

Public support for European solidarity: Between Euroscepticism and EU agenda preferences?

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Accepted for publication in the *Journal of Common Market Studies*

Abstract: This study investigates public support for two types of EU-wide solidarity that currently exist, namely member state solidarity (i.e. transfers to less developed and crisis-hit countries) and transnational solidarity (i.e. granting cross-border social rights to EU citizens). Drawing on data from the 2014 Belgian National Election Study, we find that opposition towards European integration – in particular regarding EU enlargement – reduces citizens’ willingness to support European solidarity to a large extent. However, this study reveals that public support for European solidarity cannot simply be reduced to a pro-versus anti-integration, nor to a domestic left-right conflict. Citizens’ substantive positions towards the EU’s social and economic agenda are a crucial element in understanding contestation over European integration issues.

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Introduction

The Brexit referendum has forced European policymakers to reflect on the course of the European project more than ever. In its white paper on the future of Europe, the European Commission carved out five scenarios that differ strongly in the proposed scope of competences for the EU (European Commission, 2017c). Very often, debates about the future of the EU are reduced to a choice between ‘more or less’ Europe. However, this opposition conceals a more fundamental debate on what kind of Europe – in terms of its policy and priorities – is preferable. In this regard, the EU has been increasingly criticized for being preoccupied exclusively with economic policy, and lacking a strong social dimension (Scharpf, 2010). Although some are reluctant about EU interference in social policy, calls have been made for a more ‘Social Europe’, with a strengthened focus on social policy-making at the EU level (Fernandes and Rubio, 2012; Vandenbroucke, 2013). Advocates of strengthening the EU’s social dimension have put forward various arguments. Most notably, EU-level social policy is considered necessary to avoid politically undesirable effects of the single market on national welfare states, such as the risk of social dumping and a race to the bottom in terms of social standards. Social Europe is also deemed to contribute to the long-term sustainability of the Eurozone, as initiatives with a social purpose can reduce the risk of asymmetric shocks. In addition to these political and functional reasons, intensified engagement in social policy-making is considered a precondition for sustaining public support for the European project. These arguments in favour of a Social Europe find a response among policymakers. Jean-Claude Juncker’s (2015) call to achieve a ‘social triple A-rating’ – parallel to being ‘triple A’ in economic and financial terms – is an example of this. The ‘European Pillar of Social Rights’ initiative and the proposal of EU Commissioner Marianne Thyssen to reform the EU social security co-ordination law reflect the same ambition.

Notwithstanding calls for a more ‘Social Europe’, it is important to acknowledge that the EU is already involved in social policy making, using various policy instruments such as social regulation, the exchange of best practices, and – probably the most contested aspect of Social Europe – the redistribution of domestic resources (Falkner, 2016). Currently, redistribution at the EU level is based on two different logics of solidarity: (1) *member state solidarity*, establishing financial transfers

between countries, and (2) *transnational solidarity*, granting cross-border welfare rights to EU citizens (Sangiovanni, 2013). The salience of both types of European solidarity has increased in the light of the recent economic crisis. Financial assistance to debt-ridden member states overturned the no-bailout clause, deepening member state solidarity. In addition, high unemployment rates in Southern Europe increased the number of mobile EU citizens, which might not only exercise their economic rights, but also their welfare rights (Eurofound, 2014). These events bring to the fore questions about the legitimacy and the limits of European solidarity. In particular, concerns have been raised about a so-called ‘Transfer Union’, with permanent transfers to less-developed member states (Fernandes and Rubio, 2012) and the financial burden of intra-EU mobility on national welfare states¹ (Fóti, 2015).

In this article, we approach the legitimacy of European redistribution from the perspective of public opinion, and investigate the level and roots of popular support for member state and transnational solidarity. Specifically, we analyse whether public resistance against European solidarity is simply an emanation of Euroscepticism, or rather reflects individuals’ preferences concerning the EU’s social and economic agenda. On the one hand, European solidarity strengthens the integration of the member states and citizens in the EU by sharing risks and resources. Public resistance to European solidarity can therefore be an expression of citizens’ opposition to the principle of European integration in general. On the other hand, European solidarity is inherently part of the EU’s social dimension, meaning that resistance to European solidarity may be explained by a lack of support for the implementation of a social agenda for the EU. To date, few studies have analysed individual differences in the support for European solidarity. It remains unclear to what extent support for European solidarity is an expression of general support for the EU, or instead ideological preferences concerning the priority of social and economic policy for the EU agenda (hereafter referred to as EU agenda preferences). In addition, most studies are limited in scope, as they focus either on member state solidarity (Beaudonnet, 2014; Bechtel et al., 2014; Daniele and Geys, 2015; Kleider and Stoeckel, 2018; Lengfeld et al., 2015; Stoeckel and Kuhn, 2017) or on transnational solidarity (Gerhards and Lengfeld, 2013, 2015; Hjorth, 2015). Potential differences in the explanatory mechanisms of these two types of European solidarity remain obscure,

¹ Especially those with generous social benefits and services (Scharpf, 2010).

whereas they could provide broader insight into citizens' understanding of European integration issues. To answer these questions, we analyse data from the Belgian National Election Study (BNES) 2014 by means of structural equation modelling.

The two faces of European solidarity

Historically, the institutionalization of solidarity within national welfare states gave rise to questions about the conditionality of solidarity and about who deserves social protection (van Oorschot, 2000). The development of EU-level social policy similarly prompted discussions about what principles and ideals of solidarity ought to apply between member states and citizens of the EU (Crum, 2011; Sangiovanni, 2013). Sangiovanni (2013) rightfully distinguishes national solidarity, member state solidarity and transnational solidarity as different logics of solidarity in the EU. As we are interested in practices of European solidarity, we focus on the latter two types. *Member state solidarity*, also labelled 'international solidarity' (Ciornei and Recchi, 2017), refers to the sharing of social and economic risks between EU member states; *transnational solidarity* entails social and economic risk sharing among EU citizens. Practices of both types of European solidarity currently exist in the EU.

Member state solidarity

As an integral part of European integration, joint efforts are made to reduce regional disparities and to strengthen economic and social cohesion in the EU. The structural and cohesion funds were established to support these efforts. Financed by national contributions, they represent about one third of the EU's total budget (European Commission, 2016). The funds are directed towards a diverse set of objectives, from upgrading workforce skills to environmental programmes, and thus respond to a number of challenges for which member states share responsibilities (Allen, 2010). This policy instrument entails an important element of redistribution that is founded on the logic of member state solidarity, as the richest EU countries are net contributors and less-developed countries net recipients (European Commission, 2016). The Cohesion Fund, for instance, exclusively provides resources to member states that have a gross national income per capita below 90 per cent of the EU average.

The European debt crisis has revived the debate about redistribution between EU member states. In a short space of time, a new permanent bailout fund for the Eurozone led to a deepening of member state solidarity. The established European Stability Mechanism obliges member states to contribute to a joint budget, from which countries facing severe financial difficulties can borrow. It has been argued that member state solidarity is not only needed to get out of the crisis, but will also contribute to the smooth functioning of the monetary union in the long term (Fernandes and Rubio, 2012). Others have warned that financial transfers are solely legitimate in exceptional circumstances, as they can lead to public opposition both in donor countries, based on concerns that the loans will not be paid back, and in recipient countries, because of the accompanying austerity measures (Vanhercke et al., 2016).

Empirical studies indicate that in donor countries such as Germany, public support for financial assistance is higher than is often portrayed by the media (Bechtel et al., 2014; Lengfeld and Kroh, 2016). The interdependency between member states of the EU seems to be a motivation to support financial aid to other member states (Beaudonnet, 2014; Lengfeld et al., 2015). In addition to national economic interests, the willingness to support other member states is also guided by considerations of moral duty and reciprocity, that is, the expectation that any country might become needy in the future. The finding that Germans are more willing to provide financial help to EU than to non-EU countries (Lengfeld and Kroh, 2016) indicates that European integration has created a certain degree of support for member state solidarity.

Transnational solidarity

EU rules not only have consequences for redistribution between member states, but also have a direct impact on the legal rights and obligations of every individual citizen. The co-ordination of social security systems (regulations (EC) 883/2004 and 987/2009), which aims to prevent citizens from losing their social security rights when moving from one member state to another, for example, establishes cross-border solidarity relationships between EU citizens.² Transnational solidarity is mainly

² The EU does not pay social benefits directly to individuals, but co-ordinates member states' redistributive policies.

implemented through the principles of non-discrimination, aggregation of periods of insurance, and exportability (European Commission, 2010). Most importantly, the principle of non-discrimination implies that mobile EU citizens have the same rights and obligations as nationals of the member state where they reside. This means that social benefits and services can no longer be reserved only for nationals. When benefits are conditional on the completion of particular periods of insurance, employment or residence, EU co-ordination rules ensures that periods under the legislation of other member states are taken into account. The use of social benefits can also not be limited to a member state's own territory. Due to the exportability principle, family benefits are also paid to entitled mobile EU citizens whose child is living in another member state.

European social citizenship is crucial to establish solidarity between Europeans. As Ferrera (2005) states, the process of European integration has redrawn the boundaries of social citizenship and has attempted to restructure it at the European level. Given that about 16 million Europeans live and work in another member state (European Commission, 2017b), its scope and impact are significant. However, intra-EU movement is not equally spread across Europe: 98 per cent of mobile workers live in EU15 or EFTA countries, while only 2 per cent reside in the EU13 (European Commission, 2017a). Currently, transnational solidarity only comes into force when citizens exercise their right of free movement, although the extension of transnational solidarity has already been proposed in the form of a European unemployment insurance scheme, a European child benefit and a European minimum income benefit (Dullien, 2012; Levy et al., 2013; Peña-Casas and Denis, 2014).

The opening of the boundaries of long-standing national solidarity systems to EU citizens remains a sensitive issue for member states as well as for their citizens. Empirical research among Swedish citizens shows that the recipient's identity plays a decisive role in the willingness to grant social benefits to EU migrants (Hjorth, 2015). More specifically, cues about being Bulgarian as opposed to Dutch, decrease Swedish citizens' willingness to grant access to child benefits. These findings can be linked to recent EU enlargement, which triggered concerns about Eastern Europeans constituting a financial burden on welfare arrangements (Fóti, 2015). Very often, the costs of mobile EU citizens for public budgets is capitalized on by Eurosceptic parties, and this has become a salient political issue (Bruzelius

et al., 2014). Although there is no empirical evidence for the welfare magnetism hypothesis – that international differences in the generosity of welfare systems trigger intra-EU migration flows (Giulietti and Kahanec, 2013) – public support for cross-border welfare rights is shown to be cost sensitive. When citizens are faced with potential cuts in the level of benefits, they are less willing to grant EU citizens access to their national social security system (Gerhards and Lengfeld, 2015).

Explaining European solidarity: Euroscepticism and EU agenda preferences

A variety of theoretical approaches – including self-interest, identity, and individual transnationalism (Bechtel et al., 2014; Berg, 2007; Ciornei and Recchi, 2017; Gerhards and Lengfeld, 2015; Kuhn et al., 2017) – have been put forward to explain citizens’ attitudes to European solidarity. We focus on the role of Euroscepticism and EU agenda preferences as two factors that received only little attention in previous research.

Although attitudes towards European integration are often conceptualized as embedded into a wider cultural integration-demarcation conflict (e.g. Kriesi et al., 2008), the international relations model states that contestation of European integration issues is structured along a single dimension of pro-integration versus anti-integration. Accordingly, public opposition to European solidarity would be a direct reflection of Euroscepticism: a negative attitude towards European integration or the European Union in general (Krouwel and Abts, 2007). Concretely, deepening and widening are the two basic processes that underlie the integration into ‘an ever-closer union’ (Fraser, 2004). *Deepening* refers to the transfer of decision-making powers to the supranational level. In a variety of policy areas, the EU has acquired exclusive, shared and supporting competences as defined in the EU treaties. *Widening* refers to the geographical enlargement of the EU. Although doubts have been raised about the capacity of the EU to absorb further members (Vobruba et al., 2003), the process of enlargement is likely to continue, as several candidate countries are negotiating to gain EU membership. Citizens’ attitudes towards the processes of widening and deepening are not necessarily complementary (Hobolt, 2014; Karp and Bowler, 2006). For instance, those who favour deepening may not be in favour of widening,

because the EU might lose strength with more countries included, as decision-making would become more difficult.

Both deepening and widening have an impact on solidarity patterns in terms of what resources and risks are shared, and with whom. For instance, the EU used its acquired competences to coordinate national social security systems, granting social rights to EU mobile citizens. Continued deepening can further strengthen European solidarity ties. The proposed European unemployment insurance (Dullien, 2012) would namely redistribute resources across the entire EU (or EMU) labour force, as it is not only targeted at mobile citizens. In addition, enlargements have clear consequences for the boundaries of solidarity. Opening the door to new (poorer) member states inevitably influences the balance of old member states' financial contributions and incoming subsidies from the EU (European Commission, 2016), creating opportunities to express solidarity with new member states and their citizens. In sum, EU membership entails a certain degree of member state and transnational solidarity by means of processes of both deepening and widening. Put differently, European solidarity is a way to establish the further integration of citizens and member states within the EU. Consequently, it can be expected that support for both practices of European solidarity is in the first place informed by citizens' stance on European integration: those who oppose the very idea and principles of European integration are less willing to share resources and risks with other EU member states or citizens. Previous empirical research shows that anti-integration attitudes are important predictors of support for member state solidarity (Kleider and Stoeckel, 2018; Kuhn et al., 2017). These arguments lead to the following hypotheses:

H1: Citizens are less supportive of European solidarity if they oppose EU membership.

H2: Citizens are less supportive of European solidarity if they oppose EU deepening.

H3: Citizens are less supportive of European solidarity if they oppose EU enlargement.

Others have argued that contestation over European integration cannot be reduced to a single pro-integration versus anti-integration dimension, and point to the importance of left-right ideology

(Hooghe and Marks, 1999; Tsebelis and Garret, 2000). Accordingly, one can expect that support for European solidarity depends not so much on preferences regarding European integration as such, but instead articulates citizens' ideological preferences about the policy direction of the European project. Further, as EU competences have become more diverse, citizens have become more sensitive to the political agenda of the European Union (van Elsas and van der Brug, 2015). Whereas the European project is primarily concerned with economic policy, the EU's social policy objectives have become more prominent over time (Føllesdal et al., 2007). This shift in the EU's agenda is visible in the European Semester, which is the policy co-ordination cycle through which priorities are set for the EU. Although initially focussed on monitoring economic developments and preventing economic and financial problems, the European Semester has integrated social policy objectives in recent years (Vanhercke et al., 2015). For instance, country-specific recommendations put increasing stress on ensuring the accessibility and effectiveness of member states' social security, pension and healthcare systems and on fighting poverty and social exclusion. Nevertheless, the course of European integration remains highly debated.

Accordingly, citizens who support EU membership and the principles of European integration might still criticize specific aspects of EU policy, such as the EU's engagement in social policy (Sørensen, 2007). We argue that the fundamental policy objectives of the European project, namely what kind of Europe should be developed, are of crucial importance in understanding attitudes towards solidarity at the EU level. Whereas some believe that the EU's main goal should be to enhance the competitiveness of the European economy, others may consider that the EU should be primarily occupied with providing, at the supranational level, decent social security to ordinary citizens in times of globalization (Isernia and Cotta, 2016). Previous research confirms that citizens have different conceptions of the EU's priorities (Gabel and Anderson, 2004). We hypothesize that those who prioritize social policy are more likely to advocate European solidarity practices, because they can be considered as tools to implement the EU social agenda. On the other hand, preferences regarding the economic agenda for the EU may not be related to support for European solidarity. Moreover, those who would prefer the EU's agenda to remain focused on economic issues may be less in favour of further European solidarity

building. Previous studies have shown that citizens who position themselves on the political left are more willing to grant other Europeans access to their social security system (Berg, 2007; Gerhards and Lengfeld, 2013, 2015, Vasilopoulou, 2016) and are more willing to provide financial assistance to other member states (Beaudonnet, 2014; Daniele and Geys, 2015; Kuhn et al., 2017). However, these studies do not tap into EU agenda preferences in particular. In this respect, Beaudonnet (2014) found that citizens who consider the development of a European Social Model as a priority are more willing to support financial help to other member states in times of crisis. By contrast, prioritizing economic objectives has no significant impact on member state solidarity. As we expect EU agenda preferences to be important for both transnational and member state solidarity, this reasoning leads to the following overarching hypothesis:

H4: Prioritizing social policy as an important agenda item for the EU is positively related to support for European solidarity.

H5: Prioritizing economic policy as an important agenda item for the EU does not translate into higher support for European solidarity.

Furthermore, we are interested in whether a pro- versus anti-integration dimension explains member state and transnational solidarity to the same extent. Although we do not have strong expectations about diverging effects, we explore whether both types of European solidarity are equally affected by EU agenda preferences and attitudes towards EU membership, deepening and enlargement. For instance, it is possible that opposition to EU enlargement has the strongest impact on transnational solidarity, if citizens strongly associate enlargements with increasing numbers of EU migrants that can claim welfare benefits. The consequences of enlargement for member states solidarity may be perceived less costly, as EU budget contributions comprise a relatively small share of national resources.

Methodology

Data

To test our hypotheses, we use data from the Belgian National Election Study 2014 (Abts et al, 2015). This post-electoral survey was carried out among a register-based probability sample of Belgians entitled to vote in the 2014 national elections. On completion of a computer-assisted personal interview (response rate 47 per cent (AAPOR, 2016)), respondents were asked to fill out a drop-off questionnaire, containing an extended module on Social Europe. About 74 per cent of the respondents send back the completed questionnaire (N=1403).

Variables

Support for *member state solidarity* is measured by means of three agree/disagree statements tapping into support for member states in economic difficulties, the amount of tax money being redistributed and the continuity of solidarity between EU countries. Responses were recorded using a 5-point scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree). In contrast to previous studies, our measurement taps into general principles of redistribution between countries, thus capturing support for the logic of the structural and cohesion funds rather than the bailout funds. Attitudes to *transnational solidarity* are operationalized by four 5-point Likert-type items on the access of EU citizens to social benefits and protection in Belgium. One item concerns equal social rights, two relate to prioritizing nationals and one refers to the conditionality of social rights. Confirmatory factor analysis indicates that a measurement model with two latent variables fits the data well, as the RMSEA equals .045 and both the CFI (.969) and TLI (.950) are sufficiently close to 1. The latent factor of member state solidarity correlates at .641 with the latent factor of transnational solidarity, which indicates that these two types of attitudes are quite strongly related to each other. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics as well as factor loadings for the items measuring both types of European solidarity.

[Table 1 about here]

Euroscepticism or general EU support is measured by the three constitutive components, namely support for EU membership, deepening and enlargement. First, citizens' *support for EU membership* is assessed by the item 'Generally speaking, do you think that Belgium's membership of the EU is (1) a good thing, (2) a bad thing or (3) neither a good nor a bad thing'. Second, the attitude towards *deepening of the European project* is measured by the preferred distribution of competences between the EU and the national government: (1) The current competences of the European Union should be reduced, (2) The distribution of competences between the EU and national member states should remain more or less the same or (3) The current powers of the European Union should be expanded. Third, the attitude to *enlargement* is assessed by an item concerning whether the accession of Eastern European countries in the last decade is: (1) a good thing, (2) a bad thing or (3) neither a good nor a bad thing. Because the correlation between these three items of Euroscepticism is only moderately strong (Cramer's V values [0-1] between each of the three indicators range from .26 to .40), we treat the three variables as separate indicators.

Prioritising social policy for the EU is operationalized by a latent variable gauging the extent to which the European Commission should give priority to the following issues: fighting social inequality, fighting poverty, developing strong social protection in all EU countries and enforcing good working conditions in all EU countries (answer categories: a very low priority, a low priority, neither a low nor a high priority, a high priority or a very high priority). *Prioritising economic policy for the EU* is operationalized by a latent variable measuring support for prioritizing EU-level efforts in 'fostering economic growth' and 'creating employment'. CFA shows that these items do indeed measure the intended concepts. The measurement model of social and economic priorities has a good fit ($X^2=40.40$; $df=8$; $CFI=.973$; $TLI=.950$; $RMSEA=.054$) with five out of six factor loadings larger than .60.³ Frequency distributions for all items are displayed in Online Appendix.

³ Modification indices suggest an error correlation between 'Developing a strong social protection in all EU countries' and 'Enforcing good working conditions in all EU countries'. The inclusion of the error correlation

We include various social-structural variables, among which are *age*, *gender* (0=male, 1=female) and *education level* (lower-secondary education, upper-secondary education and tertiary education). *Occupational status* is based on the Erikson-Goldthorpe-Portocarero (EGP) class scheme. We use a slightly modified six-class version of the EGP scheme, comprising the following classes: service class I (higher-level supervisors and administrators), service class II (lower-level supervisors and administrators), routine non-manual, self-employed, skilled workers and unskilled workers. Retired people are categorized according to their last occupation and respondents who had never been employed are included in a separate category. Furthermore, *perceived economic insecurity* is included. Respondents were asked how often they had the following concerns: (1) that your financial worries will increase in the coming years, (2) that you will have difficulties in maintaining your socioeconomic position and (3) that your children and the coming generation will find things much more difficult. A latent variable is constructed of these items (answer categories: never, rarely, sometimes, regularly and often).⁴ *Migration background* is included as a dummy variable (0=no, 1=yes). Respondents whose mother or father did not have Belgian nationality at birth are considered as having a migration background. We include citizens' attachment to Europe, ranging from: not at all attached (1) to strongly attached (5). Lastly, because preferences regarding the policy priorities in EU politics are embedded in a general ideological position, we take into account *left-right self-placement* (0-10 scale). The correlations between left-right self-placement and the items of prioritizing social or economic policy are relatively moderate (Pearson's correlation coefficients between .06 and .22). An overview of the descriptive statistics is given in Online Appendix.

Statistical modelling

To test our hypotheses regarding the roots of member state and transnational solidarity, we estimated a series of structural equation models (SEMs) using Mplus software version 7.3. The advantage of SEM

improved the model fit significantly and is theoretically justified because both items refer to protecting EU citizens.

⁴ Standardized factor loadings equal .83, .79, and .48.

over traditional regression modelling is that it allows to estimate latent variables and corrects for measurement error in the model. This leads to more accurate representation of constructs and of relationships between them. The models were constructed stepwise (that is, adding blocks of variables in separate steps), which allow to assess the net explanatory power that Euroscepticism and EU agenda preferences add to the models when social-structural predictors, European identity and left-right placement are taken into account. A visualization of the final model is shown in Online Appendix. We do not observe multicollinearity, as variance inflation factor values of all predictors are lower than 1.7, which is well below the recommended maximum of 10 (Meuleman et al., 2015). Results are weighted by age, gender and education. Item non-response is addressed using full information maximum likelihood estimation (Schafer and Graham, 2002). All reported regression parameters are standardized to allow comparison of effect sizes.

Results

Models 1a and 1b (Table 2) show the effects of social-structural variables on member state and transnational solidarity respectively. Remarkably, support for transnational solidarity is more strongly affected by socioeconomic indicators (education level, occupation and subjective economic insecurity). For instance, the gap between the low educated – traditionally considered as the ‘losers’ from globalization (Kriesi et al., 2008) – and the highly educated is larger for transnational solidarity than for member state solidarity. This suggests that European solidarity practices trigger feelings of competitive threat among lower-educated Belgians and that granting social rights to EU citizens is especially perceived as threatening to people’s own social position. Furthermore, transnational identities are a facilitating factor for creating European solidarity; citizens with a migration background endorse member state solidarity more strongly and identification with Europe enhances solidarity with both EU member states and citizens. In line with previous research, right-wing voters are less in favour of European solidarity. Together, these variables explain 27.3 per cent of the total variance in member state solidarity and 26.2 per cent of the variance in transnational solidarity.

The three indicators of Euroscepticism are added in models 2a and 2b. These variables additionally explain 19.2 per cent of the variation in member state solidarity, but only 8 per cent of the additional variance in transnational solidarity. In line with our expectations (H1-3), the results indicate that opposition to EU membership, deepening and enlargement have strong and independent effects on support for European solidarity. First, disapproval of one's country's *EU membership* impedes support towards both member state solidarity and transnational solidarity. Membership is thus considered as an engagement to share risks and resources with the countries and citizens that are part of it. Second, rejecting the principle of *deepening* is an additional brake on citizens' support for solidarity across the EU. Citizens who prefer a status quo for the division of powers or who think that the EU should return a large part of its powers to the nation states are less willing to support other member states financially or to accept EU citizens as equals by granting them social rights. With regard to transnational solidarity, however, differences are less evident (and not always statistically significant). Third, models 2a and 2b show that citizens who disapprove of the Eastern *enlargements* (or have no clear opinion on the matter) are significantly less supportive of both member state solidarity and transnational solidarity. Belgian citizens thus recognize that the accession of new countries to the EU will expand the circle of solidarity, potentially making it more costly. The boundaries of the European community seem to be of extreme importance, because opposition towards enlargement even more strongly hampers support for European solidarity than opposition to EU membership and to EU deepening. A comparison of the regression coefficients shows that opposition towards EU membership, deepening and widening clearly have a stronger impact on support for member state solidarity than on transnational solidarity. Perhaps the former is very much seen as an EU-induced practice, whereas transnational solidarity is less perceived as an automatic consequence of European integration.

Lastly, models 3a and 3b illustrate that public resistance to European solidarity is not simply an emanation of Euroscepticism, but relates to citizens' substantive preferences regarding the EU's agenda. As expected, citizens who advocate the European Commission giving a higher priority to social issues are much more in favour of member state solidarity and transnational solidarity. Prioritizing economic issues in European politics, by contrast, does not translate into higher support for European solidarity.

Moreover, citizens who strongly believe that economic policies should dominate the European agenda are significantly less willing to show solidarity with other EU member states or with EU citizens than those who give economic issues a lower priority. These effects are found on top of voters' left-right self-placement, signalling that people genuinely have substantive positions towards the EU's policy objectives. European solidarity is seen as a constitutive part of Social Europe, but not of economic European policy, which confirms hypotheses H4 and H5. It is remarkable that the effect of prioritizing social issues is much stronger for member state solidarity than for transnational solidarity. Possibly, EU transfers to less-developed and crisis-hit countries are considered as more effective policy instruments to achieve the EU's social objectives. The allocated structural funds can improve the social development of complete regions, whereas transnational solidarity practices in the form of cross-border welfare rights are merely targeted at mobile citizens. Respondents might take into account that mobile EU citizens constitute only a small group within the European population and therefore may consider them as being less needy. Models 3a and 3b explain in total about 55 per cent of the variance in member state solidarity and 36 per cent of the variance in transnational solidarity.

[Table 2 about here]

Discussion

In contemporary debates about the development of the European Union, there is an apparent paradox between the call for a more Social Europe on the one hand and reservations about supranational solidarity on the other. This study empirically analyses whether public support for existing forms of European solidarity – member state solidarity and transnational solidarity – is in the first place an emanation of Eurosceptic attitudes, or is instead driven by EU agenda preferences.

There are three main findings. First, Eurosceptic sentiments reduce support for member state and transnational solidarity. Opposition towards EU membership, deepening and enlargement greatly

obstruct citizens' willingness to share risks and resources with nations and citizens that are members of the EU. Citizens seem to recognize that being a member of the EU and the continued process of integration by means of widening and deepening will inherently require certain practices of EU-wide solidarity. In particular, opposition towards EU enlargement is strongly detrimental with regard to support for European solidarity. The public seems to understand clearly that enlargement of the EU has consequences for the boundaries of the community in which resources can be accessed or redistributed.

The second major finding is that support for European solidarity is not just a matter of being in favour of or against European integration, but depends strongly on citizens' preferences concerning the agenda-setting of the EU. Prioritizing a Social Europe translates into higher support for member state and transnational solidarity. Advocates of a more social direction for the European project are thus genuinely more willing to redistribute resources to other member states and to open up the boundaries of their long-standing national solidarity systems to EU citizens. Conversely, prioritizing an Economic Europe is associated with lower levels of support for transfers to less-developed and crisis-hit countries and cross-border welfare rights. This finding implies that even though individuals are in favour of European integration, it is possible that they oppose European solidarity. EU agenda preferences are a crucial element in understanding support for specific EU policies whereas they remained underexposed in previous research. It should be noted that support for European solidarity is also strongly related to citizens' European identity. This confirms previous research which shows that public support for European solidarity includes a strong cultural component (Kleider and Stoeckel, 2018).

Third, we found differentiation in attitudinal patterns towards the two faces of EU-level solidarity. The finding that Euroscepticism has a relatively weaker impact on support for transnational solidarity may result from the fact that cross-border welfare rights are not only a prerogative of EU citizens. Non-EU citizens – or so-called third-country nationals – are under certain conditions also eligible to social benefits and services. Citizens may therefore perceive these benefits as part of a broader phenomenon of globalization, instead of the result of European decision-making. By contrast, financial transfers to less developed and crisis-hit countries are an exclusive characteristic of the EU's policy, implying that solidarity between member states is more strongly perceived as a phenomenon inherent to European

integration. Furthermore, the preference for a more social EU agenda has a relatively weaker effect on support for transnational solidarity. In citizens' minds, a more social agenda for the EU means helping other member states, and to a lesser extent sharing resources with mobile Europeans residing in their country. This discrepancy may be based on the reasoning that EU social objectives can be more effectively achieved by means of EU transfers, which can benefit complete regions, whereas cross-border welfare rights are only advantageous to mobile EU citizens. The differentiation in the explanatory patterns of transnational and member state solidarity indicates that citizens distinguish between various components of Social Europe, confirming previous research (Baute et al., 2017).

One of the limitations of this study relates to the measurement of support for cross-border welfare rights. This is operationalized by support for social rights for EU citizens residing in Belgium, whereas the principle of non-discrimination implies that Belgians are also granted access to social security when residing in other member states. The one-sided view on the beneficiaries of cross-border welfare rights in our survey has potentially resulted in recording lower support for transnational solidarity. A second limitation concerns the cross-sectional nature of the data, which implies that the causal direction behind this studied relationship cannot be established empirically. Although we argue that support for European integration influences preferences regarding European solidarity, the opposite causal argument can also be made, namely that attitudes towards European solidarity affect preferences regarding integration. Furthermore, given that this study is based on Belgian data, we are fully aware of the possibility that both member state solidarity and transnational solidarity can be perceived differently in other EU member states. On the one hand, Belgians may perceive member state and transnational solidarity as practices with little reciprocity. Apart from the revenues allocated to EU administration, Belgium is a net-contributor to the EU budget, attracts a high share of mobile EU citizens and has a strongly developed welfare state. In crisis-hit countries, support for financial help to other member states and cross-border welfare rights for EU citizens seeking employment elsewhere may be stronger. On the other hand, Belgians are on average relatively in favour of European integration (European Parliament, 2017). For a small country, the European project has enabled Belgium to gain a more central position.

Accordingly, one can expect that Belgians' pro-EU mindset spills over into above-average support for European solidarity. Cross-national research is needed to answer these remaining issues.

Notwithstanding the limitations noted above, this study provides important insights for future policy development of the EU. Although it is argued that Europe needs to strengthen its social dimension to regain support from the public, our results nuance this suggestion. Citizens who oppose the very idea and principles of the EU are unlikely to become supportive of a European project with solidarity practices as constitutive policy elements. This indicates that heading towards a more social Union is not a silver bullet to counter hard Euroscepticism. Nevertheless, by strengthening solidarity practices between member states and between European citizens, soft Euroscepticism that is directed towards the agenda-setting of the EU – more specifically that the EU puts too little emphasis on social objectives – may be tempered. Furthermore, this study has implications for the legitimacy of the EU, as it indicates that citizens evaluate the EU in terms of what course it takes, on top of their overall evaluation of the project of European integration. General support for the EU remains an important underlying reason for voters' willingness to share risks and resources with other member states and EU citizens. However, citizens have an ideological preference about what course the European project should take and this substantive position may play an increasingly important role in their support for continued European integration. Debate about the future of the EU should focus more on the policy directions of the union rather than presenting it as a unidimensional issue of more or less European integration.

Acknowledgements

This study was made possible by grants from KU Leuven Research Council (OT/13/30), the Research Foundation FWO-Flanders (Grant Number G068816 N) and the Belgian National Lottery.

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Table 1: Operationalization and Descriptive Statistics of Member State Solidarity and Transnational Solidarity

| <i>Scale 1-5</i> | <i>% disagree (strongly)</i> | <i>% agree (strongly)</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>S.D.</i> | <i>Factor loading^a</i> |
|--|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|---------------------------------------|
| Member state solidarity | | | | | |
| <i>Rich EU countries such as Belgium should always support other member states that experience serious economic difficulties</i> | 33.04 | 30.37 | 2.94 | 0.94 | .713 |
| <i>Too much tax money is going from the prosperous EU countries to the poorer EU countries</i> | 17.61 | 38.86 | 3.25 | 0.88 | -.519 |
| <i>The solidarity between the richer and poorer EU countries should not be broken</i> | 11.00 | 52.39 | 3.48 | 0.85 | .635 |
| Transnational solidarity | | | | | |
| <i>EU citizens should receive the same social services as Belgians</i> | 38.46 | 32.87 | 2.89 | 1.07 | .599 |
| <i>In the allocation of social security benefits, Belgians should have priority over EU citizens</i> | 27.92 | 45.98 | 3.25 | 1.07 | -.709 |
| <i>EU citizens should first have a job before they gain access to social services</i> | 8.99 | 74.06 | 3.91 | 0.94 | -.659 |
| <i>Let's support the poor in our country first, before we help the poor coming from other EU countries</i> | 13.90 | 63.65 | 3.76 | 1.08 | -.775 |

Note: ^a Fully standardized parameters. Model fit: $\chi^2=64.491$; $df=13$; CFI=.970; TLI=.951; RMSEA=.053, N=1400.

Source: BNES 2014.

Table 2: Structural Equation Models for Member State Solidarity and Transnational Solidarity

| | Model 1a | Model 1b | Model 2a | Model 2b | Model 3a | Model 3b |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|----------|-------------|----------|-------------|----------|
| | Member | Trans- | Member | Trans- | Member | Trans- |
| | state | national | state | national | state | national |
| | β | β | B | β | β | β |
| Age | .083* | -.042 | .096** | -.031 | .040 | -.048 |
| Female | -.042 | -.070* | -.063 | -.076* | -.078* | -.080* |
| Education | | | | | | |
| <i>Low</i> | -.195*** | -.251*** | -.114* | -.197*** | -.131** | -.203*** |
| <i>Middle</i> | -.142*** | -.196*** | -.094** | -.162*** | -.107** | -.169*** |
| <i>High</i> | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. |
| Occupational status | | | | | | |
| <i>Service class I</i> | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. |
| <i>Service class II</i> | .010 | -.045 | -.010 | -.042 | -.027 | -.049 |
| <i>Routine non-manual</i> | -.004 | -.052 | .026 | -.032 | -.013 | -.048 |
| <i>Self-employed</i> | -.082* | -.100** | -.070 | -.085* | -.070 | -.087* |
| <i>Skilled workers</i> | -.086* | -.097** | -.062 | -.077* | -.060 | -.078* |
| <i>Unskilled workers</i> | -.066 | -.075 | -.052 | -.065 | -.093 | -.082 |
| <i>Not applicable</i> | .060 | -.031 | .002 | -.069 | -.013 | -.073 |
| Economic insecurity | .015 | -.146*** | .059 | -.122** | .047 | -.121** |
| Migrant background | .097** | .038 | .129*** | .059 | .108** | .055 |
| European identity | .374*** | .258*** | .139*** | .115** | .119** | .112** |
| Left-right self-placement | -.209*** | -.239*** | -.187*** | -.221*** | -.105** | -.192*** |
| EU membership | | | | | | |
| <i>A bad thing</i> | | | -.153** | -.098* | -.199*** | -.111** |
| <i>Neither good nor bad</i> | | | -.097** | -.094** | -.099** | -.098** |
| <i>A good thing</i> | | | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. |
| EU deepening | | | | | | |
| <i>Reduce competences</i> | | | -.249*** | -.075 | -.246*** | -.076 |
| <i>Maintain competences</i> | | | -.159*** | -.103* | -.159*** | -.105* |
| <i>Expand competences</i> | | | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. |
| EU enlargement | | | | | | |
| <i>A bad thing</i> | | | -.428*** | -.329*** | -.378*** | -.305*** |
| <i>Neither good nor bad</i> | | | -.164*** | -.132** | -.144** | -.124** |
| <i>A good thing</i> | | | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. |
| EU social priorities | | | | | .368*** | .147** |
| EU economic priorities | | | | | -.150** | -.128* |
| Explained variance (R ²) | .273 | .262 | .465 | .342 | .552 | .361 |
| CFI / TLI | .937 / .911 | | .934 / .907 | | .929 / .901 | |
| RMSEA | .033 | | .030 | | .030 | |

Note: * $p < .001$. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$. Source: BNES 2014.

Online Appendix

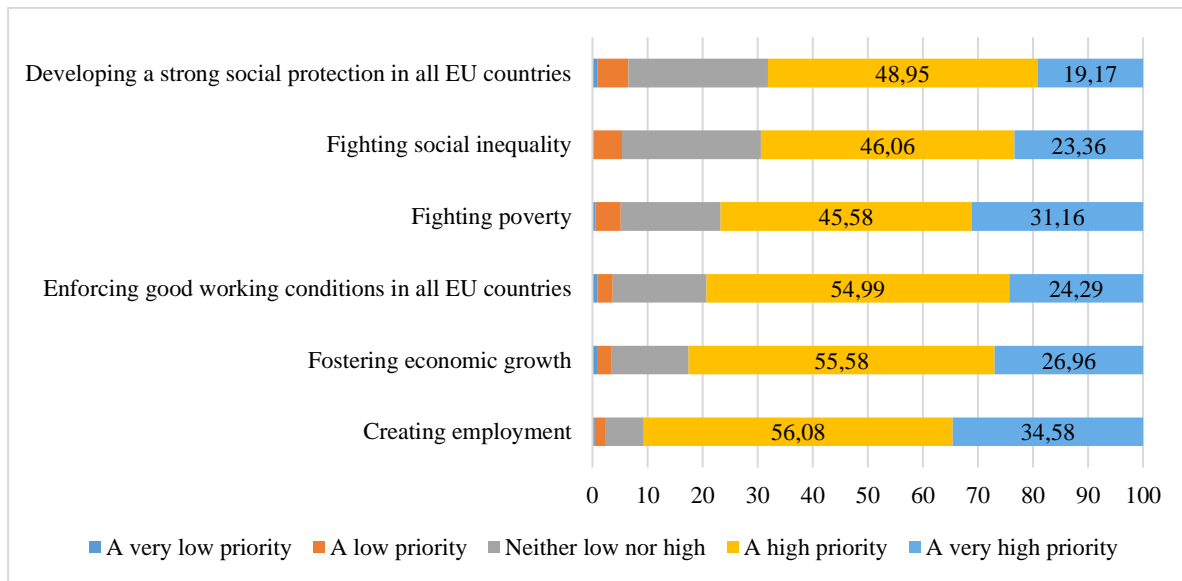
Table A: Descriptive Statistics of Independent Variables

| <i>Variable</i> | <i>Mean (S.D.) / %</i> | <i>N</i> |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|----------|
| Age | 51.70 (17.53) | 1403 |
| Female | 50.82 | 1403 |
| Education level | | 1403 |
| <i>Low</i> | 27.37 | |
| <i>Middle</i> | 32.22 | |
| <i>High (ref)</i> | 40.41 | |
| Occupational status | | 1403 |
| <i>Service class I (ref)</i> | 13.04 | |
| <i>Service class II</i> | 17.61 | |
| <i>Routine non-manual</i> | 21.18 | |
| <i>Self-employed</i> | 9.19 | |
| <i>Skilled workers</i> | 8.84 | |
| <i>Unskilled workers</i> | 19.32 | |
| <i>Not applicable</i> | 10.19 | |
| Economic insecurity ^a | 2.99 (0.92) | 1401 |
| Migration background | 13.51 | 1399 |
| European identity | 2.92 (1.13) | 1374 |
| EU membership of Belgium | | 1393 |
| <i>A good thing (ref)</i> | 52.48 | |
| <i>Neither a good nor a bad thing</i> | 35.39 | |
| <i>A bad thing</i> | 12.13 | |
| EU deepening | | 1343 |
| <i>Reduce competences</i> | 28.89 | |
| <i>Maintain competences</i> | 51.15 | |
| <i>Expand competences (ref)</i> | 19.96 | |
| EU Enlargement to Eastern Europe | | 1391 |
| <i>A good thing (ref)</i> | 18.12 | |
| <i>Neither a good nor a bad thing</i> | 34.08 | |
| <i>A bad thing</i> | 47.81 | |
| Left-right self-placement | 5.14 (2.19) | 1364 |
| EU social priorities ^a | 3.91 (0.67) | 1379 |
| EU economic priorities ^a | 4.15 (0.63) | 1383 |

Note: ^a Mean score of the measured variables of which the latent construct is specified.

Source: BNES 2014.

Figure A: Perceived Priorities for the European Commission (%).



Source: BNES 2014 (Weighted for age, gender and education).

Figure B: Explanatory Model of Support for Member State Solidarity and Transnational Solidarity

