



SHAPING PERCEPTIONS OF DEMOCRACY: THROUGH THE IMPACT OF ERDF FUNDING AND MEDIA DISCOURSES



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Abstract

The democratic deficit is a highly debated theme within the EU. After the expansion of the Eastern European countries and the migration crisis in 2015, various opinions and ideas on whether the EU suffers a democratic deficit and lacks public participation can be found across the member states. In France, President Emmanuel Macron has expressed strong solidarity towards a shared European identity, as he became the French Republic's first President to adopt the European symbol into the existing symbol of France's Monarchial Republic. Another breaking point in terms of adopting European practices can be observed through his adaptation of pension reforms which made an eruption in the form of protests by the yellow vest movement (Bouza & Oleart, 2022, pp. 271-272). Concerning Italy and its relationship with the EU, it has become more hostile in its attitude towards the supranational institution due to its lack of demos and being unheard, such as during the migration crisis in 2015 (Stefanini, 2017). As an attempt to create more awareness and promote European values across the nations, the EU uses the cohesion policy as an investment instrument in order to support the most exposed within the social and economic sectors, that is, to improve citizens' quality of life in each of their respective societies (European Commission, n.d.-a).

This thesis will examine the construction of democracy through the policy-making process from a post-functionalist and MLG perspective regarding cohesion policy. To do so, a regression analysis will be made to create an overview of the recipients of the ERDF, which are specified through the cases of France and Italy, as it aims to support economic and social development and promote these values among the European regions within the EU. In other words, the ERDF aims to promote democratic values. After making the regression analysis, CDA will be made on the two states' media concerning the lack of demos. That is to determine the relationship between the effect of ERDF and the discursive portrayal of European democracy framed by France and Italy's national media.

The discussion will reflect upon the findings of the quantitative and qualitative analysis to see the existence of disjuncture between them. In addition to this section, it will discuss whether the economy is a vital factor in promoting European values and supporting public participation. A conclusion will be given on the relationship between the quantitative and qualitative findings for which the quantitative findings suggest a correlation between the amount of ERDF funding and skepticism which can be particularly observed in the Southern regions of France and Italy. This view of skepticism towards the EU and the democratic processes might be observed in terms of the media portrayal of European democracy for which

the qualitative material shows a pattern across the articles for which they share the theme concerning the relationship between democracy and citizens' participation in the decision-making processes. Each article from France and Italy shares a particular political view that might explain the different approaches to the subject of democracy.

Keywords:

European Union; Cohesion Policy; European Regional Development Fund; France; Italy; policy-making process; democratic deficit; demos; democracy; European

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Acronyms

AFP	Agence France-Presse
ANSA	Agenzia Nazionale Stampa Associata
CCC	Citizens' Climate Convention
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CF	Cohesion Fund
CFS	Community Support Framework
CJ	Court of Justice
CNPF	Conseil National du Patronat Francais
COVID-19	Coronavirus 2019
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
DPA	Deutsche Presse-Agentur
EEC	European Economic Community
EC	European Commission
ECB	European Central Bank
ECJ	European Court of Justice
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EMS	European Monetary System
EMU	Economic and Monetary Union
EP	European Parliament
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ERM	EC's Exchange Rate Mechanism
ESF+	European Social Fund Plus
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
ESS	European Social Survey
ESS8	European Social Survey Round 8
ESS9	European Social Survey Round 9
ESS10	European Social Survey Round 10
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
JTF	Just Transition Fund
M5S	Five Star Movement (Movimento 5 Stelle)
MLG	Multi-Level Governance
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
OLS	Ordinary Least Squares
UK	The United Kingdom
US	The United States of America
WWII	World War II

1. Introduction

Cohesion policy is an instrument for the EU to use in order to invest in regions and cities that are the most exposed and vulnerable within the social and economic sectors as it aims to improve citizens' quality of life in their respective societies. Hence, cohesion policy aims to reduce disparities in relation to development between regions to promote economic and social cohesion among EU member states. Together with the EC, cohesion policy has several political ambitions that are prioritized as it supports and delivers multiple EU policy objectives, such as education, employment, energy, the environment, the single market, as well as research, and innovation (European Commission, n.d.-a). Hence, cohesion policy supports and invests in terms of economics. That is, cohesion policy seeks to provide economic growth to ensure social fairness and prosperity (European Commission, n.d.-b). In addition to supporting programs, the cohesion policy promotes territorial integration which provides a different set of investment tools to aid regions that are the most vulnerable, such as border regions, urban areas, regions that are located remotely, or regions that are outermost. To support these regions, the cohesion policy seeks to expand and better the growth of jobs, businesses, and the economy along with supporting sustainability. To accomplish these goals, it has a budget of €392 billion, which is almost one-third of the EU total budget, in the period of 2021-2027. As these goals are rather broad, the cohesion policy has several funds, each aiming for specific targets. These are; the ERDF, the CF, the ESF+, and the JTF (European Commission, n.d.-a).

Through EU-funded projects, the cohesion policy contributes to establishing a European identity and bringing awareness (Borz, Brandenburg, and Mendez, 2022). Overall, the cohesion policy contributes to the objectives of European integration as it plays a crucial role in terms of reducing social disparity in the areas of economics and social cohesion. European integration is vital for the EU's success as this implementation project might be perceived as a utopian idea. Nevertheless, it is challenging to unite several ethnicities which the EU attempts to pursue in the areas of politics and economics, such as through funding. It is important to mention that European history is tied together due to its many conflicts through time which might tie a closer union by emphasizing the importance of cooperation (Niznik, 2000, p. 395).

In the case of ERDF, it aims to support social development to create a closer EU (European Commission, n.d.-a). That is, to create a collective European identity and to promote democratic principles as it attempts to correct imbalances and support poor regions. Regional funds can therefore also be viewed as a democratic actor. Concerning the European identity,

the ERDF fund supports social cohesion in terms of public institutions, such as education and health which will eventually strengthen the ties to a collective European identity. Thereby, the regional fund promotes European values across Europe. Its priorities lie in investing in Europe and its regions in various areas to become more competitive (European Commission, n.d.-d). The process of seeking ERDF funds is through shared responsibility or shared management, or in other words, through the EC along with the national authorities of the member states (European Commission, n.d.-d). Hence, the ERDF's primary focus lies in regional development but is strongly attached to democratic principles as these are implemented within the framework of EU policies and institutions.

For several years, it has been argued whether the EU suffers from a democratic deficit which is due to the lack of public engagement as the political arena within the EU has no transparency and has an absence of demos. In other words, the decision-making process is lacking in terms of public participation and neglects transparency. Accordingly, it is seen as a threat that the authority is transferred from the national governments of the member states into a supranational institution which results in a lack of transparency (Kelemen, 2017, p. 211). In the most recent times, a threat has been observed on the rule of law for which democratic deficit was discussed again and as to how the EU can address this issue in terms of its member states (p. 230). Critics have debated whether the EU lacks a democratic deficit as the EU grows in power and as a result reduces national democracy. This might lead some member states to violate the rule of law as they justify their actions on a national level (p. 211). In addition, the EU has faced multiple challenges during the last 20 years in terms of crises which have led to an increase of Euroscepticism, such as the economic crisis in 2008 and the migration crisis in 2015. Both crises share an unexpected event for which the EU failed to deliver a solution in terms of output legitimacy. For instance, the migration crisis led to some member states enforcing national security due to the lack of trust in the EU and its failed attempt to engage member states in the process. An observation can be made regarding opt-outs for which some member states have the privilege of not participating in some of the activities within the EU which is forced upon others (Cini & Borragan, 2019, p. 137).

Nevertheless, ERDF can be perceived as a great ambition to create cohesion and democratic values across the European regions. It is delegated through a democratic decision-making process in which the member states participate to address the imbalances between regions through investments and thereby become closer connected to the European citizens (European Commission, n.d.-d). Despite the ERDF supporting social development, unawareness might still play a factor on the public level.

To narrow this paper's research, the focus is set on France and Italy as these seem to be significant cases in terms of ERDF as well as their attitudes towards a European democracy. The two countries are both one of the largest economies within the EU and, therefore are important in relation to size and economics as they both receive a substantial amount of ERDF funding while experiencing significant regional disparities. The ERDF contributes to addressing these disparities by providing financial support in the form of projects. Therefore, it is important for the funding to be allocated in the most exposed regions as it also might influence people's perception of fairness and solidarity towards the EU which leads to the focus of this thesis being ERDF due to its aim at social development for which I will explore the funding's transparency while analyzing its association with democracy, and how democracy is framed by France and Italy media (European Commission, n.d.-d). Hence, I will investigate if there is an association between the amount of funding while analyzing how democracy within the EU is framed by these states' public media through quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data will provide an overview of the allocation of ERDF funding between the member states of France and Italy as well as its impact concerning public attitudes towards the EU. Through the overview of numbers, it can be depicted in the ESS if the choices of allocation are transparent and meaningful to the public. Moreover, the theoretical perspective of post-functionalism and MLG contribute to viewing the issue in the process, for instance in the decision-making phase. Hence, the theory might elaborate on the reason for the finding results.

The qualitative part will address whether the EU has succeeded in addressing the democratic deficit in France and Italy through the media's portrayal of democracy. Both member states share a similar relationship with the EU in terms of length of membership but with slight differences concerning attitudes which will further be investigated within this thesis. Hence, this paper will focus on the differences and similarities between France and Italy regarding public attitudes towards European democracy. Through qualitative research, it is possible to observe media articles' focus on European democracy.

1.1 Research question

This thesis seeks to answer the research question:

What is the relation between the effect of the ERDF funding on public attitudes towards the EU and the discursive portrayal of democracy framed by France and Italy's media?

This research question concerns quantitative data by first observing the allocation of ERDF funding while viewing the public attitudes towards the EU within the theme of democracy to see the effect of the funds. After gathering the quantitative data, a qualitative analysis will be made and focus on the discursive portrayal of democracy framed by France and Italy's media to see if they may influence the public perception of democracy.

To answer the research question, I will first provide a literature review to sketch out the arguments concerning the EU's lack of demos and suffering a democratic deficit. By understanding and displaying the academic literature in the context of the scope, it is possible to continue the research from a post-functionalism perspective along with MLG as these share similar traits. This will be followed by the methodology section which concerns the choice of data in terms of quantitative and qualitative along with the tools for analysis to give a sufficient analysis. In terms of quantitative methods, a regression analysis will be used to demonstrate the distribution of ERDF funding between the member states of France and Italy. To view these numbers more closely, France and Italy are divided between North and South regions. In order to support the numbers of the first dataset concerning the allocation of ERDF funding, a histogram of public attitude towards the EU and the role of democracy will be added. These surveys will concern the EU's power in relation to EU unification and nations' control regarding key decisions within an EU framework. These will be observed to see the effect of the ERDF funding and whether the economy is a vital factor in establishing a strong union. The numbers might be further understood through a post-functionalist and MLG perspective as they provide a sufficient overview of the policy-making process.

Regarding qualitative methods, discourse analysis will be used and be based on Norman Fairclough's CDA in terms of his three-tiered model of discourse to analyze the chosen media articles in-depth as the model analyzes beyond the text and studies the relationship between power and language. The media articles share the subject of democracy to address the EU's lack of democratic deficit. In addition to CDA, a media discourse will be applied to demonstrate further the power of language within the specific genre of mass media and to look at specific

framing techniques used in the articles. Next is the analysis section which will examine the usage of data in the scope of the topic as it will discuss the finding results. The analysis of the qualitative material might explain the numbers from a social aspect given by the data in the quantitative part. Hence, the qualitative material might give an understanding of the context of the socio-political environment and shed light on how democracy and governance are framed through the media. Lastly, the thesis limitations will be discussed, and a conclusion will be drawn from the findings of this paper. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods may provide insight into public opinion to find similar or different patterns and themes regarding European democracy. Below this section, I will elaborate on the term democratic deficit and in what context it is used for this thesis.

1.1.1 Democratic deficit

After signing the Maastricht Treaty in the 1990s, more sovereignty was given to the EU. As a result, it was discussed whether the EU lacked a democratic deficit as well as its transparency and role in civil society (Cini & Borrigan, 2019, p. 127). When defining democracy, it “...refers to a set of procedures guaranteeing the participation of the governed” (p. 128). Hence, participation is highly emphasized within a democratic governed institution to gain a level of trust and legitimacy as legitimacy also concerns a degree of trust toward a political system. In other words, legitimacy might be perceived as part of a democratic process which can be observed in input legitimacy. In contrast, output legitimacy concerns performance and efficiency as people are satisfied in terms of a political system’s legitimacy. Nevertheless, these two forms of legitimacies are often combined, with one being more present than the other (p. 128).

The democratic deficit was not on the agenda when the EEC was established in 1957, as the community had a limited number of delegated functions at that time. It was first later when the CJ defined the features of the European legal order which came to have a direct effect on the implementation of new policies where the functionalist approach was insufficient to support the legitimacy of the integration project. In other words, the legitimacy was questioned as the power moved from the national level to the EU institution (p. 128). To accommodate the situation, one way is to strengthen the representation of the EP in terms of the decision-making phase. This solution may be perceived as a supranational/federal. Another way is to transfer as much power to the national parliaments as to ensure the accountability of each of their ministers

in the Council. This option can be viewed as an intergovernmental solution (p. 129). However, two issues remain for the EU to be democratized. First is the parliamentary model of democracy. The people who elect the members to the EP also expect the parliament to not only have legislative power but also an executive one which is difficult as it is the EC who acts as the executive power. This decision was taken in the Treaty of Rome. Second, is the role of the EU being neither a traditional international organization nor a state as it is defined as a supranational polity (p. 129). However, the problem is that this form of polity does not contain any demos: "...that is, a 'people' with some common identity or shared values that might provide the basis for a parliamentary expression of democracy" (p. 129). In other words, no common public sphere exists for people/citizens to be informed (p. 129). For instance, the EU has no shared media that is used across the member states. Additionally, citizens feel less motivated to vote in the European political arena compared to the national one as they see the European political parties as rather weak to the domestic parties (pp. 129-130).

The Lisbon Treaty was an attempt to provide more democracy and legitimacy to the EU as it has the explicit title "Provisions on democratic principles" (p. 135). According to the Lisbon Treaty, Article 10 states that the EP along with the Council and the EC are held accountable for their actions and are, therefore, representative in terms of democracy (p. 135). Hence, the Lisbon Treaty was the first one to define democratic principles concerning the EU. Nevertheless, the EU has always faced the challenge of fighting the democratic deficit. Throughout the years, the EU has experienced various forms of crises, such as the economic crisis and the migration crisis in 2015 for which the EU had a hard time delivering solutions to the table and having an efficient output legitimacy (p. 137). Concerning the economic crisis, the democratic deficit was present in terms of the absence of the EP along with the national parliaments. Regarding the migration crisis, the EU was unable to create a collective solution which led to some member states establishing their national security to protect themselves from the flow of migrants. The crises led to an increase in Eurosceptics across Europe, and as a response to the economic crisis and the migration crisis in 2015, Brexit was executed (p. 138).

1.2 Literature Review

MLG derives from a diffusion of authority as it drives away from the central state. It is stated by Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks (2020), that MLG is based on post-functionalism as it is built on cooperation in terms of providing collective goods, governance relies on the

participants while authority is given to the MLG if conflicts emerge among the communities (Hooghe & Marks, 2020, p. 820). MLG is often used in linkage to European integration as the EU functions in multiple layers within an institution. The most important phase of MLG is the decision-making phase, in which the member states have a major role in terms of addressing and prioritizing subjects and issues (Hooghe & Marks, 2001, p. 17). Additionally, the concept of the theory is most apparent in cohesion policy (p. xiii). It is argued that identity well along with democracy is often used as a strategic tool by the EC in order to advance the EU's policymaking (Saurugger & Thatcher, 2022, p. 158). Similar to MLG, post-functionalism shares the idea in terms of the benefits of cooperation among the different levels of a supranational institution. Hence, integration is highly emphasized (Hooghe & Marks, 2020, p. 825). Despite the benefits of having a supranational institution, it might also neglect nations along with its citizens. The theory of post-functionalism values both views as it persists in maintaining national identities and interests within the dynamics of politics while supporting the idea of having MLG with a common European community (pp. 824-825).

It is questioned by some the reason for governments willingly shifting their authority to a supranational institution. However, a struggle exists for EU member states to balance their sovereignty while preserving power between the nation and the EU (Hooghe & Marks, 2001, p. 71). Nevertheless, some arguments can be found concerning the benefits of transferring authority to a supranational institution. One of these is the government leader's advantage regarding international and domestic bargaining. Another reason is the government leader's burden is reduced in terms of leading a nation (p. 72). A third reason is for government leaders to give away responsibility when making unpopular choices. The last example can be observed in France where its government leader, de Gaulle, used the integration of the EU as a scapegoat. De Gaulle was put into the situation to cut domestic production to reduce steel production for which 3,000 workers were to be fired. The decision was blamed for being a European policy and not a French one (p. 73). Some government leaders might feel pressured to some extent and surrender some of their national sovereignty to ensure market integration. Hence, these government leaders might be pressured to further European integration in order to strengthen the EP (p. 77). Using the EU and the integration process as a scapegoat helps the government leaders' popularity to grow among the public. However, it might create further distance between the EU citizens and the EU which eventually will lead to less trust in the EU and its parliament.

The process of European integration has been the main subject for many years in terms of economic goals but became a means to control the tensions among the nations in Europe to avoid past events of war by building a supranational institution (Hooghe & Marks, 2001, pp.

51-52). The idea of Europe and its boundaries are not specified along with European identity as these change through time as can be seen through the enlargements of the EU, such as the Eastern European countries in 2008. Along with the enlargement of the Eastern European countries, the EC found it challenging to draft a cohesive policy which resulted in a lack of progress concerning the social policy agenda through the 2010s (Saurugger & Thatcher, 2022, p. 158). In 2009, the Lisbon Treaty entered into force as an attempt to eliminate the democratic deficit as it made some adjustments to the decision rules along with institutional roles in terms of how policies are governed and became efficient concerning the Union's competencies in the different spheres and aspects (Cini & Borrigan, 2019, p. 437). It has been argued that the democratic deficit is led by crises. In 2018, the economic crisis led to 360 billion euros in loans and caused a hole within the EU (p. 389). Grant support was given, such as by Germany. However, some countries were against this grant instrument. The Netherlands became the leader of the so-called 'Frugals' group which contained a small number of wealthy countries (Denmark, Sweden, and Austria) in order to balance the level of debt (p. 392). In contrast, Southern European countries wanted these grants to be given with small requirements to be met, such as Italy and Spain as they both had high accumulated debt. This again accumulated during the pandemic of COVID-19 (p. 393).

Nevertheless, European integration is meant to be increased through the decrease of national parliamentary control. In other words, European integration is only possible if sovereignty is given to a higher authority, such as the EC which acts as the executive. In contrast, the parliament is the legislative (Follesdal & Hix, 2006, p. 534). However, this also seems to be the problem as the executive power is above the control of the national parliaments as the executive agents/governments can ignore the parliaments in terms of the decision-making. This also leads to the argument that the EP is too weak. To increase European integration is to increase the power of the EP as well as it is balanced with the governments in the Council and the EC. However, there are still claims that the EP is too weak compared to the Council due to the Parliament's limited power and that the executive agents are not elected by the Parliament. Another argument that the EU suffers a democratic deficit is the 'European' elections (p. 535). Although citizens elect their governments to be part of the Council along with the EP, they are not called for 'European' elections as these do not concern either the personas or the political parties at the EU level. In other words, these elections do not concern what is on the political agenda (pp. 535-536).

As an attempt to create regional stability while promoting European values, the EU has launched a series of regional program funds, such as ERDF. By compensating funds to weak

economic areas, the EU tries to ensure a form of support. Despite this effort to correct imbalances, the attitudes toward the EU have become more skeptical over the years (Schraff, 2019, p. 83). What is remarkable is that the regional funds create more skeptical views in the most vulnerable areas that also receive the most. Hence, Eurosceptic voting seems to be most present in these areas (p. 84). It has been argued that due to the increase of globalization, economic inequalities follow along. For instance, European integration has contributed to a somewhat increase in income inequality. Despite the good intention of furthering European integration, it facilitates a slower economic market which in the end nurtures regional economic inequalities (p. 85).

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Post-Functionalism

Post-functionalism shares the idea of cooperation across nation-states in order to provide collective goods that will benefit all sides. However, cooperation depends on the participants and their view of each other along with the functional benefits that they will gain. Hence, there must be a certain dependency on other actors that are involved in the process if this cooperation is able to function. Another similar trait is emerging conflicts which enable MLG (Hooghe & Marks, 2020, p. 822). In other words, emerging conflicts within MLG cannot be settled with a majority rule. This is due to MLG limiting the self-rule of the participating actors. Having a shared rule also equalizes the functional benefits that will stem from this community (p. 825). Hence, all share the same form of ruling to gain the community's benefits. Moreover, both post-functionalism and MLG represent a departure from the functionalist theory in their way of understanding governance structure as well as its process.

One of the focuses of post-functionalism within the EU is integration. It challenges the traditional functionalist idea as it argues that integration does not necessarily play a part in terms of national identities or transfer all sovereignty to one supranational institution. It rather emphasizes the need to persist national identities along with interests and political dynamics within the EU. That way, the MLG can be harmonized (pp. 824-825). At the same time, nation-states may feel left out in the process of integration due to the overruling by a supranational institution. Hence, these problems might arise within an MLG and question the democratic

legitimacy and accountability within the EU membership. In the process of policy-making within MLG, the decision-making phase may in some cases obscure the democratic accountability as EU citizens may feel disconnected in terms of policy-making. This is also a reason for some to believe that the EU lacks a democratic deficit as the decision-making process is vital for people to be heard as these decisions might affect a whole population.

In connection with the public and political support for further integration, the EU leaves the choice to each member state to choose the level that matches their political preferences and identity. In other words, a member state can choose to opt-out, which might differentiate the EU membership (Malang & Schraff, 2023, p. 1). The opt-outs are a solution for the EU in terms of decreasing the level of Euroscepticism across Europe. Public opinion has been measured concerning opt-outs, which shows a positive effect in differentiated integration, particularly on democratic legitimacy. Studies show that if a requested differentiation is met, trust increases towards the EU (p. 2). Different speeds can be taken concerning integration; multi-speed, multi-tier, and multi-menu (p. 3).

Nevertheless, it has shown that the public is more Eurosceptic if there are more differentiations (p. 4). Accordingly, opt-outs cannot be used in the context of influencing a Eurosceptic public to further European integration (p. 22). It is observed in the core of Europe, that citizens are quite satisfied with the process of integration whereas countries that have chosen the option of opt-outs see integration rather as a threat than a benefit to the national sovereignty (p. 23).

In terms of the ERDF, the funding aims to reduce disparities among exposed and vulnerable regions. Member states might fear this loss of control of the allocation and distribution of the funds as it might undermine their autonomy regarding national priorities.

2.2 MLG

2.2.1 Policy-making process

MLG is often connected to European integration where a much less state-centric model is focused. Hence, the state-centric model is substituted in combination with state sovereignty and national decision-making. According to Gary Marks and Liesbet Hooghe (2001), the policy-making process in the context of this theory can be divided into four sequential phases: policy initiation, decision-making, implementation, and adjudication. These four sequential

phases observe the behavior shaped through formal rules and practices (p. 12). These will be further elaborated on in the subsections below.

Policy initiation: agenda-setting

The first phase is policy initiation which concerns agenda-setting. It initiates the phase of the policy-making process where issues are identified and prioritized compared to other issues. In this phase, multiple actors are involved, each with different interests that help shape the agenda (Hooghe & Marks, 2001, pp. 12-13). The multiple actors for this activity include the EC, the European Council, the EP, the Council of Ministers, various interest groups, and member states. In this activity, the EC is responsible for the agenda as it makes the final signature. The European Council is next to the EC as it has a legitimate status and defines political guidelines by providing general policy mandates. In these terms, its control is still limited. The European Council consists of the political leaders from their respective member states. Next is the EP along with the Council of Ministers. These two can send out requests to the EC for them to draft and produce proposals (p. 14). Interest groups are always part of the European arena; however, their responsibility is difficult to direct. Nevertheless, it is of great importance that the EC considers them in the process as they also have a say in the matter. Despite the involvement of multiple actors, the EC still makes the final decision at the end of the process (p. 16). In terms of the cohesion policy and ERDF, the priorities are set within these areas to allocate the most regional disparities and socioeconomic challenges that need to be further addressed and handled within a set of deadlines (European Commission, n.d.-c).

Decision-making

The next and second phase is decision-making which defines policy formulation which continues from the first phase of the agenda-setting phase. This phase involves the development of policy proposals where the national governments are in control (Hooghe & Marks, 2001, p. 17). In other words, the involved actors engage in a dialogue in order to develop policy solutions and come to terms with each other. What differs between a multi-level system and a state-centric system is in the decision-making phase as multiple states cooperate across nations. This also shows a great commitment across nation-states as they need some level of trust in each other to cooperate (p. 21). In the context of the ERDF, the member states can make proposals within this program to address the socioeconomic challenges within their specific

borders (European Commission, n.d.-c). The EC will together with the member states assist in defining the allocation of ERDF.

Implementation

Third is the implementation phase (Hooghe & Marks, 2001, p. 24). In this phase, multiple actors may be involved in the process of implementing the policy to execute it for different aspects (pp. 24-25). The agenda-setting and decision-making phases made it possible for the involved institutions to compete. In this phase, national governments monitor the executive power of the EC and are involved daily concerning the implementation of policies. This act brings it much closer to the subnational governments and interest groups (p. 24). In relation to ERDF, it is of great importance that the end of this phase will align with the objectives of the cohesion policy in the ERDF program as it must follow its rules and directions before executing (European Commission, n.d.-c).

Adjudication

Last is the adjudication phase which concerns conflict-solving that might arise during this process. In this phase, the ECJ acts as a monitor and mitigates upcoming problems by referring and applying to current agreements (Hooghe & Marks, 2001, p. 26). Additionally, this phase concerns evaluating whether the policies achieve the intended objectives and seeing if any further adjustments are needed to improve the policies and programs. In MLG, this phase is a shared responsibility among the involved actors across the different levels of the government along with interest groups (pp. 26-27). In terms of ERDF, the adjusted policies must apply to ERDF funding to meet the cohesion policy and the program's objectives so it can be implemented properly and align with the requirements. It might be measured upon the effectiveness and efficiency as well as the impact it has on the funding program. Based on the evaluation and findings, new adjustments may be made to update the cohesion policy and its strategies in terms of the program's design and structure as it may enhance future projects and hence, make them more effective (European Commission, n.d.-c).

MLG does not directly interact with the sovereignty of states. Instead, member states are divided into a multi-level polity (Hooghe & Marks, 2001, p. 27). States must give up some of their sovereignty to participate in an MLG. Most of the decisions are taken by the Council by a qualified majority if a government should be outvoted (p. 28). Nevertheless, MLG may

not be a balance of opposing powers as there is no constitutional framework as such due to the non-existent goals of integration. Consequently, the competencies of subnational and national actors may be misplaced and allocated in a non-sufficient and ineffective way (p. 28). This might also affect ERDF's transparency and increase European citizens' awareness of the funding program due to the misplacement of funds.

2.2.3 Types of MLG

The MLG theory focuses on the EU integration, and it attempts to explain how the policy-making process functions within the EU on the different levels as well as how these levels influence policy-making. To explain this, the theory distinguishes between two types of governance systems.

Type I refers to vertical governance that concerns the relationships and interactions between different levels of government. The vertical interaction works as a top-down hierarchy in terms of authority and is a more traditional form of governance system. The jurisdictional members at the same level do not cross other levels. In other words, the authority across the different levels is dispersed through the jurisdictions at each of the multiple levels. Hence, vertical governance has a pyramidal structure as it has a hierarchical structure (Hooghe & Marks, 2003, p. 239). In the context of ERDF and cohesion policy, these are managed at various levels as the implementation process involves multiple actors in terms of coordination on a governance level within the member states. As it is the EU that sets the agenda and framework for the funding part, it is the EU institutions on a regional, national, and local level that need to cooperate and negotiate with each other. The member states' role influences the decision-making in terms of allocating the funds which involves vertical coordination between the EU and its member states.

In contrast to type I, type II follows a horizontal governance structure as it refers to more flexibility across the different levels. Unlike type I, type II concentrates on relationships at the same level that share common issues and challenges. Hence, it addresses common problems (p. 240). Considering the ERDF and cohesion policy from the perspective of type II, various actors engage in collaboration to implement and develop projects that aim to promote economic and social growth. Type II facilitates the resources that are shared in a horizontal government in order to pursue its common objectives.

For this paper, MLG type I is applied due to its relevance to ERDF as it will discuss from a vertical governance perspective in terms of the relationship between the different levels of governance within the EU framework.

3. Methodology

The methodology section will elaborate on the data choice and the research type I am conducting for this paper. To answer the research question, this paper will include mixed methods. The research will study the ERDF funding in France and Italy as well as national media articles concerning the democratic deficit. These two studies combined should display whether the economy is a vital factor in a post-functionalist aspect of an MLG structure and give an idea of public perception of the EU in terms of democracy. As the media functions as a people's communicator, I find it relevant to include France's and Italy's media portrayal of the EU and its perception of European democracy.

4.1 Choice of data

The usage of this paper's quantitative data stems from the historic EU payments - regionalised and modeled which reflects the annual payment of ERDF funding given to the member states' regions from the period 1989 till 2018 (DG Regional Policy, 2024). In this study, the historic EU payments - regionalised and modeled will focus on the period from 2014 to 2018 to better align the comparisons with the qualitative material. However, some of the years within the dataset might be influenced by past crises, such as the migration crisis in 2015 for which the amount might change in terms of various aid packages.

The second set of data is from the ESS8, ESS9, and ESS10 and is filtered for France and Italy to give an overview of public attitude in the years 2016, 2018, and 2020 (European Social Survey Round 8 Data, 2016; European Social Survey Round 9 Data, 2018; European Social Survey Round 10 Data, 2020). Hence, to better compare the ERDF funding dataset, the ESS datasets are included. The statistical analysis might give a robust analysis in terms of generalizations and patterns while using control-based variables for the countries.

4.1.1 Quantitative

For this paper, quantitative methods are used to provide an overview of statistical data concerning ERDF and its recipient regions. Quantitative methods refer to a collection of numeric data to observe the existence of two or multiple variables and their relationship to see whether they correlate. Hence, this can be done using statistical analysis (Lamont, 2015, p. 97). Numeric data often gives a better meaning that is beyond the descriptive language. However, numbers provide far more than tools to analyze measurements but also assist in establishing the existence of trends and patterns in the data through variables' relationships as well as understanding their behavior to see the actors' interactions (p. 96). In this case, the EU and the two member states, France and Italy, are chosen for this paper's investigation.

This quantitative research is deductive as the observations are tested against empirical data to reach a logical conclusion. All quantitative methods and research require some form of data to be collected in order to be coded or scaled. In this case, a large unstructured data collection is coded in the form of two datasets, the historic EU payments - regionalised and modeled and ESS. Additionally, scaling is used to convert the qualitative data into numeric form as another set of data is collected in the form of media articles to count different wordings to see a pattern in terms of emphasis and theme. In other words, scaling makes the research focus on a particular subject. This paper will concentrate on the theme of democracy within the EU. Quantitative methods not only concern a collection of descriptive statistics but with the help of the data make predictive claims concerning actors' behavior and interactions with each other as well as test the empirical data (p. 98).

Unit of analysis

The NUTS2 data classify the definition of a European region in this paper. NUTS are a set of data in a hierarchical order which is a geocode standard dividing economic territories within the EU. They serve the purpose of providing European regional statistics in terms of socio-economic analyses. Different sets of NUTS data exist which each provide data of smaller or bigger regions, such as NUTS1 representing larger socio-economic regions whereas NUTS3 focuses on much smaller regions and can be referred to as subregions that belong to the regions of NUTS2. In this paper, I have chosen to use NUTS2 based on the regions that are applied to regional policies and funding like ERDF (Eurostat, n.d.).

Data sources

The first set of data is from the historic EU payments - regionalised and modeled which reflects the annual payment of ERDF funding between 1989 and 2018. The dataset serves the purpose of providing sufficient regionalized NUTS2 data for specific EU funds. In this case, the ERDF is chosen to be observed. The data is used to analyze the effects of the EU ERDF fund. Together with ESS, it is possible to see whether it has an effect on EU citizens' views on democracy within the EU (DG Regional Policy, 2020). It is worth mentioning the datasets' different periods as the historic EU payments - regionalised and modelled are observing older programming years whereas the ESS10 is up to date which is the reason to include ESS8 and ESS9 as these were made in 2016 and 2018. Nevertheless, it is interesting to observe some years after the implementation of the funds to view the public attitude as well as to see if it affects the subject of democracy.

The second set of data is from ESS8, ESS9, and ESS10 which is a European Social Survey taken across the EU member states that concerns different rounds with specific themes for which the public is interviewed. The data is downloaded as a subset. The ESS is in a constant process to keep up to date with European citizens' opinions and improve access to ESS data. The ESS8 has the topic of welfare attitudes and attitudes to climate change, the ESS9 concerns the timing of life, justice, and fairness, and the ESS10 has democracy and digital social contacts. Moreover, the ESS10 dataset is also the most recent and updated survey by the ESS (European Social Survey Round 9 Data, 2018; European Social Survey Round 10 Data, 2020).

Concerning the data source bias, the data that is collected in terms of these two datasets stems from EU websites and therefore is valid as the data comes from the primary source itself. The first dataset, historic EU payments - regionalised and modelled originates from the website *cohesiondata* with data provided by the European Commission - DG Regional Policy (DG Regional Policy, 2020). In terms of the second data, the ESS is an online data portal that provides access to the European Social Survey (European Social Survey Round 10 Data, 2023).

Variables

The quantitative analysis focuses on the distribution of ERDF funding between France and Italy along with public attitudes. Additionally, the analysis digs deeper to observe the equality between France and Italy's North and South regions to see differences in attitudes depending

on geographical location. The regions in the analysis are included due to ERDF's focus on supporting unbalanced regions (European Commission, n.d.-d). Hence, it might give a clue to public opinion as the funding reflects the regional disparities. In terms of MLG, the regional disparities reflect how power is exercised within the EU and how it influences the member states and regions in relation to the decision-making processes. Therefore, it can be argued whether the disparities in funding allocation are fair and inclusive in the decision-making processes along with member states' roles and participation. This is repeated in post-functionalism concerning member states' corporations in order to allocate funding in those regions that are the most economically and socially exposed compared to other regions within the EU.

The dependent variables are different in each figure as they display various subjects. **Models 1, 2, 3, 4,** and **5** all display the distribution of ERDF funding whereas **Models 6** and **7** display public opinion concerning democracy. Along with **Models 4** and **5**, tables are included to demonstrate the amount of ERDF funding going up or down from 2014 to 2018. The section below will first elaborate on the various variables used in the analysis.

Independent Variables

ERDF Funding of EU Payment annual - 2014-2018

The analysis focuses on the independent variable EU annual payment as it reflects the allocation of funding. The funding reflects the EU's interest as it provides an overview of ERDF funding's recipients. In other words, the amount of funding may reflect the EU's preference of prioritization on the allocation of ERDF funding. The variable stems from the historic EU payments - regionalised and modeled which monitors the annual payment of the EU in terms of ERDF funding from the period 1989 till 2018 (DG Regional Policy, 2024). This variable reflects historic EU payments that are prioritized in this period regarding the allocation of funding. In other words, the historic EU payments are reflective in terms of the priorities set by the democratically elected members of the EP.

Dependent Variables

EU unification go further or gone too far - 2016, 2018, and 2020

The dependent variable, whether the EU unification should go further or has gone too far, stems from the ESS8, ESS9, and ESS10 datasets in 2016, 2018, and 2020. The ESS provides valuable data as it gives insight into the social and political attitudes of Europeans (European Social Survey Round 8 Data, 2016; European Social Survey Round 9 Data, 2018; European Social

Survey Round 10 Data, 2020). It is therefore relevant to include this variable to measure public attitudes as it supports the research question of whether the EU suffers a democratic deficit. The question asked by the interviewer concerning EU unification was:

“Now thinking about the European Union, some say European unification should go further. Others say it has already gone too far. Using this card, what number on the scale best describes your position?” (European Social Survey Round 8 Data, 2016; European Social Survey Round 9 Data, 2018; European Social Survey Round 10 Data, 2020).

The possible responses given by the interviewer range from 0 to 10 where 0 indicates that the unification has gone too far and 10 wants the unification to go further. The responses given at 5 indicates neutrality. Additionally, 77 is an indication of the interviewee refusing to respond, 88 is when the respondent does not have any opinion about the subject, and lastly, 99 does not answer about the subject (European Social Survey Round 10 Data, 2020). For the analysis, the answers given from 0 to 10 are only included as these make the most relevant of analyzing the public opinion. The reason to include this question concerning EU unification is due to its relation to democracy and is used as a governmental tool to address democratic legitimacy. It helps to ensure that EU integration is aligned with democratic principles along with public sentiment.

National governments make key decisions rather than the EU - 2020

Another dependent variable is whether the respondents believe that the key decisions are made on a national level rather than the EU. This variable stems from the ESS10 dataset 2020 and is not asked in the ESS8 and ESS9 rounds. The interviewer used this question for the respondent to answer:

“And still generally rather than about [country], how important do you think it is for democracy in general... ...that key decisions are made by national governments rather than the European Union?” (European Social Survey Round 10 Data, 2023).

The possible responses are the same as those of the above variable from 0 to 10 and 88, 77, and 99 (European Social Survey Round 10 Data, 2023). Again, the responses given from 0 to 10 are only included to make the analysis most relevant. The responses given at 0 indicate that the

key decisions taken by the national governments rather than the EU are not important for democracy whereas 10 states that it is extremely important (European Social Survey Round 10 Data, 2023). The reason to include this question in this research is because of its linkage to democracy in terms of representation. In other words, it provides insight into how the public perceives the balance of power and the democratic legitimacy concerning the decision-making processes.

Control Variables

Member States

Control variables are used as constants as they influence the result or outcome of the observations. As this analysis focuses on the two member states, France and Italy, it is necessary to narrow the research and observations on them. This variable represents the distribution of the ERDF funding between France and Italy to distinguish the differences between them in terms of funds. In addition, this variable also serves to display the public attitude in the models concerning the included survey questions from the ESS dataset.

French and Italian regions

The second control variable is the same as above, as it is the member states. However, each member state is divided between the North and South regions. This is due to distinguishing ERDF's effect on the recipients as the ERDF funding aims to create a balance between the regions by providing support in terms of social and economic development. The member states variable is divided by the NUTS 2 ID to distinguish the regions into two groups, one for North regions and one for South regions. Hence, this variable will reflect the allocation of ERDF funds and view its prioritization further as it focuses on the allocation on a regional level. The variable displays the relationship between the two groups of regions, North and South, and the allocation of funding to portray the balance of the recipients. The number of regions included in the dataset is worth mentioning as it might influence the result of the models. The number of French regions is 565 whereas Italian regions are 388.

For this paper's analysis, the regions of France and Italy are divided between North and South. Due to Italy's uneven division, observing the differences concerning public opinion on the EU would be interesting. Statistics show that Northern Italy has better access to domestic markets, better infrastructure, and a big concentration of industries that benefit from being near consumers. As a result, a big difference can be found in human capital (Righi, 2022). To compare the analysis of Italy, France is divided as well between North and South.

Year

The third control variable is the year. That is to give an overview of the allocation of ERDF funds in the member states of France and Italy within a specific time frame as it makes it relevant in terms of comparing the results with public opinion taken from ESS as well as the qualitative analysis part. Although the time frame between the ERDF funding and the public opinion might differ, they are picked to be the closest to each other to make the analysis relevant. Also, it would be interesting to observe the effect of the ERDF funding after its implementation years to see its impact on public opinion concerning democracy and the relation to the EU with for instance the ESS10 from 2020. Additionally, the variable year is used in all the figures to reflect the relationship between the amount of funding and the recipients, making the regression a multivariate as it indicates the need for control variables.

ERDF

The fourth control variable is the ERDF fund. This control variable is filtered in the dataset, the historic EU payments - regionalised and modeled to focus on the ERDF funding and make it comparable to the other variables. Hence, it is necessary to include this data as the research question focuses on the ERDF funding in terms of allocation and its impact on the citizens.

Regression analysis

A statistical analysis will be made when gathering the quantitative data to get an overview of large datasets of the ERDF funding and ESS. Quantitative methods are not only used to provide an overview but also to get an understanding beyond the measurement. Here, it is important to distinguish between the two statistics, descriptive and inferential. As the name refers, descriptive statistics provide the tools for measurement while giving the basic valuation of the used variables. In contrast, inferential statistics is also a statistical tool but differs in terms of going much beyond the data to help answer the research question, such as observing different patterns throughout the statistical data. In this case, I will be looking at a hypothesis that will be tested and observed for correlations along with modeling various relationships between the used variables in the OLS. Concerning model relationships, a regression analysis is used which is a common tool for determining the relationships between variables. Moreover, a regression analysis functions as a predictor in terms of having a dependent variable which is based on the

value of an independent variable. In other words, if having two variables where one is x which is the dependent variable, the independent variable is y (Lamont, 2015, p. 109).

In addition to a regression analysis, there are two existent types, those are, bivariate and multivariate regression analysis. To distinguish between these two types, one has to look at the amount of involved variables. For instance, bivariate regression analysis concerns only two variables. The variables function as dependent and independent variables for which one can observe whether the independent variable will correlate with changes in the dependent variable. In other words, one can notice any changes in the value of x as it correlates with the changes in the value of y . Hence, bivariate regressions will determine whether a correlation occurs between two variables to see if they have a relationship. If there is no existence of a correlation in a bivariate regression, it means that the variables will be plotted as a line or a curve in the regression design (p. 109). This type of regression analysis is a helpful tool to determine the relationship between two variables and to highlight any correlations, however, it cannot tell if one variable is the cause of the other variable (p. 109). In other words, a regression analysis is not to be used to explain the process of something that is caused by another.

In contrast to bivariate regression, multivariate regression analysis examines three or multiple variables and therefore exceeds the limit of analyzing two variables. Hence, multivariate regression is a useful tool to determine the relationship between multiple variables as it can provide good insight in terms of the possibility of a bivariate regression producing a spurious relationship. A spurious relationship concerns two variables that have the appearance to be somehow related, a third variable is the cause of this. A multiple regression analysis deals with a spurious relationship as it explores and tests multiple variables (p. 111). The models that are used and demonstrated in this paper are all multivariate regressions as they test multiple variables in multiple models. Using two variables in each model is considered a multivariate regression analysis. The used models demonstrate the ERDF funding distributed among the member states of France and Italy. To include public opinion about democracy, histograms are included to see the frequency of measurements and to visualize the distribution of the subject. Including histograms helps provide insights that may inform the interpretation of the data and is a good versatile tool (ASQ, n.d.).

OLS regression is included due to it displays the estimation of coefficients (XLSTAT, n.d.). In other words, an OLS regression is often referred to as a linear regression but is a specific method used within the linear regression method. In this case, the OLS regression demonstrates the amount of funding distributed through the years 2014 to 2018 in France and Italy.

4.1.2 Qualitative

As this paper uses mixed methods, qualitative methods are practiced. Qualitative methods refer to non-numeric data collection (Lamont, 2015, p. 79). Each of the research methods has a set of tools to analyze and understand in depth the chosen material. In terms of qualitative methods, the data is analyzed in spoken or written form. Moreover, qualitative research is often used in relation to case study research designs that investigate particular events, regions, countries, or organizations as well as individuals (p. 78). In this case, a case study will be applied as the focus is set on two countries, France and Italy, along with their annual EU payments in ERDF funding and public opinion.

The qualitative data is collected through media articles published by public media in France and Italy which all share the theme of democracy related to the nations and the EU. Media reports are valid resources as they provide specific information on a particular topic along with a basic background. Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish between the many media sources in terms of bias, whether it is an international or national media, and its ideology (p. 81). In other words, a media source might give a certain perspective on a given subject. For this analysis, four media articles are chosen where two of each are from France and Italy. Furthermore, media sources can help support hypotheses about a particular topic as they provide a possible elaboration (p. 82). In addition to the source collection, the research is document-based to study the EU's lack of demos and democratic deficit. The documents are secondary as the media articles refer to the EU and special events. The articles also give their interpretation of the primary sources which might affect the final message (p. 80). Therefore, it is important to question the veracity of the written work as some media are proven to promote specific attitudes and perspectives (p. 82).

Case study

Besides using mixed methods, a comparative case study is used as another research method as this paper's research question will investigate a common event/phenomenon, that is the connection between ERDF and democratic deficit (Lamont, 2015, p. 125). A case study can help confirm theoretical claims or test material (pp. 125-126). In this case, the case study will further highlight the use of power in the discourse material. Furthermore, a case study will explore deeper into the material and critically reflect upon the methodology (p. 126). The

research is a *small-n* and concentrates on specific data on France and Italy in relation to public opinion on the EU and democracy (pp. 126-127). Additionally, the research investigates specific phenomena while studying the properties of this case.

Concerning the case study design, this case study will be comparative as it has the strategy of most-similar case comparison. The research question will investigate the linkage between the ERDF fund and the discursive portrayal of democracy within the EU framed by France and Italy's public media. Hence, a comparative study is made between the two EU member states (p. 133).

Critical Discourse Analysis

When collecting the data, a qualitative analytical technique is applied in order to analyze the materials more in-depth. In this case, discourse analysis is used as it studies the language to understand the depth and meaning concerning the world around us (Lamont, 2015, p. 89). Discourse analysis is used in connection with qualitative methods, which concentrate on the interpretation in terms of linguistics in the form of communication. Both can be written and spoken. For this paper, written media articles are chosen. From the perspective of discourse analysis, the world and society are constructed by actors who are formed by intersubjectivity understanding as language plays the main role in terms of interpreting objects that are promoted through the written course. However, discourse is not only used to better understand the use of language but also brings a set of assumptions concerning the world's construction through language (p. 91). Despite discourse analysis being 'unscientific,' it is a useful tool to analyze language and the surrounding world as it gives an understanding and meaning to how language is constituted as well as its interpretation and production of the world (p. 92).

CDA outlines eight key points that characterize it. First, CDA addresses social dilemmas or issues as it is seen as a social practice. Second, it observes how power relations are executed in a text as these are discursive. Third, language reflects social relations in a society and culture. Fourth, texts are shaped through ideology which is particularly emphasized by Fairclough (Simpson et al., 2019, p. 60). Fifth, discourse can consist of intertextuality as it is connected to other discourses, such as indirect quotes or references from earlier discourses (pp. 60-61). Sixth, discourse shows the connection between text and social/cultural structures as text is mediated and linked to society. Seventh, CDA distinguishes three dimensions, description, interpretation, and explanation. These three dimensions correspond to Fairclough's three-tiered model of discourse which will be elaborated on further in the text below

(Fairclough, 2001, pp. 21-22). Eighth, discourse is a social practice as confirmed by Fairclough, and will as well be further explained in the subsection below (Simpson et al., 2019, p. 61). Critical discourse analyzes linguistic strategies in a text that seems to be naturalized but may rather be ideologically influenced (Simpson et al., 2019, p. 59). According to Norman Fairclough (2001):

“*Critical* [emphasis added] is used in the special sense of aiming to show up connections which may be hidden from people - such as the connections between language, power and ideology...” (p. 4).

In terms of CDA, this theory attempts to interconnect discourse with power, ideology, and social structure as it criticizes linguistics on another level. Multiple scholars have their approaches to CDA, such as Ruth Wodak and Teun van Dijk (Simpson et al., 2019, p. 59). Wodak (2001) has a more societal approach drawing much upon discourse-historical analysis and conducting extensive research on nationalism, populism, and racism as well as identities and relationships within specific societies (pp. 63-64). Van Dijk (2001) takes a socio-cognitive approach to discourse as he emphasizes much on the cognitive processes involved in language (pp. 97-98). In other words, social structures influence society (pp. 97-98). In this paper, Norman Fairclough’s approach is chosen as he focuses on discourse as a social practice and therefore does not only examine the language but also how language is used in a social context. Fairclough differentiates from other CDA scholars with his three-dimensional approach, which analyzes three levels: text, discourse practice, and sociocultural context/social practice. He also places a great emphasis on power, as he believes that any written or verbal work is based on ideology. Therefore, nothing written is neutral and will always be biased as the language is shaped by power and ideology (Fairclough, 2001, p. 18).

Fairclough’s three-dimensional Model of Discourse

According to Norman Fairclough (2001), discourse is a social practice. It is the conception of language which is determined by social structures (p. 14, 16). Moreover, it is distinguished between two forms, *langue* and *parole*. *Langue*, which is the language, is socially determined in each society. The use of *langue* often involves *parole* or power as language is never neutral and will always be biased (p. 18). Hence, language is always influenced in some way for people to interpret.

As mentioned, discourse or language is a social practice. There are three reasons why language is a social practice. First, language is part of society as it is used in a unitary and homogenous sense (pp. 17-18). Language is a part of society and can be perceived as social phenomena. Social phenomena are understood in the context of social production, that is, whenever people or individuals speak in either written or verbal form which will have a social effect. In other words, social phenomena are linguistic but also part of a process and practice in a social context. For instance, wordings and their meanings are interpreted differently (p. 19).

Second, the language used in a society is a social process as it is developed and produced here (pp. 18-19). This approach can be observed from the *text* in a discourse (p. 19). In the context of discourse, text can be both written and verbal/spoken text. Accordingly, text is perceived as a product of a process in text production (pp. 19-20). In discourse analysis, text is just a part of the whole discourse as there are three layers, text, interaction, and context (pp. 20-21). In addition to the text in a discourse, it is perceived as a process of interpretation as the text is the resource. Text is an important part of the discourse as it both produces and interprets processes that involve interaction between these two properties. Knowledge and language are involved when a text is produced and interpreted (p. 20).

Third, it is conditioned for language to be a social process (p. 19). As language is a social practice, it is “...conditioned by other, non-linguistic, parts of society” (p. 20). In other words, texts are cognitive as it is produced in individuals’ minds but have social origins as they are produced and generated socially as well as used in social practice (p. 20).

Hence, discourse involves two social conditions: production and interpretation (p. 20). These social conditions shape peoples’ minds as they bring them to production and interpretation which results in the production and interpretation of texts (p. 21). **Figure 1** (see Appendix 2 - Qualitative) shows Fairclough's three-tiered dimensional model of discourse in a CDA, which interacts with each other in the form of texts, interactions, and contexts (p. 21). First, text concerns formal properties as they a description. Second, interpretation interacts with text as it sees the text as a form of product in the process of production (p. 21). Third, context refers to the relationship to the previous layer in terms of interaction as it attempts to elaborate on the social effects (p. 22). The three dimensions can be seen in **Figure 1** in Appendix 2 - Qualitative.

Media discourse

As this analysis deals with CDA in media articles, I find it relevant to apply media discourse as it studies in-depth communication in the mass media (Fairclough, 1995, pp. 35-36). Mass communication differs from other communicative methods as it uses a set of special properties. In other words, mass media is consumed in another different time and space when read by the audience. Mass media might be perceived as a chain of communicative events as it has become global and might be read by other readers around the world (pp. 36-37). That is, media is a chain between the public and private domain as it is often consumed in private: "A crucial property of the mass media is that they 'mediate' in this way between the public and the private domains" (p. 37). The media has shaped the public's expectations in terms of public versus private behavior of consumption: "The media have tried to bridge the gap between the public conditions of media production and the private conditions of consumptions by evolving a 'communicative ethos' and a 'communicative style'" (Scannell cited in Fairclough, 1995, p. 37). Additionally, cultural disjunctures can be found depending on the location of production and therefore some news might be read differently compared to other parts of the world (pp. 36-37). Differences can also be found in the various types of media regarding their channel of communication as well as the usage of technologies and platforms. For example, if the news is published in print, it might seem more personal to the reader compared to online articles. Hence, the meaning of the text might be portrayed and framed differently depending on the publication's technology and platform. News media serve to inform the public of current situations which can be regional, national, or global, and therefore play a crucial role in shaping peoples' minds and perceptions on how they understand the world surrounding them. In order to shape the public's minds, the media uses strategic framing techniques to persuade the readers to view particular topics from a specific point of view, such as through quotes (p. 38).

Choice of media articles

The sources of the four media articles are all public national media, two of each from France and Italy. They all share to be English but are still published by the national media. Considerations were made in terms of choosing the articles. One of these considerations was keywords to search for relevant content. These keywords were EU and democracy as it was important for the articles' content to discuss these two subjects. Another important feature was for the content to include the public in some way as to reflect the opinion concerning the chosen subject.

The first two articles are published in France by Le Monde and The Connexion. Le Monde is one of the leading newspapers in France. It has both a French and English site for the public to access. It started in 1944 and launched as a daily newspaper. In 2010, the newspaper was sold to private investors as it met some financial issues but in 2019, the journalists were given more free space as new stakeholders financed the newspaper. The newspaper is considered to be left-center biased. Additionally, it is determined to have high factual reporting (Media Bias/Fact Check, 2023-a). This article is chosen due to its connection to France and the EU along with its portrayal of European democracy. The article emphasizes Macron's alignment with EU recommendations regarding the pension reform which is one of the reforms dictated by the EU (Sénécat, 2023). Moreover, it highlights Macron's persuasion to the public to implement the reform but uses another strategy and undermines the democratic processes. Hence, the article discusses the gap between the democratically elected politicians and the public (Bréville, 2023). The second article is published by The Connexion which is an online and print newspaper providing French news. The news platform was established in 2002 and aimed to target the bilingual group (The Connexion, n.d.). As The Connexion aims for its target group to be related to France, its reporting is neutral and does not take a particular stance in its news updates. The article is chosen due to its public aspect in terms of democracy in France. It mentions populist movements, such as the yellow vest movement, and how this trend spread across Europe due to the neglect of European democracy. Additionally, the article discusses the role of the citizen in policy-making, such as the CCC. Hence, it suggests direct democracy to improve the EU and how it should address its citizens regarding decision-making processes (Ramdani, 2021).

The two last articles are both produced and published in Italy, namely ANSA English and Italian Insider. ANSA English or Agenzia Nazionale Stampa Associata (ANSA) was founded in 1945 and is an Italian news agency with its headquarters located in Rome. The news agency covers international affairs as well as local news. In 2017, an agreement was signed by ANSA with AFP and DPA (AFP, 2017) to create a website to launch the news about the EU. In terms of the newspaper's bias, it is the least biased and therefore has a high factual reporting as it has minimal use of loaded words. That means, it uses low wording and has a neutral view of its story selections. Additionally, it has a high credibility ranking in terms of bias (Media Bias/Fact Check, 2023-b). The article by ANSA was chosen due to its theme of EU and democracy as it concerns decision-making processes and EU policies. The article is critical of EU policies in terms of their efficiency. Another critical point in the article is made in terms of the EU and its lack of being proactive as the political leaders are too influenced by the public.

Hence, it is emphasized how the EU needs to regain its position and make decisions without too much influence (ANSA, 2015). The other article is published by The Italian Insider. It serves to be Italy's primary source for an English newspaper providing sufficient daily news concerning Italian affairs. It aims at business people who work in Italy and covers Italian news. Moreover, the newspaper has several codes to follow to provide neutral coverage for its audience (The Italian Insider, n.d.). Therefore, one might expect it to have the least biased news coverage. The last article is chosen because of its discussion concerning democratic portrayal and its democratic processes within the EU (Bodfish, 2018). Overall, the articles share the theme of democracy and the engagement of citizens' participation in the decision-making processes.

4. Historical background

A historical background is given to enlighten both France and Italy's relation to the EU. As they both are founders of the EU, this section will portray their relationship with the membership from 1958 till the present. A historical background will provide a perspective on positive and negative events that influence their attitudes toward the EU.

4.1 France (1951-2023)

4.1.1 ECSC (1951-1957)

It was by French initiative to start the Monnet Plan and the Schuman Plan. Monnet's initiative concerned moving coal and steel production from the monopoly to the free market. Schuman developed and executed this policy as the Schuman Plan aimed to stabilize the coal supply to create a far more competitive market by lowering consumer prices along with the allocation of the industry in Ruhr (Lee, 2004, p. 111). This event initiated the establishment of the ECSC where the six founding member states, France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg signed the Treaty of Paris in 1951 (p. 112). The objective of the ECSC was to avoid any escalation of war. The establishment of the ECSC along with the signing of the Treaty of Paris formed the European Community as it is known today, the European Union, when the Treaty of Rome was signed in 1957 by the founding members (p. 116). Along came the establishment of a series of institutions: "...the European Commission, the European

Assembly (later changed to the European Parliament), the Court of Justice, and the Economic and Social Committee” (p. 116). Hence, a super institutional organization was born. Along with the establishment, France came to play a major role and lead in terms of the integration process (p. 116). The objective of the ECSC is to establish a common market along with a customs union. However, this also met some skepticism along the way as there were several concerns concerning the economic and political benefits of having a customs union. One of these concerns concerned the customs union and how it might contribute to the restoration of Germany’s power economically and politically which is the objective of the ECSC to avoid and instead create cooperation among the member states and not to strengthen the member states’ hegemony.

During 1953 and 1957, France was the main exporter to Europe as its exports doubled in this period. While the French enjoyed this great exportation, the CNPF, the French Patron’s Association, slowly felt stronger towards the idea of having a customs union. Having a customs union also requires having a liberalization union and concerns began surrounding economic isolation (p. 117). Despite France's economy’s improvement, the country also met concerns surrounding its great economy which might lead to isolation in terms of economic and foreign policies. Hence, these concerns were met by the French government which led to the European financial assistance in terms of investment and market opportunities. Eventually, this led to France supporting more European economic integration (p. 118). Therefore, one can conclude that at the beginning of ECSC, France saw opportunities to join and establish a European community as it was able to exploit its national interests in this change of environment (p. 119). The idea of establishing ECSC and a common European community depended on particular interests: limiting Germany’s hegemony, creating a common economic market for the member states to depend on each other, and for France to drive the benefits of having a common European community. The whole idea of having a supranational Europe became an important contributor to moving forward for European integration. Despite the optimism of a common European community, skepticism was met by the public and some of the bureaucrats. Jean Monnet contributed to making the idea of ECSC possible and making the European idea alive (p. 120).

4.1.2 ECSC (1958-1994)

During the years after the establishment of ECSC, came the idea of joining NATO which was fundamental for the Western world (Sutton, 2011, p. 92). Despite the optimism surrounding NATO, France decided to withdraw from its integrated military command as it changed its foreign policy in 1965. Hence, all French troops were removed from NATO's integrated military command. Between 1958 and 1963, France moved from not only having a leading role in the EU but also motivated France to become an independent power on a global level. This also meant that France was the only supporter of the US during the Vietnam War during the Johnson administration in 1965. However, it is worth mentioning that France also controlled Vietnam and had it as a colony before the war escalated and therefore also had an interest in controlling the country (p. 111).

Moving forward to the end of the 1980s, a new Europe was formed after the Cold War ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall. A new emphasis was laid on the new Germany by the French, particularly by Charles de Gaulle and Winston Churchill (p. 245). However, when Germany became a full member of NATO which included an integrated command it was to the French president's dislike (pp. 259-260). NATO was also meant to strengthen European security but instead resulted in dissatisfaction by the French. Hence, the diplomatic ties through NATO did not go as intended as it was supposed to (p. 260). In 1994, France withdrew their troops from Germany as well as refusing to contribute or participate in any form of NATO multinational corps (p. 261).

4.1.3 Maastricht Treaty (1992-1999)

On the 7th of February in 1992, the Maastricht Treaty was signed. From the perspective of the French, the signed Treaty had four goals: a recovery of France in terms of monetary policy; seeking higher social protection that aligns with France's; through the European Council, France's role in terms of foreign policy will be drastically enhanced; and lastly, a solution is found concerning France's European defense-role dilemma (Sutton, 2011, pp. 270-271). The objective of the Maastricht Treaty was to unite Europe and strengthen its ties. One of the aims of the Maastricht Treaty was to adopt a single currency, the Euro. Hence, a new establishment of a new monetary policy was to be installed (p. 279). The adaptation of the Euro contributed to faster economic growth and made Europe more compatible on a global level. One of the factors that led to the signing of the Maastricht Treaty was the *franc fort* policy. This particular

policy contributed to France's high and stable economy before adopting the Euro. The *franc fort* policy was successful as France maintained its high position in terms of economics compared to the German level which was at that time much lower compared to the franc currency in the 1980s and 1990s (p. 280).

In June 1993, a meeting in Copenhagen was held by the European Council. The meeting concerned the establishment of the Copenhagen criteria which became a criteria for joining the EU (p. 314). The planned intention for this criterion was to include the Eastern European countries to which the French did not have objections as it adopted a new French foreign policy due to the enlargement of Central and Eastern Europe to encourage a more positive attitude towards this enlargement (pp. 315, 317).

4.1.4 Financial Crisis and Eurozone (2007-2017)

The financial crisis of 2007-2009 left Europe in chaos. However, the French bank's loss was much lower than the US, the UK, and Germany. Hence, the French banks were more capable of handling the crisis compared to banks in other countries as they needed much less support from the government. Nevertheless, France was among the Southern European countries much more affected by the financial system. Between the period of 2007 to 2010, the French bank lost about \$72.4 billion (Howarth, 2012, p. 6). The debt crisis grew deeper and intensified in 2010-2011. Since its eruption in 2007, the French government prioritized securitization to avoid repeating such an event (p. 24). A so-called 'balanced business model' made it possible for French banks to securitize their operations and make a buffer from the blow of the financial crisis (pp. 24-25). Hence, the French attempted to make a form of protectionism regarding the economy. One crucial feature during this period was the shift in the French political economy, as it stayed in the 'financial market' where French banks sought foreign activities in order to compensate. Nevertheless, the state came to play a bigger role in finance, such as the French bank business model and globalization (p. 25).

In 2017, Emmanuel Macron was elected as the new President of France. He had a special agenda, that is, to create a stronger tie between France and the EU. He made proposals to reinforce the EMU to reform economic and political strategy within the eurozone. Hence, he intended to build a much stronger economic market that could compete on a global level. As France is one of the biggest economies in Europe, he expressed the responsibility lies on France and the rest of Europe as they need both common rules and instruments to accomplish

this goal. Hence, new domestic rules were necessary to be implemented to achieve this (Fontan & Saurugger, 2020, p. 2).

The French political system is known to be centralized which makes the level of policy autonomy high in the French governance (pp. 2-3). The Eurozone crisis is considered an intergovernmental process as it excludes both the EP along the EC. Instead, it strengthens the ECB. As it became intergovernmental, it left the state of the community weak as the member states had unanimity in terms of decision-making (p. 5). From the perspective of MLG, it contributes to adding complexity within the EU with several actors, such as politicians, interest groups, and the media, influencing the last end of the governance to define the national interests (pp. 5-6). These decisions that are then taken during this process, are adapted on the European level and then back to the foreign actors who adopt these new thoughts which will then develop new national polities (p. 6).

Regarding the Eurozone, two perspectives were on the particular subject: First, the French government's attempt to further the Eurozone economic integration. These are done through fiscal sharing by introducing instruments, such as Eurobonds; Second is to tighten the fiscal rules. That is, any form of economic policy coordination is not prioritized as it leads to a loss of power (p. 7). Nevertheless, the French Eurozone in terms of governance system is influenced by small policy networks which contain both civil servants and private bankers. They assisted the Greeks during the crisis to make banks commit to paying off the Greek debt (pp. 9-10).

4.1.5 Brexit and the Future within the EU (2016-)

A year before Macron's election, the UK announced its exit from the EU with Brexit. This resulted in some tensions between France and the UK as their relationship with each other changed (Drake, 2018, p. 97). Despite this change of events, France saw it as an opportunity to become more competitive as the French Prime Minister Édouard Philippe presented the slogan "Let the expatriates return!" (pp. 97-98). The event of Brexit contributed to the French election in 2017, as it became an important puzzle in the political arena. As exactly foreseen by Philippe, France has become too attached to the EU and voted for Macron as the new President who was known to be a great supporter of the EU and its system as well as France's European identity (p. 98). Hence, 'Frexit' did not become a reality (pp. 98-99). However, recent years have shown

a certain instability regarding the French public support for the EU. France and the EU's relationship seems to be not without obstacles in terms of domestic French politics (p. 99).

When President Macron was elected, he celebrated the triumph with the EU anthem and its flag. He had shown great optimism toward the EU and to show the French support. Despite this optimism, there are also expectations to be met, such as domestic distractions which might influence the decision-making resources (p. 103).

4.1.6 North vs South France

Differences can be found across the regions of France, particularly North and South. The Southern regions of France have experienced a high unemployment rate since the financial crisis hit in 2008. At the same time, the Southern regions have one of the fastest population growths while having the highest poverty rates as well. In terms of geographical location, the North has more stretched lands than the South with mountains and rocky terrain (Colibasanu, 2017).

The political landscape varies in the French regions due to the gap between cities and the countryside. For instance, the gap between cities and the countryside is more significant in the South compared to the North as these are more literate whereas this literacy is less in the North due to the fast-growing industrial cities (Hunt, 1984, pp. 552-553). Hence, a pattern can be found in terms of cities and countryside due to industrialization and the geographical location which also might have a say in terms of political orientation. In the North and Paris, the public tends to vote for left-oriented parties (p. 546). In contrast, Southern regions' attitude towards EU integration is rather skeptical as the Provence voted against the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. Moreover, the Southern regions have a long history with the French right in relation to the party National Front which has grown over the years as Marine Le Pen has a strong hold on the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region. The rising support towards the National Front is due to the issue of immigration as it has grown, particularly, in the Southern regions of France (Colibasanu, 2017; Martin, 2021). Some voters believe that national identity is at stake due to migration which is used as an argument by Le Pen as she links crime with immigration (Martin, 2021).

4.2 Italy (1951-2023)

4.2.1 EEC (1946-1990s)

After WWII, Italian emigrant workers sought labor throughout Europe. Hence, a migration movement was in Europe. Especially Switzerland was the main destination for many Italian emigrants. A tendency of migration was seen in Europe. It might be seen as the European countries attempting to adjust this new migratory policy to achieve an international level and become more European (Birindelli, 1976, p. 180). In 1958, the Treaty of Rome acted upon this (pp. 180, 184). EEC was established with six European countries, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. The objective of the EEC was to improve workers' conditions within this Community which became the basis for the common market along with the cooperation across the member states with each of their different economies. The EEC made it possible for workers to move freely between the member states and to guarantee a certain series of rights that benefitted all sides. Hence, a healthy economy became essential in terms of the exchange market along with the other commodities. From a post-functionalist perspective, the EEC showed great benefits through cooperation. It was first in 1959 that the EEC came to function with the importance of Italian emigration and its labor. In other words, a relationship was established between the flow of migration and European industrialization and the workforce of Italy became an important means in the project of EEC. In the period between 1959 and 1961, emigration was at a fast pace within the EEC, but emigration came to a halt and declined in the following years between 1965 and 1966. During the peak of the emigration years, the Italian labor force in the form of emigrants was adopted into Germany and France with 90% (p. 184).

4.2.2 The Maastricht Treaty and Eurozone (1980s-2000s)

European integration was at a fast pace during the 1980s along with an extension of EC policy. During these years, Italy has along with other member states made several proposals concerning institutional reform and added some extensions of Community policy competencies. After the end of the Cold War, Italy saw the opportunity to deepen its relations with the EC in order to reach its goal of a unification of Europe. Hence, this was seen from an intergovernmentalist perspective in terms of the decision-making that came to be. Much reason was to commit to the EC and unify Europe further as fear returned toward Germany. To counter

this fear, Italy had high hopes for economic and political integration to make Germany more deeply engaged in the EC (Daniels, 1993, p. 179). It became known that Italy's government supported the whole concept of 'double acceleration' within the Community which concerned economic and political areas in integration to strengthen its institutional system. In addition to Italy's support, it was in favor of an extension of majority voting to speed up the process of decision-making within the Council of Ministers (p. 180).

Italy got less power in terms of the EP than it first anticipated. Nevertheless, Italy had great optimism for the Treaty on the EU as it saw it as vital to achieving the goals of EMU (p. 180). The Maastricht Treaty was signed in February 1992. During the same year in April, Italy focused much on its capacity in order to meet the Maastricht Treaty criteria regarding EMU. Due to the focus on Italy's capacity to meet this criterion and to follow up on the economic and monetary integration, in September, Italy was forced to be suspended from the ERM of the EMS (p. 178). It is worth noticing that the Italian public had shown great optimism for the EC and the national elites compared to other member states who had a more skeptical view. Despite this optimism, Italy also faced some challenges along the way, like economic integration. From the perspective of the Maastricht Treaty and the Single Market program, the focus is set on rearrangement in terms of Italy's economic management, especially with public finances and a balance between public and private sectors. Concerning the Single Market, it will become a threat to the Italian industry as it will have no competitors within these sectors and will be protected from any outside intruders. Nevertheless, Italy had great support for the various stages of EMU, such as having a single European currency (p. 180). Italy has shown great commitment to EMU although it went through significant changes in terms of economics and politics it still will enjoy the economic benefits of being a part of the EC as it aims to lower prices and to have much healthier public finance. The lowering of inflation along with interest rates would benefit Italy in terms of international competitiveness. Hence, although the process is difficult to manage and adapt, it would benefit Italy in the far end (p. 181). Despite this great optimism, the reality was another as Italy faced multiple difficulties in meeting the convergence criteria for EMU and meeting the requirements of the Maastricht Treaty regarding economics in public finances (p. 182). To meet this set of demands for integration, Italy was met with the urgency to modernize its political state (pp. 182-183). In June 1992, the Amato government was formed in Italy. The Amato government aimed to align Italy's economy with the other EC competitors. Hence, the government needed to take a series of economic measures, such as the economy within the public and reducing the state-owned industry. The Italian industry became more competitive by reducing inflation which lowered the interest rates along with lowering

Italy's public debt (p. 183). Although Italy was far behind in meeting the Maastricht Treaty's requirements, it qualified shortly as it brought down its inflation, interest rates, and public debt and was able to join the first wave of the monetary union (Hopkin, 2012, p. 38).

The Eurozone crisis escalated in July 2012 (p. 35). During the financial crisis of investment banks in 2007 and 2008, Italy's economic situation was vague as its national debt was too large and if it were to exit the EU, it would eventually trigger a financial crisis within the union. This situation was put to attention at the center of the euro crisis and had a slow process to solve (p. 36). During the end of the 1990s and the start of the 2000s, a combination of pressured prices along with the low rate of productivity, and the recent election with Silvio Berlusconi in 2001, resulted in a crash of the industrial sector. Hence, the competitiveness along with the government's fiscal began to decline shortly after joining the monetary union. Technocrats were inserted into the government during the 1990s to achieve the requirements of adopting the euro. During Berlusconi's government, its focus was set on lowering taxes and had no real commitments. Therefore, the public debt went downward again until 2004. This changed due to Romano Prodi's election in 2006. However, this changed again in 2008 due to the financial crisis which resulted in a public debt going on the same level as it did in 1994 with up to 120 percent of GDP (p. 42). This left Italy in a vulnerable state as the financial crisis made its impact on the Eurozone as well (pp. 42-43). Especially the Southern European countries were left exposed to the crisis as budget deficits grew along with unemployment and tax revenues fell drastically. Nevertheless, compared to the other Southern European countries, Italy appeared to be the least affected by the crisis as the third Berlusconi government seemed to solve the issue through fiscal policy while maintaining the budget. It seemed that Italy had the smallest decline concerning the fiscal balance between 2009 and 2011 which differentiated compared to the Northern European countries (p. 43).

4.2.3 Migration Crisis (2015)

Concerning Italy and its history with migration, Italy began as an emigrant country and soon evolved to be an immigration country in the 1960s. This was due to a series of events that unfolded in nearby countries, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the civil war in Yugoslavia, and the enlargement of Eastern European countries along with the Arab Spring, and lately the Syrian war. Italy has managed to regulate its migration laws in order to expand its capacity for integration. During the Berlusconi government which was a center-right cabinet with two right-

wing parties, North League and National Alliance, a law was enforced that restricted the immigrants to only allow entrance if they were secured in terms of a labor contract signed by the migrant and an Italian employer (Stocchiero, 2017, p. 169). Hence, family reunification has been downvoted for as to regulate immigrants (pp. 169-170). Ever since this regulation of immigration law, migrants have become a part of Italian society (p. 170).

In 2015, the migration crisis culminated with the instability in the Mediterranean area, particularly, in Syria. The Balkan route was the most used as the asylum seekers sought to Italy. Turkey was no longer pressured by the flow of asylum seekers as Italy became the new popular route to the EU. In 2014, immigrants have become a majority compared to emigrants. Since 1991, the flow of immigrants has risen and in 2015 the number was at 5,014,437 (p. 171).

The public sphere is the core and essence of a democratic political system. In terms of migration, the topic became sensitive in the public debate. Italy's relationship with migration involves various feelings and tensions. Here, the media plays a vital role as it exploits the subject and tension of fear along with political interests with prejudiced policies (p. 171). Much of the focus on migration is negative, however, much research shows the opposite as migrants are a part of the economic growth and are not an expenditure for the Italian welfare system (pp. 171-172). Italy's number of migrants has risen but compared to other European countries the number is small. In an attempt to influence the public debate and the perception of migrants, the liberal, left-wing parties, and the Catholics tried with rational arguments and statements to keep an open mind on migrants and the possibilities they bring to the country. Despite this effort by the liberals, left-wingers, and Catholics, the rational arguments do not appeal to the public and their emotions toward the subject. Instead, the media and right-wing parties keep exploiting the subject of migrants and focus on the problems that migrants bring along to Italian society. A conflict erupted between the poor immigrants and the poor Italian citizens and had the objective of banning migrants (p. 172). Migrants soon became known as "others" in social narratives and to alienate these from Italian society. Hence, the term migrants were used negatively (p. 173).

In 2015, the Italian public debate focused much on the EU's lack of management in implementing a shared migration policy across the member states. Nevertheless, the Italian government had an agenda based on three pillars: to rescue migrants in the Mediterranean Sea; Italian government to stay committed to the EU regulations; And lastly, as migration is an international issue and not just an Italian issue, it is vital to find a European solution and implement a common policy. Due to Italy's geographical location, the country is exposed to the flow of migrants and needs assistance from the EU. Funds were much needed to keep the

capacity to receive the large number of migrants (p. 175). To assist the Italian government's management of migrants, the EU sought an agreement with Turkey, and this kind of agreement was extended to other third countries (p. 179).

4.2.4 Brexit and the future (2016-)

From the perspective of Italy, Brexit involved concerns in terms of instability and a lack of commitment to forming a new European security. Hence, it was discussed whether Italy would be joining France and Germany becoming the European leaders as the UK had made its exit from the EU (Cladi & Locatelli, 2020, p. 103). The UK and Italy's relationship has been close as the UK mainly had Italy as its partner and supporter in the EU. These came to be known whenever Italy experienced clashes with other greater nations (p. 96). Italy decided to join forces with France and Germany while having a stronger foreign policy as well as strengthening the CSDP (p. 103). Italy was committed to the process of European defense integration and participated in 21 PESCO projects during 2018 (p. 105).

4.1.6 North vs South Italy

Similar to the division of Northern and Southern France, Italy has an unequal regional living standard along with demographic differences. In 2018, the GDP per capita was 55.2 percent in the South whereas North and Central Italy lay around 76.7 percent. Moreover, the concentration of industrialization was located in the North, which peaked after WWII. The end of the oil crisis in the 1970s contributed to the South's infrastructure and labor costs (Fina et al., n.d., p. 1). Multiple political attempts have tried to reduce this regional disparity between North and South. This can be referred to as the four phases.

The first phase concerned the Italian government and its regional policy in Southern Italy from 1951 to 1992. The second phase from 1992 to 1998, is referred to as the transition phase which involved less concentration in the Southern regions but other depressed areas as well in terms of regional policies. Along with this transition phase came the hostility towards the elite in the Northern regions. Hence, in 1991, the Lega Nord brought together the support for autonomy and established a much stronger presence in Northern Italy in the 1970s. From 1998 to 2002, the third phase implemented a new development policy that aimed to strengthen the local development projects through local actors but was unsuccessful. The fourth and last phase concerned the Eastern enlargement of the EU which changed the focus from the South

to the East concerning the Cohesion Policy from 2002 to 2018. Hence, the Cohesion Policy investment in the South was put aside to reduce disparity in the East and the Italian government adopted new austerity measures for the less developed regions (p. 6).

Today, the North and South are divided in terms of political parties. Lega Nord can be categorized as a right-wing populist party in the North, and the M5S in the South is considered to lean left but have both left- and right-wing policies included in their ideology. Hence, the voting pattern in Italy is atypical due to its rise of populist parties all over the country but with the difference found in whether the parties are leaning left or right (Faggian et al., 2021; PolitPro, n.d.-c).

5. Analysis

The analysis will first provide a quantitative part concerning the relationship between ERDF funding and public attitude regarding European democracy to see how the amount of ERDF correlates with public attitude. Afterward, a qualitative analysis is made in the form of CDA to observe similar features in terms of language in the chosen media outlets.

5.1 Quantitative

5.1.2 Analysis

The models demonstrate the effects of the ERDF funding and public opinion concerning European democracy. The regression analysis and histograms aim to demonstrate this effect to show whether the ERDF impacts the public regarding their attitude towards democracy in relation to the EU. This analysis is therefore focused on the allocation of funds and public opinion concerning democracy as the aim of ERDF funding is to create stability and balance among the regions of Europe in terms of social and economic development. Hence, what ERDF funding and democracy have in common is reducing social disparity in economic and social cohesion. In other words, the essence of democracy is to provide equal access and opportunities along with representation of individuals. The section below will elaborate on the featured models included in Appendix 1 - Quantitative.

Distribution of ERDF funding

Model 1 displays the distribution of ERDF funding between France and Italy. The dependent variable in the Historic EU Payments of ERDF Funding dataset is the EU payment annual. The dots in the model represent the regions within each member state to show the amount of funds they received in the period between 2014 and 2018. In other words, it displays the EU ERDF funding of annual EU payments in current prices distributed between France and Italy between 2014 and 2018. Hence, this distribution gives a historical overview of the EU funds (DG Regional Policy, 2024). Additionally, the variable provides an up-to-date view of the allocation of funds in terms of the accessible data to the public. The model shows that Italy receives more quantities of money compared to France. Attached to **Model 1** is **Table 1A** which demonstrates the number of funding France and Italy received from 2014 to 2018. Here, it is evident that Italy receives more compared to France.

Making further observations in terms of the North and South regions of France and Italy, it is possible to see how the allocation of funds differs which can be observed in **Models 2** and **3**. **Models 2** and **3** share the same dependent variable as **Model 1**, EU payment annual, to display the EU ERDF funding of annual EU payments. In order to demonstrate the ERDF funding and the differences between the member states' North and South regions, **Model 2** shows the ERDF funding distributed between these regions in France whereas **Model 3** displays the distribution of North and South regions in Italy. **Model 2** shows a little difference between the North and South, but still enough of a difference to identify that the South regions of France receive more ERDF funding compared to the Northern parts. In contrast to **Model 2**, **Model 3** gives a much greater difference between the North and South regions, as it turns out that the Southern regions of Italy receive much more when compared to the North. Hence, a greater unbalance emerges between Italy's North and South regions than the French regions. Together with **Model 2**, **Table 2A** demonstrates the allocation of ERDF funds distributed between North and South France. Here, South France receives more compared to the North when comparing the years from 2014 to 2018. The same tendency can be observed in **Model 3** and **Table 3A**, as South Italy receives more ERDF funds than the Northern part.

France and Italy's regions are relevant to include in the analysis as the ERDF funding target group is the exposed regions. In order to demonstrate the differences between North and South regions in terms of ERDF funding, **Models 4** and **5** show an OLS regression. **Model 4** shows the contrast between the North and South regions of France and **Model 5** displays the North and South regions of Italy. As the amount of funding differs between the countries, the data may reflect differently as Italy receives more funds than France. One may observe that

both **Models 4** and **5** demonstrate the relationship between ERDF funding and the recipient countries. In both cases, Italy and France's Southern regions receive far more than the Northern regions as the models reflect the quantities of money. However, the data distribution in the OLS regression analysis might be inappropriate as the variance of errors is not constant and changes depending on the independent variable. Hence, the OLS regression analysis violates the robustness (Long, 2008, pp. 433-434). In other words, the data is heteroskedastic and therefore does not appear normally in terms of distribution which makes the final result invalid. Both **Models 4** and **5** do not contain any outliers as there are no extreme values in the data which affects the OLS regression analysis and the coefficient. Additionally, they both display the ERDF funding throughout the years from 2014 to 2018 in order to demonstrate the amount of money the recipients receive within this period. **Model 4** displays the amount of ERDF funding in French regions distributed between North and South. One may notice how the correlation is skewed downward for the North and South, however, the North is more negatively skewed compared to the South. Together with **Table 4A**, the table displays the number of observations along with R^2 which is a statistical measure that represents the proportion of the independent variables. The R^2 goes from 0 to 1 in order to describe the fit of the model. In this case, the R^2 lies at 0.796 which indicates a good and strong relationship between the independent and dependent variables. **Model 5** shows the amount of funding that is received by the Italian regions distributed between North and South. The regression shows how much funding is received over time from the period 2014 to 2018. Compared to **Model 4**, a much greater difference can be observed as Italy's Southern regions receive far more than the Northern regions. Hence, a greater unbalance can be found between Italy's Northern and Southern regions. Together with **Table 5A**, it is possible to see the number of observations included as well as R^2 which in this case lies at 1 indicates a 100% variability as the dependent variable explains the independent variable. However, it is worth considering various factors if R^2 also indicates an overfitting of the data (Using a Model Summary, n.d.).

Public opinion on democracy

Models 6 and **7** all concern public opinion in France and Italy. This is included to see the trust index as well as to investigate the existence of a democratic deficit in relation to the EU. The models are structured as histograms in order to demonstrate the contrasts between France and Italy. Additionally, all the models have sub-models to display further the differences in public opinion in France and Italy. Again, North and South regions are included to make it comparable with the first three models, **Models 1, 2, and 3** as it is interesting to see whether the amount of

ERDF funding affects public opinion concerning democracy. All models and tables can be viewed in the Appendix 1 – Quantitative.

Model 6 displays a histogram concerning public attitude toward European unification and whether it has gone too far. A histogram's purpose is to show a specific study's frequency. In this case, **Model 6** represents the frequency of public opinion concerning whether European unification has gone too far or should go further in France and Italy. In terms of France, one can observe that most respondents are at 4 which is below the middle of the point system. This means that the respondents believe that European unification has gone too far to some extent. Despite this high response at 4, one may also observe that there is also a high response after 5 but it stops at 7. Concerning Italy, it can be seen a high measurement at 5. After 5, the opinion goes downward to 7. From the observations in both France and Italy, one can conclude that the member states share the public opinion concerning European unification, however, a small difference can be found as France is more hostile to the subject than Italy. The median lies at 5 in France and 5 in Italy. Additionally, the number of regions is relevant to mention as it might influence the result. The number of respondents in **Model 6A** and **Model 6B** differ from **Model 6** as the respondents between 0 and 10 are only included as well as North and South regions (islands are not included in the counting). Therefore, the number of respondents changed from 1837 to 1740 for **Model 6A**, and for **Model 6B** the number changed from 2544 to 2381. If looking further at the location of observations, one may observe whether the hostile opinions originate from the North or the South regions. For instance, **Model 6A** shows a histogram of public opinion concerning European unification in the French regions. Here, the Southern regions of France show some concern towards further European unification. **Model 6B** displays a histogram of public opinion regarding European unification in the Italian regions. In contrast to **Model 6A**, **Model 6B** shows a high number of respondents from the Northern regions concerning European unification has gone too far whereas the Southern regions are keener on the idea of European unification but still with a majority leaning towards the opposite. Hence, a pattern might be observed that the idea of European unification should not be pushed further to some extent. The central data mostly lies in the center of the histogram while the distribution consists of multiple peaks. The median for **Model 6A** for Northern France is 6 whereas the South is 5. It can therefore be argued that Northern France tends to have a more positive attitude towards the EU unification in contrast to Southern France. The same tendency can be observed in **Model 6B**, as Northern Italy has a median of 6 whereas the South is at 5. To better compare the datasets, ESS9 is included as the survey was made in 2018. Hence, **Model 6C** compares ESS8, ESS9, and ESS10 to see whether a difference occurs in terms of public opinion in France

regarding European unification between the years 2016, 2018, and 2020. In 2016 (ESS8), the number of respondents changed from 1989 and in 2018 to 1892. Moreover, the median in ESS8 is at 5 which is repeated in ESS9 and ESS10. Therefore, the only difference between 2016 and 2020 is the number of respondents included in the survey. Similar to the model before, **Model 6D** shows a comparison between ESS8, ESS9, and ESS10 where the survey is made in Italy. The number of respondents has changed from 2471 in 2016 to 2566 in 2018. In terms of the median, it lies at 5 as well in all the survey rounds. Hence, it is similar to France as the number of respondents has changed from low to high. What differs between the models is the mean. For instance, **Model 6C** changes its mean from 5.00 to 5.45. In other words, the mean shows the average of a measure regarding the central tendency of the value by dividing the number of observations in each ESS round. Hence, the number is rising from 2018 to 2020. This observation can be made in **Table 6C** which shows a summary statistic of **Model 6C**. In terms of **Model 6D**, the mean shows the same tendency as the number goes from 4.52 to 5.18 which can be viewed in **Table 6D**. Nevertheless, the median has not changed drastically between the years 2016 and 2020. Therefore, it is found relevant to include **Model 7** which concerns public opinion concerning whether key decisions are made by France and Italy rather than the EU for 2020, while interesting to see the years after the implementation of ERDF funding's effect on the public view. The number of respondents in the context of this subject is 1894 for France and 2533 for Italy. One may observe that the majority of the respondents believe that the key decisions are made by their nations rather than the EU. However, Italy has a higher frequency on the subject compared to France. To investigate this further, the regions are included and divided between North and South in both countries to see the existence of a pattern. **Model 7A** first displays the contrasts between the North and South French regions concerning whether the public believes the key decisions are made by France rather than the EU. The majority of the respondents believe this to be true, especially in the Northern regions whereas the South is a little more skeptical but is still over 5 at the point scale. The models have multiple peaks, but most respondents lie over 5. **Model 7B** shares the tendency with **Model 7A** concerning the belief that the nation makes the key decisions rather than the EU. Therefore, **Models 7, 7A, and 7B** share similarities as they all tend to share the belief that each of their nations has more power in terms of making key decisions rather than the EU. Hence, the center of the data mostly lies over 5 and gives the impression that one's nation takes the final decision rather than a supranational institution like the EU. The median for **Model 7** in terms of France lies at 8 and for Italy is at 7. Hence, it can be argued that France has a stronger belief than Italy in relation to whether the respondents believe that key decisions are taken on a national level rather than

the EU. The median for **Model 7A** for Northern and Southern France is 8. For **Model 7B**, the median for Northern Italy is at 8 whereas Southern Italy is at 7. The number of North and South regions differ in France and Italy and is worth including. The number of respondents from North France is 1085 whereas the respondents from South France is 714. It makes a difference at 371 which influences the result. The number of respondents from North Italy is 1556 whereas the number of respondents from South Italy is 827. Hence, a bigger difference can be observed between these two, as it makes 729 a difference between the number of respondents in North and South.

Overall, the included models on public opinion regarding democracy share the same tendency and pattern. However, the data distribution differs to some extent, particularly when observing France and Italy but also regarding each of the nation's regions. **Models 6, 6A, and 6B** tend to share a negative attitude and therefore do not believe that EU unification should go further and has already gone too far. **Models 7, 7A, and 7B** also show the same tendency as the highest peaks happen to be after 5 on the scale. However, some of the peaks differentiate in **Models 7A and 7B** as the North regions believe that the nation makes the key decisions rather than the EU compared to the South regions. The frequency is higher in **Model 7B** which displays Italian North and South regions.

Discussion of findings

The overall findings of the quantitative analysis indicate some differences between France and Italy. For instance, the funding distribution differs between the two member states as Italy receives more than France. On a regional level, the Southern regions of France and Italy receive more in contrast to the Northern regions. This is investigated further by including public opinion concerning the subject of democracy. ERDF funding aims to provide support and balance to the exposed regions within the EU. Together with the ESS, it can see whether it affects the public's perception of democratic principles in terms of transparency and accountability. The ERDF-funded projects uphold the democratic values and principles that the ESS data explores, such as examining public attitudes. One of the ESS subjects concerns whether the member states make key decisions rather than the EU which explores inclusivity and participation. The histograms further explore this (see **Model 6, 6A, 6B, 6C, and 6D** in the appendix). This finding together with the overview of ERDF funding views a small degree in terms of positive attitude as the majority of the public sees the member states participate in the action of decision-making. Despite this positive attitude towards participation, France and

Italy's North and South regions differ, and an unbalance can be seen which might be investigated further in another analysis. To better view and compare the data to the ERDF funding (**Model 1, 2, and 3**), **Model 6C** and **Model 6D** are from the datasets ESS8 made in 2016 and ESS9 in 2018. However, there is little difference between ESS9 and ESS10, making ESS10 relevant to include without ESS9 in **Model 7, Model 7A, and Model 7B**.

The findings suggest that the amount of ERDF funding a region receives aligns with public attitudes. In this case, the trust index is explored through the study of public opinion of the ESS8, ESS9, and ESS10 datasets. The criticism towards the EU can therefore be diverse and multifaceted. However, the difference in periods between the ERDF funding and the ESS Round 10 is worth mentioning, which might affect the analysis along with the number of regions. Nevertheless, it may be argued that the data is still relevant as the collected data shares a similar data pattern with ESS9 as they both share the same median.

The quantitative analysis provides a statistical overview of the ERDF funding by identifying different patterns and tendencies in the numerical data. Together with the qualitative analysis, it will attempt to analyze the social meanings, interpretations, and power dynamics embedded in the language. In other words, the mix of quantitative and qualitative methods provides insight into the socio-political issues relating to democracy and regional development. The section below will analyze the qualitative part using CDA and Fairclough's three-dimensional model.

5.2 Qualitative

5.2.1 Fairclough's three-dimensional model

First dimension - Text

The first dimension of Fairclough's three-dimensional model is the *text*. Text analysis is the first part of the discourse analysis as discourse describes three different phases: "*description of text, interpretation of the relationship between text and interaction, and explanation of the relationship between interaction and social context*" (Fairclough, 2001, p. 91, emphasis added). In other words, these three phases are divided into three sets of dimensions: text, discourse practice, and social practice. The text presents various features that can be perceived as choices by the author or publisher, such as grammar and vocabulary within a discourse analysis (p. 92). The CDA is interpreted as a guide and not a final blueprint. In other words, the texts are

interpreted differently and some formal features are irrelevant to understanding the context and underlying message (p. 92). In terms of formal features, it may be distinguished into three types: *experiential*, *relational*, and *expressive*. Experiential value is the type to describe the author's experience of the social world (p. 93). Relational value refers to the relational features that are present in the text to establish social relationships. Lastly, the expressive values are related to social identities as it is the author's way of expressing to make sense of reality (p. 93).

The subsections below will analyze four different media articles through CDA. In the first dimension, an analysis will be made of the text. The two articles from France are combined as well as the two articles from Italy as they show similar features throughout the texts. The origins of the articles are included in Appendix 2 – Qualitative.

France

Le Monde and The Connexion

The first media article was published by Le Monde in 2023. The text can be perceived as hard news as it reports a political event that applies to the public interest (Simpson et al., 2019, p. 128). The second media article was published by The Connexion in 2021 (Ramdani, 2021). The article reports on political events, such as the Climate Convention while providing background information. Hence, the article can be considered a mix of hard and soft news (Simpson et al., 2019, p. 128).

Starting with Le Monde's headline, "Macron fails to persuade the French people and opts for coercion; 'No scruples, no regrets'?" (Bréville, 2023), concerns Macron's approach to governance. Instead of relying on democratic methods, Macron has sought the solution through coercion which indicates a violation of democracy as the public does not agree with the suggested policies. This is further questioned by the last part of the sentence: "... 'No scruples, no regrets'?" (Bréville, 2023), if Macron seeks to pursue his policies over moral ethics. Lexical cohesion is used to demonstrate the power of meaning as it emphasizes the text and its choice of wording for the readers to memorize which can be seen with the use of 'no' in the last part of the sentence (Simpson et al., 2019, p. 129; Bréville, 2023). In The Connexion's headline: "French citizens' convention 'direct democracy' does not work" (Ramdani, 2021), the pronoun 'French citizens' is used to include a group of people along with the nominalization 'direct democracy' which refers to the French citizens participating in a decision-making process. The headline can be seen as a statement proclaiming that direct democracy does not work. Hence,

this can be viewed as a fact for the author to express to the reader and shows an underlying ideology. In the subtitle, another nominalization is used “strong leadership” (Ramdani, 2021) as a statement in the context of policies in France. According to the subtitle, strong leadership is required as a necessary means to avoid ‘gimmicks’ that can be viewed as a way to alter the governance structure through deceptive tactics (Ramdani, 2021). The purpose of headlines is to serve as an important strategic tool as they provide the reader with the text’s theme. In a newspaper, the headline gives away the political stance and ideology (Simpson et al., 2019, p. 129). Both articles share the theme of democratic legitimacy regarding democratic representation and participation. The Le Monde article concerns Macron’s government to enforce pension reforms dictated by Brussels which suggests a disconnect with public opinion taking part in the decision-making process. The Connexion criticizes the CCC as it does not represent the public and is just a facade for democracy. Hence, both articles have a critical tone and concern about the lack of democratic deficit regarding decision-making processes.

The author of the Le Monde article elaborates on Macron’s pension reform and the effect it has on the French people in the context of the voting process: “...his pension reform, which will affect the lives of the **French people**...” (Bréville, 2023, emphasis added). This sentence creates a social relationship as it refers to a group of people, in this case, the ‘French people.’ In the last sentence of the article, the pronoun ‘we’ is used. Using ‘we’ establishes a positive self-representation as in the ‘French people’ who must bear and face the consequences of Macron’s reforms without going through the voting process (Simpson et al., 2019, p. 130). These pronouns corporate ideology as they stress unity in terms of a group of people (Fairclough, 2001, p. 106). Similar to the Le Monde article, lexical cohesion is used in The Connexion, such as ‘they’ and ‘their’ and is used to refer to a group of people. In the context of the theme’s article, these pronouns refer to the French people not having the necessary decision-making knowledge, but rather needing technocrats. While direct democracy sounds appealing in theory, it does face some challenges. For instance, voters need knowledge or expertise on the voting matter regarding the implementation of a decision as it may not always yield the desired outcomes. In other words, the article argues that direct democracy might empower the citizens as they can participate in the key decision process, but the implementation process may be challenging and is in favor of a more traditional form of governance. Another pronoun used is ‘you.’ Using ‘you’ speaks directly to the reader as a way to bring awareness: “In the long term, **you** need highly accomplished technocrats...” (Ramdani, 2021, emphasis added). This sentence indicates that using direct democracy is a short-term solution to particular issues and instead needs competent individuals who are democratically elected to make the key

decisions. Hence, 'you' is an indefinite pronoun that is used to imply a relationship of solidarity between the author and the reader and appears much more direct (Fairclough, 2001, pp. 106-107).

Another vocabulary feature used is metaphors which is only used in the Le Monde article. Metaphors are means in the context of representation of the author's aspect of experience (p. 99). In other words, metaphors can be used in the context of ideological attachments, such as in the Le Monde article for which 'rump parliament' is used as an example of the opposition has been silenced as well as limited its power and influence to implement the president's actions toward a new reform (p. 100). Another metaphor that points in the same direction in terms of reducing the opposition's power is the word 'rubber-stamping chamber' (Bréville, 2023). Similar to the last metaphor, this sentence indicates the ideology, such as decision-making being independent within the legislative process. This is repeated throughout the article, where the National Assembly is referred to as 'shadow puppets', and their legitimacy is questioned (Bréville, 2023). Using metaphors is a means for the author to express the text's underlying ideology, which can be seen in media discourse (Simpson et al., 2019, p. 130). In The Connexion article, metaphors are not used but rather figurative language. Figurative language is used to convey a specific meaning in the context of the text, such as: "Direct democracy thus became the **rallying cry** of the emboldened gilets jaunes" (Ramdani, 2021, emphasis added) which describes the yellow vest movement's protests.

In both articles, modality is present which can be relational or expressive in grammar (Fairclough, 2001, p. 105). An example of expressive modal value is the verb 'may' for which the ideology is present as the author claims the knowledge (p. 107): "...the wave of protest caused by the government's use of force **may** be a sign of the importance of the issues underlying the law..." (Bréville, 2023, emphasis added). Hence, modality turns the author's view into facts. In other words, it is a way for the author to convey to the reader and in the analysis is used to uncover the text's attitude. In the Connexion article, the two verbs 'to be' and 'to have' are used: "All that matters **is** that everybody **has** a say" (Ramdani, 2021, emphasis added). In the context of this sentence, it has an underlying ideology as it raises the question of the effectiveness of direct democracy. In addition to verbs, modality is frequently present, such as 'will,' 'can,' and 'should.' These used verbs can be categorized as modal auxiliary verbs. The modal auxiliary verb 'should' signal an obligation and indicates the power relation (Fairclough, 2001, pp. 105-106).

By analyzing the choice of wording, one can observe how the Le Monde article advocates for active democratic participation and social justice by criticizing Macron's new

reform. It has an emphasis on the social movement, the yellow vests, and gives a negative portrayal and tone of the government's procedure which aligns with left-leaning values. The Connexion article is skeptical towards direct democracy as it consistently uses a negative lexicon. The article's view aligns with right-leaning values due to its support of traditional governance.

Italy

The Italian Insider and ANSA

The third article was published by The Italian Insider (2018) in the year 2018, and it is considered to be a mix of hard and soft news as it on the one hand reports on Casaleggio's proposal of abolishing the existing parliament in favor of a direct democracy which may be categorized as hard news. On the other hand, the article includes reactions and concerns about this proposal by other political figures and parties which can be considered soft news (Simpson et al., 2019, p. 128). The fourth article was published in 2015 by ANSA (2015). It can be categorized as hard news due to its report on political events and issues as well as statements regarding EU policies. In terms of soft news, the article also consists of an analysis and opinions by the political leaders along with a historical context of European integration and the social dynamics within the EU. The article was published during the 2015 migration crisis, which might influence the article but keeps it objective. Similar to the French articles, the Italian articles share some features, but differences can be made as well. For example, The Italian Insider represents the perspectives of the M5S which is known to have a strong populist ideology along with the reactions of the other parties within the Italian parliament, such as Liberi e Uguali which leans left, and the right-wing Forza Italia (Politpro, n.d.-a; PolitPro, n.d.-b). The M5S is considered to have a mix of left and right-wing policies but populist. The statements made by M5S frequently use direct quotes and emphasize the descriptions of M5S's proposals. The ANSA article mostly reflects a center/left-wing perspective, and left-wing political figures are predominantly used within the text, such as Romano Prodi and Giorgi Napolitano. The article emphasizes the need for social justice and an effective governance system within the EU. The tone of the article is polite and indirect in its description. These features will be elaborated below in the text analysis.

Starting with the headline of The Italian Insider article: "M5S would 'replace parliament with direct democracy'"(Bodfish, 2018). The headline states that the M5S proposes

to replace the existing parliament by implementing a direct democracy. The word ‘direct democracy’ is frequently used throughout the article. Using repetition in a text emphasizes the author’s message and intensifies meaning (Simpson et al., 2019, p. 101). In this case, the author presents M5S’s proposal of abolishing the existing parliament to implement direct democracy where various aspects are included, such as the role of technology within governance along with raising questions on the traditional governance system as times have changed. Hence, the repetition also demonstrates the experiential values regarding how the author experiences society. The ANSA article focuses on the EU and the decision-making in terms of foreign policy. Hence, the article starts with the headline: “Europe ‘must start taking decisions again if wants to count’; Foreign policy, solidarity debated at Florence State of the Union” (ANSA, 2015). In this sentence, expressive modality is present in the verb ‘must’ to signal an obligation for Europe to act and demonstrate a power relation (Fairclough, 2001, pp. 105-106). The headline also gives the underlying ideology to act and address the decision-making challenges within the European context and shape the future of international affairs (Simpson et al., 2019, p. 129).

Both articles include metaphors as a way to emphasize and present the author’s points of view and the underlying ideology. The Italian Insider article consists of multiple metaphors that are used in the context of intertextuality (Simpson et al., 2019, p. 130). However, the author has chosen to include these to emphasize these views, such as in the wording “the most galactic rubbish” (Bodfish, 2018). The metaphor describes the spokesman in the parliamentary group of Forza Italia’s opposition to the M5S proposal. Another metaphor taken from an intertextual context is the sentence:

“**Incompetence** is often an excuse for not letting people participate in important choices that concern them” (Bodfish, 2018, emphasis added).

In this sentence, ‘incompetence’ is used as a metaphor to describe the challenge concerning participation in a direct democracy. The phrase is cited by Casaleggio who proposed implementing direct democracy as a substitute to the traditional form of parliament. Instead, he suggests empowering individuals might break this barrier of incompetence which will create a fairer direct democracy. Hence, direct democracy will engage people directly in governance. A third metaphor found in the text is in the sentence: “...resistance to bureaucracy...often becomes a depository for an almost esoteric knowledge” (Bodfish, 2018). Similar to the last metaphor, this metaphor concerns the need for change in terms of governance

and the need for expertise to participate in the decision-making process. Moreover, this wording highlights the complexity that lies in a bureaucracy. Metaphors can also be seen in the ANSA article to convey the author's message, such as "Europe's decision-making deficit in foreign policy is huge and this is a field in which "the instruments are there, but what is lacking is political will" maintained Napolitano" (ANSA, 2015). The sentence refers to European foreign policy's decision-making deficit and lack of political determination.

The two articles follow a similar pattern regarding grammar, the verbs 'to be' and 'to have.' In the Italian Insider article, these verbs are often used in the context of intertextuality but are highlighted by the author as she includes them in the article:

"David Casaleggio...**has** called for parliament **to be** abolished in favour of 'direct democracy' on the internet, which **has** led other parties to protest against signs of totalitarian tendencies" (Bodfish, 2018, emphasis added).

This sentence is taken from a quote by Casaleggio with the statement that having a representational democracy is unavoidable and will eventually happen at some point. Additionally, he advocates for a shift from the representational democracy where only a few make decisions on behalf of the citizens and instead having a direct democracy facilitated by technology. Hence, this view reflects Casaleggio's vision in terms of decentralization of the government. The verb 'to be' in this sentence indicates a relational process and hence is categorized as a relational value as it is linked to another entity (Simpson et al., 2019, p. 131; Fairclough, 2001, p. 105). In the ANSA article, the verb 'to have' is used as well, such as: "...the gap between European people and the EU institutions **has** widened..." (ANSA, 2015, emphasis added). This sentence describes the current state of Europe and the gap that exists between the people and the institutions.

In The Italian Insider article, the modal verb 'should' indicates power dynamics as a call to action. These verbs can therefore be categorized as modal auxiliary verbs (Fairclough, 2001, pp. 105-106).

"**We** don't need barons of intelligence that decide what **should** be done, but competent people in various circles of life that ask **us** what goals **we** want to go towards and that propose a route to achieve **them**" (Bodfish, 2018, emphasis added).

A frequently used pronoun is 'we' which gives a feeling of inclusion and a positive self-presentation of a group (Simpson et al., 2019, p. 130; Fairclough, 2001, p. 106). In the context of this sentence, using 'them' serves as a cohesive function by implying a goal to reach which is an idea followed throughout the article. Using these pronouns can be categorized as relational (Fairclough, 2001, p. 93). In the ANSA article, pronouns are not used.

Through this text analysis, it is possible to distinguish the articles' differences. For example, The Italian Insider suggests a favorable view on direct democracy due to its use of a positive lexicon along with its arguments. It criticizes the traditional form of governance as being outdated and incompetent using metaphors. These features contribute to left-leaning ideologies due to the promotion of direct democracy and active participation. The ANSA article uses negative wordings to describe the EU's current state and handling of international affairs using figurative language as well as the choice of verbs as these describe the current state of reality. Hence, much of its critique is directed at EU's current policies as not being efficient enough which leads to left-leaning perspectives in terms of austerity.

Second dimension - Discourse practice

The second dimension of Fairclough's three-dimensional model is the *discourse practice* and is the second part of the discourse analysis. Fairclough (2001) categorizes this phase as interpretation to emphasize the relationship between text and interaction or the actions of the analysts and the participants (pp. 91, 118). Hence, the focus is on the text interpretation (p. 118). Moreover, a discourse practice may be interpreted as analyzing a text's production, distribution, and consumption. In other words, a text may involve multiple parties, consequently affecting the narrative in terms of transformations and modifications (Simpson et al., 2019, p. 132). In order to analyze this phase, Fairclough (2001) has listed four elements: *Surface of utterance*; *Meaning of utterance*; *Local coherence*; And *text structure and 'point'* (pp. 119-120). Surface utterance refers to used vocabulary, grammar, and syntax (p. 119). The meaning of utterance goes beyond the text and consider the meanings made throughout (pp. 119-120). Local coherence links interpretation between the meaning and utterances. In other words, it presents the main arguments in the texts. Text structure and 'point' refer to framing techniques, hence, the author's main points (p. 120).

France

Le Monde

Le Monde is a French newspaper which has an international audience. In terms of the surface of utterance, the media article by Le Monde (2023) has a formal tone that constitutes the text's overall message that downplays Macron's strategy to implement his agenda without public voting. Hence, it carries ideological persuasion connotations through metaphors and modality. As the newspaper Le Monde (2023) is left-center biased, its political stance aligns with liberal policies and addresses democratic issues, such as economic inequality. It centers on stories that value their political beliefs while maintaining a degree of objectivity. In this case, the story focuses on the key decision process for which the public and the parliament are absent.

The meaning of utterance can be observed throughout the text. For instance, in the paragraph which starts with:

“...the wave of protest caused by the government's use of force may be a sign of the importance of the issues underlying the law and the way it's been imposed...”
(Bréville, 2023).

It can be seen how the author criticizes the government's approach to societal issues as the government overrides the population's well-being to benefit and prioritize economics. Hence, it can be observed how the author's reflection on the government and its state along with its societal values can be viewed as a left-leaning perspective (Fairclough, 2001, pp. 119-120).

An example of local coherence can be observed in this sentence:

“On nine occasions, responding to calls from an unusually united *intersyndicale* (inter-union committee), millions of people have marched in large cities – and in small towns that had never seen such mobilisations” (Bréville, 2023, emphasis added).

The local coherence is present through the number of sequences, in this case, ‘nine occasions.’ The ‘responding to calls’ explains these events which is further elaborated by the ‘millions of people.’ Hence, sequential events are important for the coherence to understand the chronological sequence. In other words, local coherence refers to the consistency of a flow (Fairclough, 2001, pp. 119-120).

The text structure and ‘points’ are provided in a chronological structure. Examples of this structure are given through historical events and social movements, such as the yellow

vests. These events also illustrate the power dynamics and the evolving state of politics within France. In other words, the relationship is visible between the parts as various points are given throughout the text from the author's perspective (Fairclough, 2001, pp. 119-120).

Overall, the narrative in this article builds on historical examples of the social movements that are emphasized as the opposition to authoritarian governance. Therefore, this view can be considered as a left-leaning bias.

The Connexion - France

The Connexion is a French newspaper that targets English speakers in France. Concerning the article by Connexion (2021), the tone is formal as it uses formal expressions while staying objective in its criticism of the decision-making process in France. Hence, the article adopts a skeptical approach in relation to direct democracy. The surface of utterance can be observed through this statement:

“Ecological transition is complicated for scientists and other specialists at the best of time, and thus not an obvious topic for a democratic experiment” (The Connexion, 2021).

The sentence is a direct critique of the masses, as the ecological transition is characterized as too complicated for the public to understand in the context of making key decisions. In other words, much criticism is directed at the Climate Convention in terms of whether it is suitable for democratic processes.

An example of the meaning of an utterance can also be seen in the CCC and its role in whether it can give sufficient advice to the government on the topic. Hence, the article highlights the need to act through effective political leadership with competence and knowledge (Fairclough, 2001, pp. 119-120).

The local coherence can be observed through the consistent theme of skepticism towards direct democracy regarding the CCC. This skepticism is evident and can be seen in multiple paragraphs throughout the article, such as the yellow vests movement and their fight for direct democracy along with the ecological transition where most of the CCC's proposals were watered down or purely rejected as the effectiveness is considered questionable (pp. 119-120).

Several structural points are made within the text. Hence, an argumentative pattern can be observed, such as the success of populist movements like the yellow vests and the proposal of the CCC which discusses the challenges it faces in terms of exclusion from the decision-making phase (pp. 119-120). Therefore, the article's view can be seen as a conservative/right perspective due to this argumentative pattern.

Italy

The Italian Insider

The Italian Insider is an English newspaper that reports daily news in Italy and the Mediterranean (The Italian Insider, n.d.). The Italian Insider article has a mix of formal and informal tones throughout as it incorporates multiple quotations that involve informal and figurative language. This also makes the text approachable for the reader to read. Therefore, the article has a consistently neutral tone while being informative.

Concerning the surface of utterance, it is practiced through expressions and opinions. In the article, quotations are widely used to demonstrate these voices along with their argumentations in the context of whether to abolish the parliament in favor of direct democracy on the Internet. The second dimension concerns the construction of social identities and relationships along with how power is exercised through discourse which can be seen enacted through the article's arguments (Fairclough, 2001, pp. 119-120). Multiple actors are present in the text, for instance, Casaleggio who proposed his vision of direct democracy and to change the political power structures by including citizens more directly through the Internet.

The use of local coherence refers to internal consistency within a text (Fairclough, 2001, pp. 119-120). In this article, consistency is present through quotations and attributions in terms of how the individuals and stakeholders experience the proposal concerning direct democracy. Hence, the quotations serve the purpose of presenting different points of view on the proposal presented. The article is then structured and built by counterarguments in a logical sequence. In other words, it connects the ideas.

Last is the text structure and 'points' which concern conveying the message of the text (Fairclough, 2001, pp. 119-120). The central point of the article is Casaleggio's proposal of adopting direct democracy to replace the parliament. The central topic is then discussed with various oppositions which highlights the totalitarian tendencies. Challenges regarding the bureaucracy and the Internet are discussed further to emphasize the need to renew the

governance. Hence, the points made contribute to the article's bias by leaning left as it prioritizes participatory democracy while challenging the traditional form of governance.

ANSA

ANSA is an online Italian news station and has an Italian and English news site (ANSA, n.d.). The tone of the article is formal as it discusses political issues related to the EU in relation to foreign policy and decision-making and includes references to politicians and experts. Some of the included references might appear informal, nevertheless, the article stays objective and maintains consistent professional language.

In addition to the included references, these serve to provide different perspectives to give a sense of authenticity. Hence, the surface of utterance is present through the quotations as they construct power dynamics within the text. With the quotations are the attributions that concern individuals, such as political figures and organizations. The attributions provide a sense of credibility as they also establish social identities. Together, they ensemble a discursive strategy as they advance their arguments and viewpoints.

The meaning of utterance can be observed through the main arguments and its framing on issues of the responses to the crises, such as the migration crisis along with the concerns about the EU. The prominent political actors included are Prodi and Napolitano as the critics of the EU and its system.

In terms of local coherence, the logical connection can also be observed through the use of quotations and attributions as they provide the context and credibility to the arguments made in the text while keeping on the topic by providing supporting details. Hence, the logical structure is followed through the ideas.

Lastly is the text structure and 'points.' In the context of this article, the structure involves the various points made in terms of arguments, such as the quotations along with their perspectives which sets the theme of the article. In this case, the theme is the EU and the challenges of decision-making within foreign policy. To demonstrate these issues, the migrant crisis is mentioned which has affected the European people and their societies. The arguments and perspectives presented are then analyzed to discuss their significance and to provide readers with the context of complexity. The article is built on critics of the EU and its need for improvement; hence, it can be argued that the article's bias is centrist.

Third dimension - Social practice

The last dimension is social practice. According to Fairclough, this stage is the explanation phase which aims to portray discourse as a social process of a social practice (Fairclough, 2001, p. 135). In other words, the phase is determined by social structures and for which society the text is produced—social practice concerns in which context the text is produced in relation to society and for whom. Therefore, the analyzed texts will be studied from a social and cultural perspective and the discourse analysis becomes ‘critical’ in its analysis (Simpson et al., 2019, p. 133).

Political climate in the French articles

The media article by Le Monde was published in 2023 and The Connexion in 2021. In 2021, COVID-19 was at its peak. Therefore, economic aid packages were distributed among the EU member states to control the virus’s effect from a health and economic perspective. Despite this effort, populist movements erupted to protest the government policies relating to COVID-19 and its restrictions (Aljazeera, 2021). Hence, the article by The Connexion concentrates on the evolving relationship between French citizens and the government along with European dynamics and trends. The emphasis lies on the social movements, such as the yellow vests to highlight the tensions and citizens’ participation in the political debate in a democratic society. It focuses on citizen participation to bring awareness, such as the environment. Therefore, it suggests a cultural change for the government to adopt a direct democracy. Moreover, the article has a right-wing perspective as it directly criticizes the populist movements while emphasizing the traditional form of governance as it questions whether the public is able to participate in the decision-making phase. Nevertheless, the article illustrates the growing influence of populist movements, and it challenges the traditional form of government both on a national and international level in the EU.

In the article by Le Monde, the focus is set on the high tensions that have divided France within its society. It directs its criticism at the political elites as they exclude the public and their interests in the decision-making process. Hence, issues regarding representation are shown to highlight the need for the inclusion of the public. Concerns about democratic norms are highlighted regarding the state’s power and legitimacy as many reforms are dictated by Brussels. The Le Monde article is a critique of President Macron and some of his right-wing economic policies. It highlights the left-wing perspectives along with its political leaders while

acknowledging populist movements. However, the quotes are only taken by left-wing political figures which contribute to the article's bias of having a left-wing perspective on democracy.

Both articles share a theme of power dynamics to demonstrate the relationship between the French citizens and the state. Democracy is the centered topic concerning France and its relationship with the EU as many reforms are dictated by the supranational institution. However, they both question whether the decision-making phase is democratic and transparent for the citizens to engage and participate.

Political climate in the Italian articles

The articles published by The Italian Insider and ANSA were both published before COVID-19. Hence, it is unlikely to influence the perspective on Italy's relationship with the EU. However, the articles were released in 2015 and 2018 which is during the migration crisis. Hence, the articles have some references to this event and are affected by the writing, such as ANSA in terms of issues related to foreign policy. In the ANSA article, the underlying ideologies can be observed through the event of the migration crisis by including several stakeholders through figurative language. Most of the political quotes are taken by left-wing party members which emphasizes this perspective.

Similar to the ANSA article, The Italian Insider article includes several quotations to demonstrate the power relations between different political figures and parties, mostly by the M5S which gives a both right and left-wing perspective. The theme of this article is direct democracy whereas the article by ANSA concentrates on challenges related to foreign policy and solidarity. Despite their differences, they both share the need for renewal and change within politics, particularly in the decision-making phase. Hence, this is a repetitive theme throughout the articles and is highlighted in similar ways, such as including references with high authority. This demonstrates credibility and trust in the articles. Including actors and attributions creates a powerful tool to construct language and power. Additionally, both focus on the use of technology and its potential to renew governance and participation methods.

6. Limitations

6.1 Quantitative

Limitations can be found in both the quantitative and qualitative studies. In terms of the quantitative, the first limitation is the time frame concerning the historic EU payments - regionalised and modeled and ESS10 as they display different periods. This makes the research difficult to compare and uphold against. The reason for still choosing these two datasets is these are the newest up-to-date datasets regarding ERDF and public attitude toward democracy. To better compare the analysis, ESS8 and ESS9 are included to ensure the compatibility between the two datasets of ERDF funding and ESS. ESS8 and ESS9 show a similarity of the data pattern to ESS10, therefore, it is still relevant to include and analyze in relation to the chosen topic. This leads to another limitation as the ESS rounds do not all concern France and Italy in the geographical scope, which was the reason to include ESS8, ESS9, and ESS10 as they include the two countries in the survey of EU unification. A third limitation is the non-inclusion of the Eurobarometer as other datasets are included instead to make the study relevant. The Eurobarometer dataset does not have a data subset to subtract from. Additionally, it does not contain data on a regional level which would be interesting to observe as the ERDF aims to reduce social and economic disparity in regions.

6.2 Qualitative

Concerning qualitative limitations, the dates of the articles' publications vary and might be influenced by different events, such as the financial crisis, the migration crisis, and COVID-19. Hence, the narratives of the texts might be influenced to some extent which can affect this thesis's analysis. Additionally, the articles are based on a national level rather than a regional level which would have made the analysis more significant to analyze and uphold against the ERDF data. Another limitation is the language as the articles are in English and therefore not in their native languages. This might affect the analysis due to another choice of wording and the target audience may be more widespread. Hence, the articles might not only be read by the native citizens due to this factor. A third limitation is the content of the articles as they do not directly mention the ERDF funding. However, the focus of the qualitative analysis is based on the articles' portrayal and perception of democracy in France and Italy and are therefore still

relevant to include in the analysis. A fourth limitation concerns the number of included articles in the analysis. Due to time and resources, four articles were included in the qualitative analysis which might also impact the analysis. Collecting more articles would have given a larger observation in terms of analyzing patterns and themes.

7. Discussion and conclusion

In examining the research question *what is the relation between the effect of the ERDF funding on public opinion towards the EU and the discursive portrayal of democracy framed by France and Italy's media?* this thesis has highlighted some critical points that are relevant to include. The point of this research is to see the allocation of ERDF funding and its effect on the public attitude as well as the media outlets' role.

The quantitative part has shown a similarity between the allocation of ERDF funding and public opinion in France and Italy. The ERDF regressions have demonstrated that during 2016 and 2018, the Southern regions of France and Italy have received more in contrast to the North for which the public attitude in the Southern regions of France and Italy are a little lower compared to the North. From a post-functionalist perspective, the public opinion surveys concerning unification and whether the power lies in the nation rather than the EU show the value of participation in decision-making and how these issues align with national sovereignty. National and regional attachment influence the opinions concerning integration and the system of governance. As the South seems to be more skeptical towards the EU, the economy might not be a vital factor in terms of funding but rather value the role of participation. Concerning unification, European integration might become too politicized, and national sovereignty is threatened for which euroscepticism has its roots. According to the included public opinion, it tends to favor key-decision powers lying at the national level as it directly affects national identity and welfare. This is further explored in the qualitative part in the form of media coverage that is related to democracy.

The chosen media articles were analyzed to understand the context and dynamics of politicization. The key findings of these articles can be found in the linkage between the choice of wordings in the context of language and their political views. For instance, the French articles by Le Monde and The Connexion use opposite wordings despite their similar features. The article by Le Monde has a left-wing perspective due to its critique of Macron and his economic right-wing policies. The article is written in the context of French politics and

Macron's response to the pension reform dictated by the EU along with democratic engagement which has led to public opposition. A growing disconnect between the government and the public continues due to these undemocratic processes. The article frequently uses an analytical and historical description of the democratic approach concerning decision-making processes. In contrast, the Connexion article tends to have a right-wing aspect as it describes the success of populist movements and highlights the need for traditional governance. Regarding the used language, the article tends to use dismissive wordings in its figurative language. The context of the article focuses on the effectiveness of direct democracy in France while criticizing Macron's approach to incorporating the citizens in terms of policy-making. The text situates this discussion within the context of the rising populist movements within the EU, such as the yellow vests which demand a direct democracy for the citizens to participate in the decision-making. However, direct democracy is questioned as it lacks the required knowledge in policy-making and favors traditional governance. From an EU perspective, the text discusses the populist challenges along with the complexities of direct democracy. In short, both articles share a common contextual theme regarding populist movements and democratic legitimacy. However, they differ concerning the focus, tone, and political perspectives. The Italian articles published by The Italian Insider and ANSA provide a similar portrayal where they both differentiate in terms of political aspects. The Italian Insider is considered to have a mix of left and right-wing perspectives as it is given by the populist party M5S along with the reactions of other parties within the Italian Parliament. The context of the written text is the argument made by M5S concerning the inefficiency of traditional democracy. The Internet's role is highlighted regarding citizens' participation. Regarding the EU, it advocates participatory methods within decision-making processes. In contrast, ANSA's article has a left/centrist aspect due to its focus on the party members along with an emphasis on the social aspect of justice within a government. The context of the article discusses the EU and its lack of solidarity in particular fields, such as foreign policy for which the EU is criticized for its deficit in decision-making and implementation. Both Italian articles suggest a need for the renewal of reform but differ on how it should be implemented where The Italian Insider advocates for direct democracy using the Internet and ANSA through solidarity and unity within the EU to take on these challenges. In addition to differences, the political aspect of The Italian Insider concentrates on the perspective of M5S's proposal while ANSA encompasses a broader critique of the EU.

In a historical and political context, Northern France tends to vote for left-wing parties whereas the South is much more influenced by right-wing parties. In contrast to the division of the region's political orientations in France, Northern Italy is highly influenced by right-wing

views compared to the South due to the high popularity of populist parties in the North, such as Lega Nord, and Brothers of Italy. The chosen articles for the media analysis show the same tendency and pattern in terms of the written context and the political views as earlier mentioned. Hence, a correlation may occur between those reading the articles and their political views. Summarizing these key findings in the qualitative material, one can observe the same pattern and tendency across the media articles. In terms of the articles' themes and their portrayal of democracy, The Connexion and The Italian Insider share the topic of 'direct democracy' while both sharing the underlying ideology and use of language whereas Le Monde and ANSA call for a renewal of EU's foundational principles. Hence, they all share renewal of governance but differ in terms of how this is achieved through implementation.

Using quantitative and qualitative methods, one can conclude their similarities and differences. On one hand, the numbers from the quantitative data suggest a correlation between funding and skepticism. In this case, the higher ERDF funding correlates with increased skepticism. Here, it shows how the distribution of funding affects public opinion for which the Southern regions in both member states tend to receive more in contrast to their Northern parts while the South appears more skeptical. From an MLG perspective, frustrations concerning the funding process and its allocation might influence the citizens. On the other hand, the qualitative analysis makes a distinction based on the media outlets' political leanings. In this case, North France is mostly influenced by the left and South France by the right while North Italy leans to the right and South Italy to the left. However, Italy is a particular case as the bigger cities tend to lean left. The right-wing/centrist articles might appeal more to those who value strong and critical reporting than the left-wing articles whose preference is more analytical and descriptive which appears reflected and prefers collective solutions.

From a post-functionalist perspective, the right-wing is often euro-skeptic whereas the left-wing emphasizes the need for collaboration. The article with the right-wing perspective appears critical regarding supranational governance systems, such as the EU whereas left-wing advocates the essence of post-functionalism in terms of collaboration in policy-making. The MLG is implemented through the discussions of reforms along with critiques of the different levels of governance. The articles illustrate the complex process and interplay between local, national, and supranational levels of governance in terms of the decision-making phase. Together with the quantitative findings, the higher the ERDF funding is, the greater the skepticism as it might be influenced by political ideology. Hence, the relationship between ERDF funding and regional skepticism is rather complex and the media's role in shaping public perception is a significant dynamic when promoting the subject of European democracy. It is

important to emphasize democracy is also an economic factor regarding the ERDF funds as it creates participation and social inclusion which the quantitative analysis shows.

Despite the research's limitations, the quantitative part has shown a similarity between the allocation of ERDF funding and public opinion in France and Italy. Due to limited time and resources, the research may be investigated further to gain a deeper understanding of public attitudes. To understand these regional dynamics, more research is needed in the local media to foster the perception of the EU and its multi-level governance framework.

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