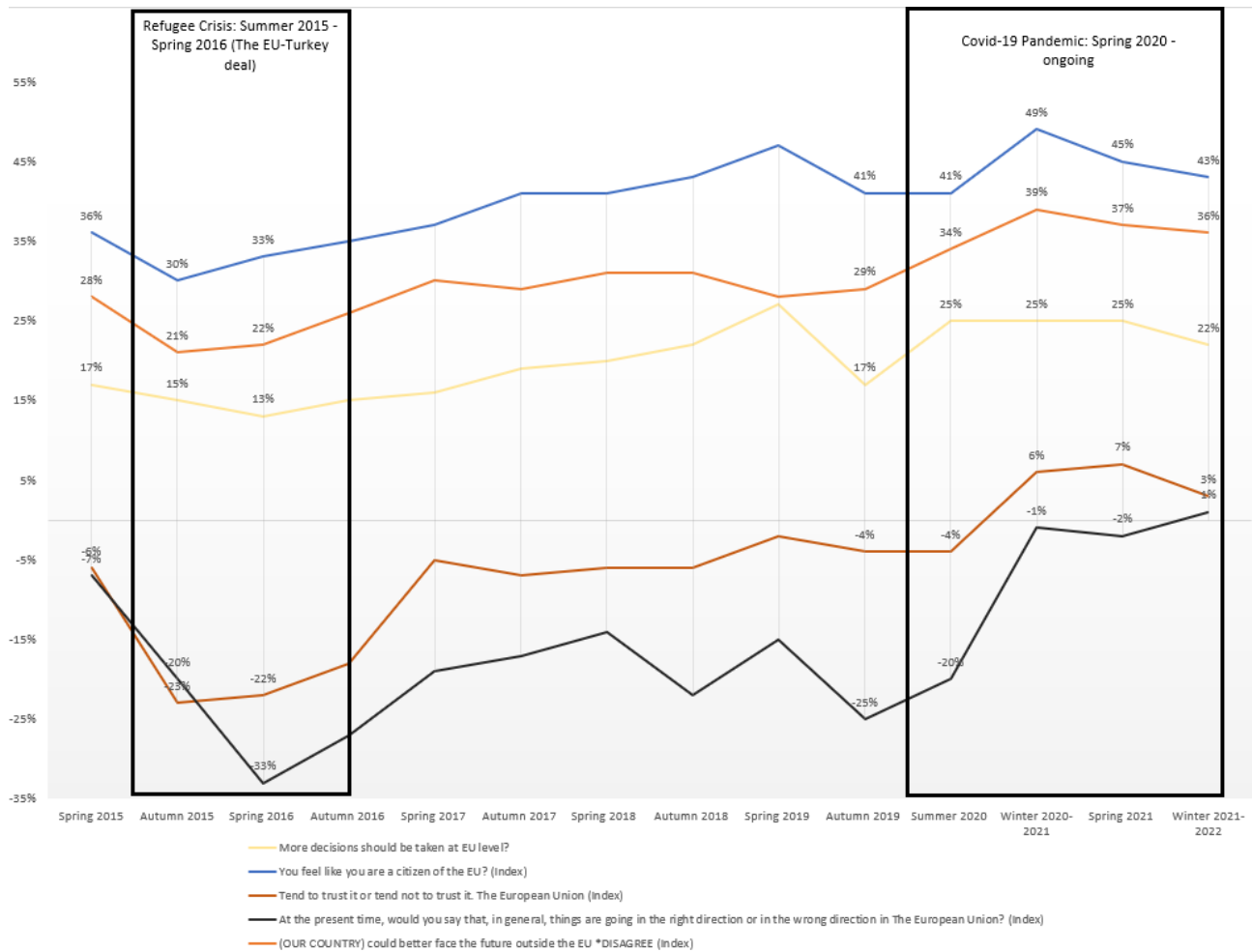


Figure 18: Data from: European Commission. (2020). "Public Opinion in the European Union". In Standard Eurobarometer 83 – 96, & European Commission. (2020). "European citizenship". In Standard Eurobarometer, 83 – 96

The index number is used in this chart, showing the percentage difference between positive and negative answers. As such, an index number of zero percent indicates an equal division between negative and positive responses. As evident from the chart, public opinion increased in every category from the previous year during the Covid-19 Pandemic compared to the 2015 Refugee Crisis where it decreased. Overall, public opinion towards the EU was also much higher during the Covid-19 Pandemic. With the combination of high public opinion towards the EU and high levels of support for an emergency plan to help all EU member states recover from the pandemic, it is argued that tension between EU citizens' identity and European integration was not salient during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Following the argumentation of Hooghe and Marks (2009), salient tension is a necessary precondition for the mobilization of exclusive identities. Eurosceptic political entrepreneurs need the tension to be salient if they are to construct and mobilize exclusive identities against European integration. As such, it can be argued that a reason why the Covid-19 Pandemic resulted in the

successful negotiations of an agreement with high levels of solidarity and burden-sharing between member states, was because the tension between identity and European integration was never salient resulting in the absence of exclusive identities.

5.2.4 The success of fiscal solidarity and burden-sharing during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Based upon the analysis of the variables of contractual incompleteness, dilutive boundary regime, asymmetrical bargaining power, and exclusive identities it is argued that only three were present during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Before the pandemic, the dilutive boundary regime of the Schengen Agreement was defined by internal and external debordering and the high levels of integration between member states created the perfect condition for the spread of Covid-19. The shock created by the quickly spreading virus exposed contractual incompleteness in the EU's health and fiscal policies, which were not prepared to handle the consequences of a pandemic-sized event. This initially caused member states to engage in unilateral and uncoordinated measures to protect their own citizens. Furthermore, the economic and human consequences of the pandemic did not affect member states equally. The Southern European member states faced a harder impact and thus had more to gain from deeper integration and burden-sharing. This was argued to put them in a weaker bargaining position compared to the Western European member states, which was also evident during negotiations as several less affected member states, primarily the frugal four-plus Finland initially opposed the agreement.

However, Eurosceptic political entrepreneurs were unable to mobilize exclusive identities against the Next Generation EU recovery fund given that the tension between identity and European integration never became salient. Though the issue was politicized in the arena of mass politics, public support for the establishment of an economic plan to help all member states recover from the pandemic was high in all member states with only minor political conflicts between them and within them. Public opinion in the EU was high and even increased in the initial stage of the pandemic. Following the theory of post-functionalism, it is thus argued that inclusive rather than exclusive identities were mobilized. This allowed member states to overcome the ambiguity of contractual incompleteness exposed by a dilutive boundary regime, and the asymmetrical bargaining power between them, instead of finding common ground.¹⁹⁷ This resulted in the negotiation of a successful

¹⁹⁷ Hooghe, Lenz, and Marks, 2019, p. 14

compromise in which all 27 member states unanimously agree to establish the Next Generation EU recovery fund in a show of fiscal solidarity and burden-sharing.

6. Conclusion

Based on the empirical analysis of the variables of contractual incompleteness, dilutive boundary regime, asymmetrical bargaining power, and exclusive identities during the 2015 Refugee Crisis and the Covid-19 Pandemic, the table can now be filled out as followed:

Variables argued to influence the outcome of European integration	2015 Refugee Crisis	Covid-19 Pandemic
Dilutive boundary regime	Yes	Yes
Contractual incompleteness	Yes	Yes
Asymmetrical bargaining power	Yes	Yes
Exclusive identities	Yes	No
A successful outcome of European integration in burden-sharing policies	No	Yes

In accordance with the research question: “Why was the outcome of European integration in burden-sharing policies different during the Covid-19 Pandemic compared to the 2015 Refugee Crisis?” this thesis concludes that there is a causality between European integration and the mobilization of exclusive identities, in accordance with the argumentation of post-functionalism. The boundary regime of the EU before both the 2015 Refugee Crisis and the Covid-19 Pandemic was dilutive where internal and external borders were debordered. This made the EU member states vulnerable to large influxes of refugees, and to the spread of highly contagious pathogens. The exogenous shock produced by these crises exposed contractual incompleteness in the EU’s institutional frameworks and created pressure toward the expansion of European integration in burden-sharing policies. During the 2015 Refugee Crisis, the pressure was directed toward the incomplete asylum policy of the Dublin III Agreement which lacked a mechanism to distribute asylum applicants fairly between member states. During the Covid-19 Pandemic, the pressure was directed toward the fiscal and health policy which lacked economic recovery instruments based on grants instead of loans, and supranational

capacities to help EU member states protect against health threats. The incompleteness of these policies combined with the dilutive boundary regime failed to mitigate the unequal impact on the member states. There was a disproportionate pressure and unfair distribution of asylum applicants during the 2015 Refugee Crisis, and different economic and human costs during the Covid-19 Pandemic. As such, there was asymmetrical bargaining power between member states during the negotiations on expanding European integration to mitigate the impact of these crises.

In accordance with the most-similar system design, it is concluded that the causal variable, that resulted in a varying outcome of European integration across the Covid-19 Pandemic and the 2015 Refugee Crisis, was the absence and presence of exclusive identities. During the 2015 Refugee Crisis, tension was salient between identity and European integration in asylum policies regarding the establishment of a temporary relocation and resettlement mechanism, and later discussions on a permanent quota-based redistribution system. This salient tension was strategically mobilized by Eurosceptic political entrepreneurs, who utilized the public's concern about immigration and terrorism, as well as the political conflict on whether to help refugees or not. Furthermore, public opinion towards the EU was low. This resulted in public opposition to sharing the burden of asylum applicants and prevented the negotiations of a successful European solution to the immigration issue. The issue was instead externalized to Turkey as no agreement could successfully be negotiated between the EU member states. During the Covid-19 Pandemic, tensions between identity and European integration never became salient. Contrary to the Refugee Crisis, public opinion towards the EU increased and a clear majority of citizens in all member states were supportive of the establishment of an economic plan to help all EU member states impacted by the Covid-19 Pandemic. As such, there was no salient tension that Eurosceptic political entrepreneurs could mobilize against European integration. All 27 member states were able to overcome asymmetrical bargaining power and successfully negotiate the Next Generation EU recovery fund, financed by establishing joint debt for the first time in the history of the EU.

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