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Is Euroscepticism Rising in the European Union?



Anti-European Union Protest Flag, Photo Source: Debating Europe

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Will other countries leave the Union too?

On June 23rd of 2016, the United Kingdom, then part of the European Union, held a referendum to vote on whether to leave the Union. It resulted in a slight majority of the British population wishing to part ways with the continental collaboration, with exactly 51.89% of voters choosing to separate. (Government of the Netherlands, 2022) The United Kingdom, then officially separated from the EU in 2020.

Increasingly, other political groups within the Union have grown increasingly fonder of Euroscepticism, with the intent of following the steps of the Kingdom and detaching from the EU. Unlike the states in the United States, countries in the European Union lack a strong cultural identity which might affect the feeling of belonging to this conglomerate of nations. Will this identity deficit be enough for other countries to walk away from the European Union, or will the economic and political benefits of the latter be enough to convince the current nations to stay and work on building even stronger ties?

According to Dr Dutta “The main reasons for the rise of Euroscepticism have been notions that integration weakens national sovereignty and the nation state; that the EU is too bureaucratic and elite-driven; it encourages high levels of migration; or it is a neoliberal organization which benefits the business elite at the expense of the working class.” (Dutta, 2018) She explains that both sides of the political spectrum (left and right) have reasons for their Euroscepticism although it is more common among right-wing parties in EU countries. The reasoning for such is based on the desire of preservation of sovereignty and national identity.



*Is Europe's Refugee Crisis Is a Crisis of Humanity, not Migration or Economic Survival?
Photo Source: Impakter*

In the case of Germany, despite being one of the countries that benefited the most from being part of the Union, a rising consensus towards the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) has been occurring. Grimm explains that the AfD's argument for being against the Eurozone is because of rising tensions rooted from the separation between donor and debtor countries that the common currency brought. (Grimm, 2015) From the end of the second World War, though, Germany has been working on achieving a long-lasting peace and rebuilding back the economy and the Euro, according to former chancellor Angela Merkel, is actually a necessary tool for maintaining peace. (Merkel, 2011) Surveyed Germans were found to identify also as Europeans and believed that even the simple achievement of peace is a great benefit of being part of the EU. (Adebahr, 2018)

So, while on one hand it has been claimed that the employment of the Euro brought heavy economical drawbacks, it is still seen as a guarantor of peace for Germans.

Another country that often raises doubts on the utility of the EU is Austria. The introduction to the Euro when entering the EU negatively affected the population as prices started rising; with this economic impact and the eastern expansion of the EU, a lot of Austrians started worrying about what benefits the Union could actually have brought and along with "Discontent surrounding the EU bureaucracy, imperfect democratic procedures at the EU level and – finally, but importantly – Austria's status as a net contributor to the EU budget" a lot of people were unhappy with the outcome of this multilateral deal, (Schmidt, 2016) Statistics-wise, while on the one hand, the Eurobarometer shows little support of the Union from Austrian citizens, below the EU average, on the other hand, the Austrian Society for European Politics has polled that very few people support Öxit (Austria leaving the Union), with an average of two-thirds of the country usually in favor of the Union and apparently, this low desire of leaving, is a reaction to Brexit, (Auel, 2018)



Leaders of several Euroskeptical parties—(from left) Matteo Salvini of Italy's Northern League, Harald Vilimsky of Austria's Freedom Party, Marine Le Pen of France's National Front, and Geert Wilders of the Dutch Party for Freedom—after a meeting at the European Parliament in Brussels, May 28, 2014.

Italy has recently had elections which resulted in the victory of the centre-right coalition, most parties of which have shared a somewhat anti-European stance in the past. An increasing number of Italians, even more following the pandemic, have seen the EU as the cause of internal problems and that the introduction of the Euro in the country was detrimental to the economy. ([Berti, 2020](#))



In Rome, anti-European Union protestors show dissatisfaction during anniversary support for the EU. Photo Credit: AFP

One of the main reasons why Italy is unsatisfied with the EU is the way in which Italy has to deal with the refugees and asylum seekers that reach the Italian coasts. According to the 2015 EU agreement, there should have been a redistribution of the migrants among all the countries which was not the case, and Italy was left to deal with the issue on its own. (Romano, 2018) Even before COVID-19, Italy has been the most Eurosceptic country among all members of the Union. In 2020, the disapproval rate towards the EU reached 47%, compared to 35% two years prior. (Eupinions,2022)

eupinions trends/ EU Referendum

Imagine there is a referendum and you could decide whether your country stays as a member of the European Union. How would you vote?

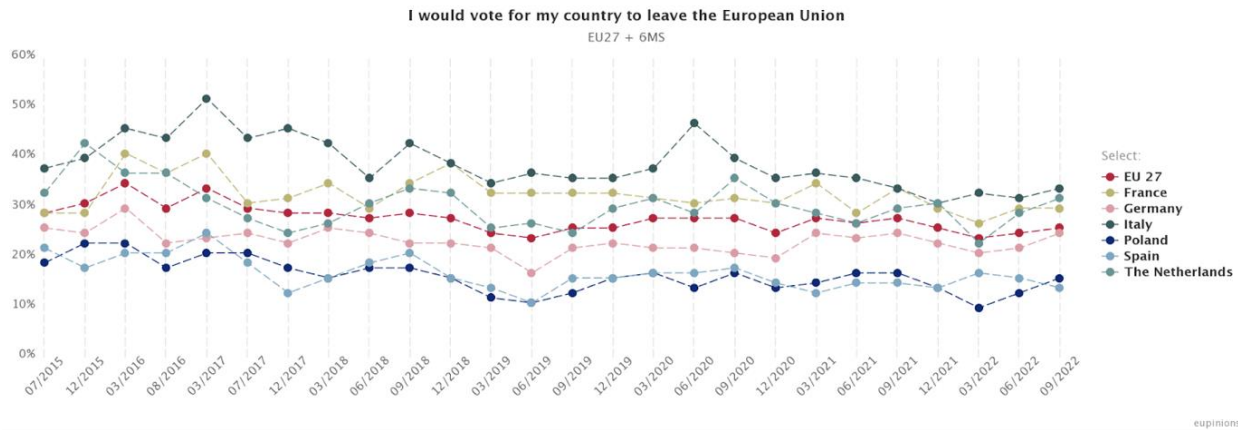


Image Credit: Eupinions.eu Bertelsmann Stiftung eupinions.eu

According to the chart, Italy has the highest disapproval rate, but the trend, since 2020, has slowly lowered from 47% to 34%, while Germany, instead, follows the trends of the combined EU countries which have had a consistent rate of under 30% for the past 5 years.

In the last couple of years, the pandemic has brought severe economic impacts in all the EU countries. This common experience could have potentially affected the trust people have of the Union either positively or negatively depending on how much collaboration was initiated. The countries that have been the most affected by the pandemic could increasingly doubt the European project if they were not supported effectively, while the more stable ones are growing tired of continuously offering their support to the former. (Busse et al., 2020) This might cause the different country groups to slowly shift away from each other because of economical differences, which Covid-19 has increased. According to the European Council on Foreign Relations, the effect was mostly mixed but tending towards a positive consolidating experience among the citizens of the European Union.

Impact of the covid-19 pandemic on "feeling European" among the national population. In number of EU member states.

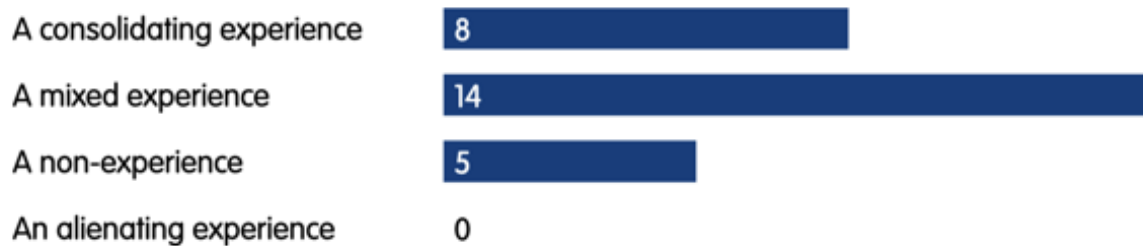


Image credit: European Council on Foreign Relations [ECFR - ecfr.eu](https://ecfr.eu)

As shown in the chart, no one surveyed felt less European than before the pandemic despite the fluctuating collaboration between countries and the closure of all borders. Donceel explains that in the most recent Eurobarometer, the feeling towards the Union was fairly positive overall but the reality is more pessimistic when looking at single countries. (Donceel,2021)

It is then safe to conclude that, although right wing parties have been spreading Euroscepticism among their citizens and propose more nationalist stances instead, none of the EU countries have had a dangerously increasing negative view of the Union. Most of the rates seem stable and much below the 50% mark, which could potentially cause another EU country to exit if a referendum was to take place. The Anti-EU propaganda brought around these countries have not reached an effective percentage to consider leaving as a viable option, but rather a faraway hypothesis that is not taken as seriously into consideration as the United Kingdom did. Even Italy, which once peaked slightly over 50%, does not seem to have serious intentions of leaving; rather, the new right-winged government seems to desire to gain a bigger role and use the Union as a tool. As of now, all EU countries will most likely not follow the footsteps of the Brits as the Euro-citizens still believe that despite many of its flaws, the European Union has delivered more benefits within their individual countries.

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