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Contesting the European Union in times of crisis: an analysis of Facebook interactions

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A crisis is a moment of truth. When the ground under your feet is shaking, when an opponent suddenly knocks on the door, you discover what inner strength you possess. An individual or a political body can learn more about themselves in such moments than in weeks or years when time is just passing by (van Middelaar 2016:496.)

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Europe in the crisis mode

"Europe is on the verge of a big new crisis, just six years after the last one", "The migration crisis will shatter Europe", "Europe's Recurring Financial Crisis Has Not, Repeat, Not Ended", "Germany's political crisis is about the future of Europe", "Italy's political crisis is a gut punch to Europe." These headlines featuring on the covers of newspapers in 2018 suggest that the crisis in Europe is alive and well. Over the past decade, the European Union (EU) has constantly been in the crisis mode: one crisis followed another, occasionally overlapping. The banking crisis has transformed into financial and sovereign debt crises, which have subsequently evolved into a Eurozone crisis. The migration crisis has galvanized nationalist forces across Europe, which have utilized the crisis as an argument for reclaiming national control over policies that have been already communitized. The culmination of this process of withdrawal of delegated powers to the hands of national states was the Brexit, whose impact on both the EU and the UK remains to be seen. Moreover, on the other side of the globe, in the same "expect the unexpected" manner, Donald Trump has become the US president, calling himself "Mr. Brexit." Due to the increasing porosity of national economies and the securitization of migration issues, cosmopolitan ethos has been on the wane at both European and global levels.

The year 2017 seemed to be a turning point for the process of European integration since the electoral defeats of several overtly anti-EU parties and the election of a new French president based on his accentuated Europhile political program were interpreted as a sign of a revival of the European project.

Indeed, the defeats of several anti-EU challenger parties at national elections in France, Netherlands, and Austria gave a hope that extreme political forces in Europe were in a downward spiral. Moreover, the election of Emmanuel Macron in France strengthened the Franco-German "engine" and boosted confidence in the future of the EU. The aura of negativity and despair, which had encircled the EU during almost a decade of multiple crises, seemed to be finally vanishing.

However, this reinvigorated EU optimism was short-lived. In 2012, Europe was in trouble due to the economic predicaments of "PIGS" (Portugal, Ireland, Greece, Spain) countries, whereas in 2018 the acronym denoting the problematic member states has transformed into "PHIGS": Poland, Hungary, Italy, Greece and Spain.[1] In the 2018 parliamentary elections, Italians chose a populist, Eurosceptic coalition made of the Five Star Movement and the Northern League. Another outlier coalition scored a victory in Spain, which was also characterized by political instability and volatility, despite the resurrection of its economy. Whereas Greece is still struggling with economic plights, Poland and Hungary are at odds with Brussels due to a series of (non-economic) reasons. Both right-wing governments have refused an equitable redistribution of migrants and neglected some of the pillars of democracy such as the independence of the judiciary or media freedoms. The Commission and the Parliament have initiated several procedures against Hungary as a result of systematic breaching of the rule of law perpetrated by Orbán's government. In a nutshell, economic and migratory plights have fostered the populist turn in European politics, characterized by nativism, protectionism, Euroscepticism and rejection of diversity.

1.2 Ascending Euroscepticism

The EU, as a unique model of regional cooperation that emerged in Europe post- World War Two, has been perpetually a matter of conflicting visions on the design and competences of its institutions, its membership, and occasionally the very necessity of this kind of transnational arrangement. The debate on Europe and European integration henceforth consists of a multitude of narratives and counter-narratives (Della Sala, 2018; Della Sala, 2010). Although the EU is meant to tackle the economic and political

[1] Source: https://edition.cnn.com/2018/06/02/europe/europe-next-crisis-phigs-lister-intl/index.html (Accessed on 22/09/2018)

challenges of globalization, the process of European integration is increasingly perceived by EU constituencies as a generator of problems for their nation states and them personally. The loss of a major member state and a key net contributor to the EU budget is another factor that may affect the weakened legitimacy of the Union (Hobolt, 2016).

Due to a series of economic, political and security predicaments, directly or indirectly involving EU policies and institutions, citizens have become more critical towards the EU and started challenging and questioning its operational modes and policy choices. Furthermore, counter-crisis measures have shifted powers from the representative institutions to the executive, causing an overall sensation of popular disempowerment (Cramme and Hobolt, 2014). Popular attitudes towards the EU have irreversibly turned from a "permissive consensus" to a "constraining dissensus", hindering further elite-driven integration processes (Hooghe and Marks, 2009). The Maastricht Treaty referendum was a slippery slope that led to increasingly unsupportive public opinion, culminating in the decision of the majority of the British to leave the Union. Although the public support for European integration started eroding at the beginning of the '90s, the multiple crises that have been plaguing the Union for more than a decade now have propelled the European public towards scepticism or even open hostility towards European integration. De Vries (2018) demonstrates that the two major priorities of Eurosceptics are migration and unemployment, which both have been on the upswing due to the Eurozone crisis and the migration crisis. As evidenced by scholarly work, the responsibility for sharp economic recession and high levels of unemployment in the Eurozone countries was frequently attributed to the EU (Hobolt and Tilley, 2014). Moreover, the difficulty and frustration lay in citizens' inability to express discontent by voting out unpopular EU authorities, due to the peculiarities of the EU accountability system.

The discord between different blocks of countries and social groups—the North and the South, creditor countries and debtor countries, the rich and the poor, the hardworking and the lazy—has additionally exacerbated anti-EU sentiments and popular critical views. These oppositions suggest the failure of European integration to foster economic convergence among EU economies and ensure even economic growth (Cramme and Hobolt, 2014:4). Moreover, the migration crisis drew a new line of

dissension within Europe, dividing Northern and Western European member states—principally in favour of the idea of the redistribution of refugees and burden-sharing—from Eastern and Central European member states—mostly averse to hosting refugees on their territories.

1.3 Social media and the European Union

Although social media pages still miss the span of traditional news media outlets, these platforms are becoming increasingly prominent as devices for disseminating information, influencing public opinion, debating different issues or mobilising supporters (Trottier and Fuchs, 2015; Bennett, 2012; Loader and Mercea, 2011; Barisione and Michailidou, 2017). Social media play an important role in the construction of transnational discursive spaces, as they are able to overcome time and space barriers particularly present in large and diversified polities such as the EU. Social media allow direct communication between political leaders or institutions and citizens, allowing the circumvention of the traditional media, which proved be remarkably EU-negative in certain countries such as the UK (see Copeland and Copsey, 2017).

Social media represent an arena for both for the expression and detection of public opinion, as well as a space for mobilising and collective action (Barisione and Ceron, 2017; Barisone and Michailidou, 2017). Moreover, they carry both participatory and transnational promises (Bossetta et al. 2017). Participatory promise refers to the capacity of social media to encourage citizens' participation in the political process by facilitating their access to political information and by amplifying the range of their potential political activities. Digital technologies have significantly decreased transaction costs for citizens' political participation and activism (Farrell 2012). However, online activism has been also labeled by some scholars as "clicktivism" or "slacktivism", due to its putative lack of follow-thru via offline activism and to its poor or inexistent impact on actual political processes and decisions (Morozov 2009). Yet, the "Stop ACTA" campaign exemplifies a successful synergy between online and offline campaigning, resulting in the rejection of the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) by the European Parliament (see Mercea, 2017).

Furthermore, social media offer a transnational promise due to their ability to circumvent geographical borders and create digital public spheres, accessible to everybody with an Internet connection. Social media have the capacity to inform and engage citizens, who have been often defined as alienated from and perplexed by the complex EU system. Moreover, cross-border political communication is essential for EU politics since EU affairs have been traditionally discussed within national public spheres (Michailidou and Trenz, 2013).

Because of the impact on modern politics, one can argue that social media have redefined the concepts of public opinion and collective action (Barisione and Ceron, 2017). The traditional gatekeepers such as polling and media organizations, political parties, and interest groups are losing the monopoly of intermediation. On the one hand, social media have emerged as a channel for the public expression of views, thus complementing the traditional channels such as public opinion polling and a dying out practice of sending letters to newspapers. On the other hand, social media have the capacity to facilitate the translation of online protest activities into an off-line collective action, circumventing the mediation of political parties or civil society organizations. Barisione and Ceron (2017) put forward the idea of a "digital movement of opinion"—a concept that encompasses both public opinion and social movements as manifested through social media activities—which emerged as a reaction to the austerity measure that had been introduced across Europe.

Despite the potential of social media to foster democracy, social media is also used for the opposite effect by extreme right organizations that strive to connect and collaborate (Caiani and Kluknavská, 2017). Online platforms also possess undeniable proneness to polarize opinions, incite verbal violence and amplify disproportional representation of certain voices (Marozzo and Bessi, 2018). Furthermore, the proliferation of so-called "fake news" has had a major impact on the political landscape, allowing false narratives to take hold (see McNair, 2017; Chadwick et al., 2018). With the onset of multiple crises, many populist movements and parties have been established and thanks to social media, rapidly gained prominence (Postill, 2018; Gerbaudo, 2018). These newly formed political parties and movements are deprived of moral and institutional constraints that encumber well-established political parties. The lack of path dependency

gives to the newly formed political organisations vast room for maneuver and the possibility to adapt their political programs to public opinion trends. Moreover, the opportunity to circumvent traditional media channels and reach a massive audience by social media at almost zero cost has additionally facilitated the proliferation of populist political forces and their increased political leverage.

1.4 The aim of the study and research questions

This study seeks to shed light on the interplay between the three phenomena introduced in the previous sections: the European Union in crises, Euroscepticism, and social media. The relationship between the EU and its citizens needs to be reassessed in the digital era, which happens to be also crisis-ridden. How has the new media environment impacted EU politics and EU crisis communication? How have the EU institutions reacted to this revolutionary change in the media environment? These general questions incited my curiosity and prompted me to embark on this research, while these questions have been further operationalised into more specific research questions and sub-questions.

A chief goal of this study is to identify how the EU was contested in discursive online arenas during the peaks of the Greek crisis and the migration crisis, both reaching their peaks in 2015. In order to analyse the discourse of ordinary EU citizens on EU-related issues, one must identify an EU-focused and transnational online discursive space, where the value of the EU, its future trajectories, and the recent crises are debated. This study outlines the proposition that the social media pages administered by the EU institutions are particularly informative and genuinely transnational EU-oriented arenas, which host vivid discussions on various aspects of European integration. The analysis of EU-focused transnational discussions complements the existing studies on public attitudes towards European integration, which draw on public opinion polls, and re-conceptualises the common explanations for public Euroscepticism, mainly based on a utilitarian or cultural hypothesis (see Chapter 2).

Although the creation of a European public sphere is still in its infancy, due to the size of EU polity and the language and cultural diversities of its constituencies, the Internet has facilitated the formation of discursive spaces for the exchange of ideas and concerns (see Michailidou et al., 2014). EU institutions have

recognised the informative and discursive potential of social media and launched various social media pages and profiles, taking an active part in these transnational EU-focused spaces as informators, moderators and debaters (see Chapter 5). Twitter has received significant scholarly attention as a tool for the Europeanisation of political engagement on social media (Krzyżanowski, 2018a, 2018b; Barisone and Ceron, 2017; Barberá et al., 2017; Michailidou, 2017). Facebook has been studied less extensively, despite the fact it has been emerging as a leading forum for discussions, mainly due to the ever-increasing practice of commenting on the pages of various socially engaged actors such as politicians, public institutions or the media (Bossetta et al. 2017; Tarța, 2017; Ruzza and Pejovic, 2019). Therefore, this study aims at contributing to the modest canon of scholarly literature focused on Facebook as a space for EU contestation, juxtaposing two narratives: the narrative of the EU institutions and the narrative of European "peoples".

First, this study takes a top-down approach and analyses the perspective of EU communicators on Euroscepticism and the way they address the public opinion expressed through social media. The two foundational research questions, which this part of the study poses, are:

- What kind of communication strategies are used by the web communication teams of the Parliament and the Commission during the critical moments for the process of European integration? (Q1)
- How do the members of these web communication teams view the drop in public support for the EU and Eurosceptic arguments as conveyed through the social media channels of the EU institutions? (Q2)

Second, the study takes a bottom-up approach to online Euroscepticism in times of crisis by asking:

- How was the EU contested in the popular discourse which was unfolding in social media during the peak moments of the Greek crisis and the migration crisis? (Q3)

This question is dissected into in the following sub-questions:

- How was the EU evaluated in terms of its principle of integration, its current set-up, and the future of integration?
- How were these evaluations justified?
- How did citizens verbally construct these crises and what type of discursive resources have they employed?
- Which political strategies were seen as reasonable and which others were discarded as ineffective or irrational?
- Who was blamed for the two crises and what counter-crisis solutions were proposed?
- Which social categories are introduced in the discussion and is the relationship between them solidarian or adversarial?
- Which EU and national actors were made visible in the comments? Were these actors framed in positive, negative or neutral terms?

I expect communication style of EU communication specialist to be formal, factual and technocratic due to the hierarchical organisation of public institutions and well-ingrained communication practices. Moreover, being EU civil servants, it is expected that they would engage in legitimation of the EU and its counter-crises measures when exposed to the Euro-critical public opinion. Furthermore, Eurosceptic attitudes are expected to prevail over the EU-supportive ones, since the disgruntled part of the public is more likely to voice their opinions than those satisfied with the status quo. As regards the justification for various attitudes towards the EU, I expect democracy to be the most dominant rational for Eurosceptic sentiments for two reasons. First, the study (De Wilde et al. 2013) that this thesis uses as a point of departure has identified democracy as the most recurrently invoked argument by the online public whose contributions have been monitored. Thus, the present study seeks to test these findings in new online settings and temporal contexts. Second, both crises involved certain controversiality due to the contested legitimacy of EU-devised counter-crisis measures and, therefore, democratic concerns are more likely to emerge. As concerns the ways the two crises were discussed and framed, I expect that the transnational debates would reproduce dominant arguments present throughout national public spheres due to the European character of the crises.

In order to answer the questions listed above, this study combines several research methods. Initially, the study posed an investigation into the way the representatives of the Parliament and the

Commission disseminated important crises-related online contents by identifying different rhetorical strategies they used. Then, the study focused on a set of semi-structured elite interviews with the members of web communication teams of the two EU institutions in order to find out their perceptions of the growing discontent they encountered in the public discourse that emerged as a response to the contents they disseminate via social media, when performing their roles of official communicators of EU-related developments. The study concludes with an extensive content analysis of the Facebook commentary, dealing with the evaluation of European integration and the role of the EU in the Greek crisis and the migration crisis.

The number of Internet users, who choose to passively follow or take part in the transnational debates mediated by EU institutions, is not negligible—for instance, more than two million people follow the Facebook page of the European Parliament. Nevertheless, since the Union has more than five hundred million people, one cannot claim that the results obtained through the analyses of opinions of this relatively small group of people are representative of the public opinion. However, this specific group gathers individuals who seek to "export" their reading of EU issues into a trans-European space and share it with EU institutions and other fellow Europeans. Moreover, this particular mini-public (see Fung, 2003) is distinctive in comparison to national publics, which are mainly focused on political developments unfolding within national borders. Furthermore, the publicity of citizens' responses to the posts of the EU institutions makes these responses able to shape the public opinion and be part of the public sphere.

The type of digitally mediated activism that this study taps into is different from other forms of Internet activism such as e-petitioning, electronic advocacy or digital campaigning. Unlike these activities which are usually guided by civil society organizations or political parties, unsolicited online commenting on the Facebook pages of the Parliament and the Commission is an individual act of expressing an opinion, support or protest. This spontaneous citizen engagement is mostly reactive and represents a response to a message conveyed by the EU institutions, embodying genuine popular reactions to EU politics, policies and events. In contrast, when answering to opinion poll questions, respondents often express views on issues about which they are not knowledgeable or concerned. The results of opinion polls represent an

amalgamation of individual attitudes, whereas the debates that are the object of this study represent discursive practices and opinion exchanges among participants. Although the largest portion of the literature on Euroscepticism is based on attitudinal research, the present study draws on the argument that Eurosceptic attitudes are not fixed or predisposed but rather triggered by particular circumstances or through communication choices (De Wilde et al. 2013:5). Public attitudes towards the EU are often volatile and not always innate to different categories of population, as studies that focus on the attitudes of particular groups (e.g., the well-off, the educated, males) would suggest. The present analysis showed that the highly variegated transnational Facebook public manly denounced the EU for its lack of representativeness, self-serving character and obscurity. However, the commentators rarely contested the rationale of European integration, but the majority directed their criticism towards specific policies and individuals.

The aforementioned Facebook page hosted a truly pan-European debate. The Europeanisation of the debate is evidenced by the existence of the common interpretation of the role of the EU in the crises, the reasons for the crises and possible solutions. Moreover, a large portion of this highly heterogeneous public appeared united in identifying the main reason for their discontent with the project of European integration. These disgruntled Facebook users voiced deep concern for the public legitimacy of the EU, expressing strong dissatisfaction with the democratic quality of the EU setup. The legitimate concern over popular disempowerment resulting from the process of European integration rebuts the widespread "stigmatization" of Eurosceptics as simply nationalists or xenophobes. The present analysis reveals an overarching "people-elites" divide, which prevails over inter-member states conflicts and rivalries, confirming the rise of the populist ideology.

Barisone and Michailidou (2017:8) conceptualise what they call *public Europeanism*

> "as sharing common concerns (European politics), being exposed to or more actively interacting within a common information and communication environment (online news media and social media), and forming political opinions that citizens of other EU member states also share, across similar ideological or political lines."

They add that this sentiment of “togetherness” does not presume a fully-fledged European public sphere or identity, but a sporadic sense of Europe-wide cohesion over certain trans-European issues during limited time periods. The reflection of this European (but often also international) solidarity was evidenced in the social media sphere by the diffusion of hashtags such as #refugeeswelcome, #strongerin, #takecontrol or #PrayforParis. Although many of these events had notable international aspects, not solely European, the seriousness of these critical events compelled the EU institutions to take measures at the EU level that were occasionally breaching the *acquis communautaire*, thus generating controversies around their role in the crisis resolution. The present analysis shows that this sense of shared concerns over the matters of common interests emerged during the Greek and migration crises. In the examined debates, commentators frequently referred to themselves as “we Europeans” or “we people”. However, this sense of community and enhanced cohesion in times of crises—emerged in opposition to “elites”—echoes with the emerging populist ideology. This emerging sense of “we-ness” incepted in social media suggests the capacity of transnational online discussion to foster the creation of a European digital public sphere and European digital demos.

The Facebook pages of the Commission and the Parliament gather mostly ordinary people who voice their concerns, hoping to reach the Brussels elite. However, throughout the analysis of EU-focused social media debates, this study did not find an explicitly voiced intention to form a grassroots initiative or a more organized group gathered around a specific cause. In other words, these online debates could be categorized as mostly individual interactions with the contents published by the EU institutions or other users and not a collective action or protest.

Contrary to the emotionally charged discourse of the monitored transnational public, communicative contents released by EU communication officers were characterised by Euro jargon and technical explanations directed towards the “logos” of the Facebook audience. Thus, the interactions between the page administrators and the Facebook users revealed a stark gap between the ingrained “neo-functionalist” communication style of the EU institutions and the frustrated voice of the disgruntled public. However, the interviewees [of this study] explained that their activities are significantly constrained by rigid

hierarchical relations within the EU institutions which hamper more extensive use of colloquial language. Furthermore, the interviewees agreed that social media amplifies Eurosceptic and Euro Critical views. However, they also emphasised the existence of an important portion of the public which appreciates the work of the institutions or displays interest in researching EU-related information. In addition, several interviewees confirmed the existence of an upward spiral of EU-supportive comments in the post-Brexit period.

Finally, in order to reduce research subjectivity, I developed clear and precise methods for analysis. Objectivity of the researcher was established though techniques that establish critical distance between the researcher and data, principally by establishing clear categories of analysis and explaining them to a colleague who conducted independent coding of a smaller sample of the Facebook commentary in order to ensure there was considerable coding congruence. As regards the rhetorical analysis, I used well-established tools of classical rhetoric which have kept their relevance and applicability throughout millennia and are based on grammar and stylistics.

1.5 Dissertation outline

This work is organized as follows. Chapter 2 presents the state-of-the-art literature review on Euroscepticism and argues that the present research on public attitudes towards European integration needs to be complemented and re-conceptualised by the analysis of online discursive interactions. Social media commentary is one of the recently emerged forms of public opinion which merits a scholarly attention due to the increasing number of people who voice their views and attitudes online and shape the public discourse on an issue. Moreover, since Euroscepticism has been mainly studied within particular national realms, this chapter pinpoints the necessity to study Euroscepticism in its aggregate and transnational form.

Chapter 3 reviews the two crises that plagued the European Union: the Eurozone crisis—particularly the Greek debt crisis as its most dramatic episode—and the migration crisis. It explains how these crises have put into jeopardy the process of European integration and its input and output legitimacy.

Chapter 4 explains the research design of the study, the motivation for studying the Facebook pages to study Facebook pages of the European Parliament and the European Commission and the decision to use qualitative research methods. Qualitative content analysis is used to analyse over 7000 Facebook comments related to the Greek and migration crises and to respond to the questions dealing with evaluations of different aspects of EU polity, the role of the EU in both crises and the way the commentators attributed the responsibilities for these crises and the solutions they proposed. Furthermore, this study employs a rhetorical analysis of Facebook posts in order to identify communication styles and patterns the EU institutions used to interact with their followers in times of crises. Finally, this study focuses on a set of semi-structured elite interviews, conducted for the purposes of this study, with EU civil servants working for the web communication teams of the Parliament and the Commission in order to find out their perceptions of online Euroscepticism and the effect of the crises on EU public legitimacy.

Chapter 5 presents the results of the rhetorical analysis and the interviews and concludes that EU online communication perpetuates the technocratic communication style despite the novel communication setting. The communication officers of EU institutions tended to reframe controversial issues, likely to provoke emotional reactions among citizens, by presenting them in a technical and bureaucratic manner and, consequently, invoking particular norms of rationality, law, or contracts as references of authority and justifications for unpopular measures. Furthermore, the EU institutions were inclined to have mainly an informational role, rather than a communicative one, particularly in the case of the European Parliament which tended to be very cautious when interacting with its followers online, justifying it with its status of the representative of all EU citizens which is not supposed to take any normative approach on the process of European integration.

Chapter 6 shows the findings of the extensive content analysis of the Facebook commentary. Unlike the conventional wisdom present in the literature on public Euroscepticism, often based on statistical data highlighting utilitarian and cultural factors as the main determinants of public hostility towards European integration, the findings of this content analysis show that the most recurrent justification for negative evaluations of different dimensions of the EU polity, in the view of the examined transnational public, is its

lack of democratic credentials and the legitimacy of the supranational governance. Despite the advocates varying origins around the EU, it is important to note the uniformity that is seen in their arguments. This homogeneity of framing used to discuss the origins of both crises, the mechanisms for their resolution and the role of the EU in this context brings us to the conclusion that a “Europeanised" public debate exists, albeit present in a limited number of forums. Although most of the commentators assessed negatively the response of the EU to the both crises, the principal reasons for the crises were mainly placed in national or international realms.

Chapter 7 lays out the key findings of the thesis and discusses possible avenues of the future reform of the EU based on the insights obtained throughout the analysis.

Chapter 2

Euroscepticism: definition, evolution, typologies and causes

2.1 Introduction

Euroscepticism has experienced a peculiar evolution from a journalistic term, mainly present in British newspapers, to a widely discussed scholarly issue and feature of political programs in an increasing number of parties across Europe. At the beginning of the process of European integration, the adversaries of this process were categorized as communists, Gaullists, or anti-marketeers (Leconte, 2010), whereas the term "Euroscepticism" was used for the first time in a written text in an article in "The Times", published in 1985. Another often cited landmark in the history of Euroscepticism was the well-known "Bruges speech" given by Margaret Thatcher in 1988, when she elaborated on the future of European integration and the necessity to restrain the European Economic Community's powers. Moreover, the Maastricht Treaty represents a watershed in the history of the European project in multiple ways, including the shift in public support and a starting point of ascending Euroscepticism (e.g., Eichenberg and Dalton, 2007). At the same

time, the literature on this phenomenon has been growing, seeking to explain its elusive nature and to define it, moving from an initially marginal term to an integral part of European studies.

Euroscepticism merits special attention and scholarly investigation as it is gaining momentum at both party and popular levels. On the one hand, it is increasingly becoming part of centrist parties' agendas, spreading all over the political spectrum. On the other hand, it is diffusing across member states, transcending the borders of countries which have been more prone to a Eurosceptic public opinion, such as the UK, Nordic countries or Austria, and gaining prominence in traditionally EU-supportive Benelux and Southern Europe. Moreover, at the 2014 European elections, Eurosceptic parties capitalized on the Eurozone crisis and austerity measures. Right-wing Euroscepticism was fuelled in the countries which are high net contributors such as Finland, Germany or the UK, whereas left-wing Eurosceptic parties gained impressive electoral support in the Southern member states cumbered with onerous austerity measures (Brack and Startin, 2015:245). Altogether, Eurosceptic parties won the third of the total number of seats in the European Parliament, achieving unprecedented electoral success. Thus, it is evident that Euroscepticism is coming to the foreground in both the national and EU political landscape. Fading faith in the European project has permeated the continent, challenging even its existence as the possible dissolution of the EU has become a recurrently discussed scenario in media, elite and popular discourses.

Euroscepticism is often seen as an umbrella term which embraces a diverse range of negative attitudes towards European integration. In order to describe Euroscepticism, Mudde (2016:103) uses the term "container concept" to encompass any form of critique of the European integration, regardless of how marginal. However, a number of scholars have tried to define it more precisely. One of the early pioneers in investigation of Euroscepticism, Paul Taggart, defines Euroscepticism as "an encompassing term" which "expresses the idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration" (Taggart, 1998: 366). Nevertheless, some scholars suggest it is difficult to conceptualize Euroscepticism due to the lack of a theoretical consensus about the nature of the EU itself and the uncertainty about the final outcome of European integration (Leconte, 2015). A root cause of Euroscepticism could be the premise of the EU being a pending experiment, which in

turn leaves room for different interpretations of European integration, formation of coalitions, and fosters continuous discussions about its future trajectories.

Easton's (1965) division between specific and diffuse support for or in opposition to a political system is often used as a starting point of scholars investigating Euroscepticism. Specific opposition would be directed against particular EU policies and it actually corresponds to Taggart's "qualified" opposition to European integration. However, some scholars do not view the "qualified" opposition to the European project as a form of Euroscepticism, but as a healthy opposition that characterizes any democratic political system. According to Risse (2015:15), it is more justified to use the term Euroscepticism when talking about diffuse opposition to the EU and European integration in principle. Moreover, based on the three objects of support or opposition identified by Easton – the political authorities, the political regime, and the political community as a whole – Risse (2015) suggests that the public opposition to EU actors or dissatisfaction with their performance can hardly be classified as Euroscepticism. This kind of opposition is an essential element of politics "as usual" which characterizes national democracies, where citizens obey the decisions of national policymakers regardless of their approving or disapproving attitudes towards them. On the other hand, it is justified to subsume the opposition towards the EU as a political regime (e.g., the principle of European integration, EU institutions, and rules) or the EU as a political community under Euroscepticism.

Morgan (2005) differentiates three aspects of European integration that are targeted by Eurosceptics. The first group of Eurosceptics evaluates the EU based on the product of European integration and, consequently, depicts it as "wasteful, unnecessary, unaccountable, corrupt, protectionist, anti-democratic, and —worst of all — foreign" (Morgan 2005:56). The second group focuses on the process of European integration and denounces it as "undemocratic, secretive, bureaucratic, and "deceptive." Finally, the third group of Eurosceptics rails against the project of European integration, which is perceived as a threat to national sovereignty and as a federal polity in the making.

The aim of this chapter is to give an overview of the state of art in the literature on Euroscepticism, as it mainly seeks to identify the major causes of popular Eurosceptic attitudes, but also investigates the

historical evolution of this phenomenon, its variations in specific national contexts, and different forms of party-based Euroscepticism. This study mainly focuses on popular Euroscepticism present in social media, as a fairly new channel of expression of Eurosceptic attitudes, which promises considerable potential for an insightful analysis, since it contains a large number of spontaneous and unsolicited citizens' comments on different aspects of European integration. In order to get a solid foundation for the analysis of the articulation of popular Euroscepticism in transnational social media forums, this chapter summarizes hitherto developments in popular and, less extensively, party-based Euroscepticism, and scholarly contributions that elaborate on this phenomenon. Since this study taps into a rather under-researched field of online Euroscepticism, it shows its added value for the literature on public attitudes on European integration. Moreover, this chapter presents how Euroscepticism correlates with other relevant phenomena, notably EU politicisation, populism and media.

An added value of this study lays in its conceptualisation of Euroscepticism as a phenomenon that lays at the intersection of several research fields and receives inputs from various areas of scholarly literature such as party-based and popular Euroscepticism, nationalism, European public sphere and European identity. Thus, the literature review presented in this chapter is constructed in a way that resonates with the understanding of the research on Euroscepticism as standing at the crossroads of several research areas, which belong to diverging disciplines, notably political sociology, political science and media studies.

2.2 From a "permissive consensus" to a "constraining disensus"

At first, the European integration process was entrusted to a narrow circle of national leaders who stirred the integration without significant external interference. However, it has gradually mobilized domestic political parties, followed by civil society organizations and, eventually the EU population having an increased political engagement.

The period between the inception of the European Communities and the signing of the Maastricht Treaty is frequently defined in the literature as a period of "permissive consensus," the term coined by

Lindberg and Scheingold (1970). During this period, which was considered to be mostly elite-driven and focused on economic integration and the formation of a common market, citizens were arguably uniformed about the process of European integration or compliant with it. An early scholar of European integration and neofunctionalist Haas (1958) defines this initial "permissive consensus" as "toleration" of the European Communities rather than support or enthusiasm. According to Evans (1998: 576), the "permissive consensus" is understood as "the general affirmation of a somewhat hazily understood European project by an uninvolved public." Citizens did not show overt opposition, tacitly allowing national governments to solve common issues through intergovernmental negotiations without the involvement of popular vote. Moreover, the high levels of support levels are also explained by the well-being and prosperity, which characterized this period (Inglehart and Reif, 1991).

Classical theories of European integration paid little attention to the role of public opinion. Neofunctionalists thought the public opinion was irrelevant, whereas intergovernmentalists emphasized the role of national political elites as drivers and masters of the integration process; hence, the reason they mostly neglected popular attitudes towards European integration. Therefore, Euroscepticism, and especially popular Euroscepticism, had been under-researched by scholars. Moreover, the role of society in the process of European integration has been kept on the peripheral for most historians thus resulting in the history being described as a "history without society" (Kaelble in Leconte, 2015:253). Therefore, sociological approach to European integration had been disregarded for a long period of time.

For an intergovernmentalist, such as Andrew Moravcsik, "the EU plays almost no role […]in most of the issue-areas about which European voters care most, such as taxation, social welfare provision, defense, high foreign policy, policing, education, cultural policy, human rights, and small business policy" (Moravcsik, 2001: 163-164). Although Moravcsik's assertion largely reflected the popular attitude towards European integration during the first decades of the integration process, it does not hold true anymore. In spite of lacking important state competencies, the EU has still produced tangible effects on many realms that citizens care about.

2.3 Brief historical overview of the evolution of Euroscepticism

The first signs of popular and party-based opposition to the European Communities (EC) had already emerged during the negotiations that preceded the first enlargement in 1973. The accession negotiations with the UK, Denmark, Norway, and Ireland, and respective debates in these countries, planted the seed of Euroscepticism. A myriad of aspects regarding European integration were debated in order to evaluate the desirability of joining the EC and weigh the costs and benefits of European integration. The majority of citizens in Denmark and Ireland cast their votes for joining the EC, whereas the UK joined without holding a referendum. The citizens of Norway said "no" to EU membership two times, in 1972 and 1994. The UK, often characterized as an "awkward partner" (George 1990), has also organized two referendums on EU membership. Although the government opted for the accession to the EC without asking for popular consent in 1973, it held a referendum on withdrawal from the EC in 1975, but the citizens voted to stay in the Community. However, the British membership in the EU was put to a referendum again in June 2016, when the Leave camp won the tight majority of the vote.

Before examining the manifestation of Euroscepticism in social media, one must review the evolution of Euroscepticism through a historical timeline. Contrary to the conventional wisdom that permissive consensus was characterized by a constant level of popular support for European integration, the reality is much more distorted, with the pre-Maastricht era being riddled with several fluctuations of public opinion. For instance, during the 1970s, economic predicaments such as rising inflation and unemployment, contributed to the waning support for European integration. This wane of support was triggered by two factors: the EC's incapability to deal efficiently with emerging economic problems and the tendency of national governments to blame the EC for the crisis and use it as a scapegoat (Eichenberg and Dalton 1993; Anderson and Reichert 1995). Nevertheless, in the 1980s the public support for the EC started growing again (McLaren 2007), whereas a substantial leap in the further integration introduced by the Maastricht Treaty triggered a new drop in the public support for the newly-created European Union, which substituted the European Communities.

Rationales for Eurosceptic sentiments varied across different member states over time. Startin (2005: 67) asserts that in France "it was the debate surrounding the Maastricht referendum which was to bring the issue of Europe to a head and to demonstrate fully the gulf between France's political elites and large swathes of the electorate". On the other hand, Sørensen (2004) studied the case of Denmark and found out that public support for European integration had started dropping since the launching of the Single European Act in 1986. Furthermore, the Eastern enlargement triggered a new wave of Eurosceptic attitudes which were justified by popular concerns over a series of issues: EU immigration controls, welfare benefits, employment, social dumping, and cultural differences. Unlike Germany and France where Euroscepticism was on the rise due to the prospective enlargement, Denmark and the UK were very supportive of the increase in the number of EU member states, arguably due to the assumption that a "wider" Union would prevent a "deeper" one. In 2002, 72 percent of Danes were in favour of the enlargement towards the East, whereas only 20 percent of the French were supportive of the same idea (Sørensen 2006:17).

The rejection of the Constitutional Treaty by French and Dutch electorates in 2005 was an immense shock for pro-EU elites, since "no" was not voiced by the "usual suspects", such as the UK or Denmark, but by the two founding members, whose citizens had always been largely pro-integrationists. A wide gap between the public opinion and the opinions of political elites is well illustrated by the stark difference in support for the 2005 EU Constitutional Treaty between the French and the Dutch citizens and their parliamentary representatives. Parties in favour of the Treaty in France and the Netherlands had 93 percent and 85 percent of the seats in their respective Parliaments, whereas only 45 percent and 38 percent of the citizens voted for the proposed Treaty (Crum, 2007: 75).

The "period of reflection", which followed the failure to adopt the Constitution, yielded numerous strategic documents, consultations with citizens and civil society, and an intergovernmental agreement to sign a new Treaty that was less ambitious than the Constitutional Treaty, free from its controversial and contentious elements. Despite a number of substantial changes incorporated in the new version of the Treaty, Irish citizens first rejected it. Only after several concessions regarding abortion, military neutrality,

and a permanent commissioner, did the Irish finally approve the new Lisbon Treaty in October 2009. However, as soon as the Treaty was adopted, the economic crisis hit and contributed to a dramatic fall in popularity of the EU, in addition to the migration crisis which jeopardized its already corroded public legitimacy.

2.4 Party-based Euroscepticism

Party-based Euroscepticism was traditionally perceived as a "touchstone of dissent" (Taggart, 1998) and a hallmark of extreme right-wing or left-wing parties. According to this reading, Euroscepticism has the shape of an "inverted U-curve" with peaks on the two ends of the traditional one-dimensional political spectrum (Hooghe et al., 2002). Similarly, Szczerbiak and Taggart (2008: 349) have found that Euroscepticism is characterized by a core-periphery dynamic in which "the major parties in the party system will display a pervasive commitment to the European project" while Eurosceptic parties are "confined to the peripheries of the party system." Although Eurosceptic parties were considered for a long period as marginal protest parties, nowadays the Eurosceptic political landscape has drastically changed. Several mainstream parties have acquired moderate Eurosceptic rhetoric, clearly demonstrating that Euroscepticism has moved from the fringes of the political spectrum and become a trump card for winning elections. Moreover, previously marginal Eurosceptic parties have entered governments, "coming in from the cold" (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2012). Since the EU is often perceived among electorates as the main culprit for onerous austerity measures or increased immigration, political entrepreneurs—both left wing and right wing—have been highly responsive to the upsurge in Euroscepticism among voters. These political actors swiftly mobilized the discontent part of the citizens around anti-elite political movements and parties, which, among others, tapped into increased Eurosceptic sentiments of voters (e.g. Podemos, SYRIZA, Alternative for Germany).

In examining the different typologies of party-based Euroscepticism, Taggart and Szczerbiak (2002) draw a widely known distinction between "hard" and "soft" Euroscepticism. Hard Euroscepticism is defined as a principled opposition to the EU and European integration, expressed through the advocacy of leaving the EU or stopping the accession process in the case of candidate countries. On the other hand, soft

Euroscepticism denotes a" qualified opposition" to a specific policy or policies, but nonetheless remains supportive to the notion of European integration in principle. This form of Euroscepticism may be a result of the perception that "national interest" is currently at odds with the EU's trajectory (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2002: 7). The differentiation between "hard" and "soft" Euroscepticism is the most widely used in the literature, but it has been often criticized for being too broad and nonspecific. Kopecky and Mudde (2002) voice the fear that this typology may classify even pro-European actors as Eurosceptics and introduce a new scheme of parties' positions on European integration. Based on the concept of diffused and specific support, Kopecky and Mudde (2002) differentiate four categories of political parties based on their position towards the EU: Euro-enthusiast, Europragmatic, Eurosceptic, and Euroreject. Furthermore, Flood and Usherwood (2007) outline a six-point scale of party positions: EU-rejectionist, EU-revisionist, EU-minimalist, EU-gradualist, EU-reformist, and EU-maximalist. The last two classifications of positions towards European correspond more closely to the variegated political landscape than the "hard-soft" dichotomy because these classifications embrace both pro-European party orientations and a more varied range of EU-critical positions.

Party-based Euroscepticism can be divided into two schools: the Sussex and the North Carolina Schools (Mudde 2011). The Sussex School is mainly focused on national differences, such as the party system or the electoral system, and seeks to explain how these differences influence a party's position towards the EU by utilizing either case studies or comparative analyses. On the other hand, the North Carolina School employs mostly longitudinal analysis concerning the impact of the broader socio-economic positions on parties and public opinion across the EU. Nevertheless, these two Schools are rather understood as complementary than as opposed; thus, a more comprehensive understanding of the political parties' positions on European integration requires using a mixed-method approach (Mudde, 2011).

Euroscepticism promptly entered the political programs of right-wing parties after EU competences superseded mere free market regulations. Rightist suspicion towards European integration stems from a series of perceived threats to the national community including immigration, multiculturalism, and the loss of national sovereignty and traditional values (Hooghe et al. 2002:976). The Constitutional Treaty debate in

the Netherlands and France reinforced the radical right in both countries—the Dutch PVV and the French FN (Startin and Krouwel, 2013). Furthermore, conspiracy theory serves as a very powerful frame of interpretation for radical right discourses, since the EU is often interpreted as "a secret economic-political power" that aspires for world domination (Caiani and Conti, 2014). In addition to the identarian arguments, the economic aspect of European integration has been extensively contested by the radical right because in their understanding EU policies affect employment security, social system, state aid to national companies, and competitiveness of domestic products.

On the other hand, Eurosceptics of the left oppose the alleged neoliberal nature of EU policies, which according to the leftist reading foster excessive deregulation, free trade, and globalisation. The French Socialists opposed the Constitutional Treaty and denounced it as a neoliberal project, favouring more "social" Europe. Paradoxically, left-wing Eurosceptics accuse the EU of being too neoliberalist, whereas their right-wing counterparts claim the EU is too socialist. Similarly, European integration has been interpreted in mutually contradictory ways across assorted member states, stemming from their various political and economic traditions. In the UK, European integration was "widely denounced as a socialist plot and a model based on archaic regulations" (Benoit 1997: 78). Euroscepticism in France is mostly triggered by the fear for French culture and the increasing immigration associated with European integration; thus, it is dominantly right-wing with the National Front at the forefront of the movement. Scandinavian political parties and their constituents are mostly concerned about the implications of the EU for social and environmental issues as well as the negative impact of EU policies on national welfare provisions (e.g. Sørensen, 2004; Petersson, 2004). Moreover, Scandinavian countries and the UK have firmly embedded democracy in their political systems; hence, the putative democratic deficit of the EU fuels Eurosceptic attitudes in these parts of Europe. Finally, due to the recent economic crisis, which is seen as a result of failed free market principles and the austerity measures which followed, left-wing Euroscepticism has become more prominent, particularly in Southern Europe (Vasilopoulou, 2018; Keith, 2017).

Because of the high interactivity and mutual influence between political parties and the public, attitudinal and party-based Euroscepticism have to be observed as two sides of the same coin. European political parties have increasingly included Eurosceptic elements in their rhetoric and political platforms, reacting to the change in the public opinion with regards to the EU. Political parties in power are particularly able to shape public opinion since they are "gatekeepers" between their national constituencies and the EU (Hoffman, 1966). Moreover, national leaders are able to "frame" decisions agreed at the EU level, interpreting the consequences according to their proper political interests. However, due to the increased visibility of the EU in the news media and the possibility of EU actors to communicate directly with the citizenry through social media, the power of national political actors to distort unfavourable information and scapegoat the EU is rather limited.

2.5 Popular Euroscepticism: locating its causes

Popular Euroscepticism is mainly manifested in low support for European integration as measured by Eurobarometer surveys or in negative votes in EU-related referenda. Eurobarometer surveys, established in 1974, gauge the fluctuations in public opinion, including both EU aggregate and country-specific data. The aim is to assess EU citizens' awareness of and support for the EU's activities and obtain inputs for policy and decision-making. Survey questions cover attitudes towards topics including: European integration, policies, institutions, social conditions, health, culture, the economy, citizenship, security, information technology, and the environment. The large proportion of scholarly work on public Euroscepticism has been informed by the statistical data derived from Eurobarometer surveys and the European Social Survey. The goal of this literature canon is to map the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of European constituencies (e.g. Eichenberg and Dalton, 1993; Garry and Tilley, 2009; McLaren, 2002). Moreover, Euroscepticism is manifested in a negative vote at EU referenda. Since 1992, the practice of organizing referendums on EU-related issues has spread among national governments. These referendums have been mainly held in order to gain popular consent for the ratification of the Treaties, allowing citizens to control the pace of integration.

Popular Euroscepticism is inextricably intertwined with the alleged democratic deficit in the EU. Democracy is one of the pillars of the process of European integration and a concept that permeates both the Community *acquis* and the public discourse of EU officials. Moreover, democracy plays an important role in the Union's external relations, particularly in the enlargement process where a fully-fledged democratic set-up is a crucial precondition for the accession to the "club" listed in the Copenhagen criteria. The EU was an engine of the democratic consolidation of Greece, Portugal, along with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, where it is currently prompting the stabilization of democratic practices in the Western Balkans through the membership negotiations with the countries of this region. Needless to say, if the EU is not supported by its own constituents, its reputation, credibility and trustworthiness are seriously undermined, both internally and externally.

As concerns the classification of different types of popular Euroscepticism, the seminal work of Taggart (1998), which proposes a distinction between hard and soft Euroscepticism of political parties, can be also applied on public attitudes towards European integration. Hard Eurosceptics are against the very idea of transferring powers to any supranational institution and express a principled opposition to the European project as such. On the other hand, soft Eurosceptics oppose to concrete EU policies or have an aversion towards the planned trajectory of the further extension of EU competencies. However, the distinction between hard and soft Eurosceptics is insufficiently able to embrace all the nuances of public attitudes towards European integration. Moreover, it is focused solely on those who oppose the EU, excluding those who support the European project. Furthermore, Kopecky and Mudde (2002) criticize the theoretical precision of Taggart's classification, proposing their own classification criteria, which resemble David Easton's distinction between diffuse and specific support for political regimes (Easton, 1965). They suggest a classification based on two dimensions: the diffuse support, as an approval for the general idea of European integration, and the specific support, namely the support for the EU's current structure and the planned future evolution of the European integration (Kopecky and Mudde, 2002). According to them, there are four ideal-type categories of party attitudes regarding the EU: 1) the Euroenthusiasts that combine Europhile and EU-optimist positions, supporting both general ideas and the integration process; 2)

the Eurosceptics that merge Europhilism and EU-pessimism approving general ideas but not their current application; 3) the Eurorejects that are both Europhobe and EU-pessimist; 4) the Europragmatists, which disapprove general ideas but support the current EU integration anyway, taking pragmatically into account that even if they are ideologically against the European integration, they benefit from it. Although the categorisation proposed by Kopecky and Mudde (2002) is more nuanced in comparison to the one proposed by Taggart, De Wilde et al. (2013) have developed an even more holistic scheme for differentiation of various levels and targets of EU evaluations. Drawing on Morgan's (2005) three dimensions of the EU polity evaluations—principle of integration, EU institutional set-up, and project of integration— De Wilde et al. (2013) derive six categories of EU polity evaluations: "affirmative European," "alter-European", "status quo", "eurocritical", "pragmatic", and "anti-European". In addition, they identify a seventh category called "diffuse Euroscepticism", which they define as a negative evaluation lacking a clear and well-argued justification. Furthermore, they operationalize EU polity justification building on Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) work and identify a series of most commonly invoked reasons for EU support or criticism. These reoccurring bases for EU polity evaluations are democracy, shared culture and values, necessity, economic prosperity and safety. This scheme, although rather complex, offers a very nuanced variety of Eurosceptic attitudes as well as affirmative evaluations. It has been also successfully applied to the data that resembles the data sample analysed in this study. Therefore, I decided to use it for the purposes of this study and apply it to the sampled Facebook commentary. Further details on this scheme will be provided in the methodological chapter (Chapter 4).

Since the Maastricht referenda, public opposition to European integration has been constantly intriguing the academic community. Numerous scholarly endeavours have yielded a myriad of theories aiming to explain the upsurge in popular Euroscepticism: the impact of (un)popularity of national governments on Eurosceptic attitudes, economic/utilitarian theories, identity theory, party cueing theory, or postmaterialist theory. The most commonly utilized instrument to explain the mass opposition to the European project has been the economic/utilitarian theory. However, "soft factors" based on concerns about identity and cultural issues have been gaining prominence recently (see Klingeren et al. 2013).

Various hypotheses on the causes of popular opposition to European integration will be explained in more details in the following subsections.

2.5.1 Utilitarian factors

Utilitarian cost–benefit considerations are based on the observation that "EU membership is not necessarily a positive sum game where everyone wins; instead it frequently involves both winners and losers" (Anderson and Reichert, 1995: 233). Similarly, according to Gabel and Palmer (1995), popular attitudes towards European integration are based on individuals' different costs and benefits from the EU. Moreover, utilitarian explanations suggest that the higher strata of society tend to profit more from international opportunities generated through the process of European integration (e.g. free trade, mobility), and as a result, are apt to be more EU supportive. The division between those who support and those who oppose European integration is viewed as a reflection of the wider division between winners and losers of globalization. People endowed with "transnational competences"— predominantly acquired through formal education— are those who mostly reap benefits from globalisation (Koehn and Rosenau, 2002), whereas people who stopped their education at an early stage and who are mostly manual workers tend to oppose to globalisation, since they benefit little from the opportunities it offers and feel threatened by increased competitiveness on the job market. Furthermore, a study of the Constitutional referendums in France and the Netherlands reveals that in both countries the largest part of the electorate with lower levels of education, unemployed or with lower incomes rejected the Constitutional Treaty (Startin and Krouwel, 2013).

Copious scholars have used various macro and micro economic factors in order to explain the fluctuations in public support for European integration. Gamble (1995) has shown a correlation between the deterioration of economic conditions in Europe and the decline in popular support for EU membership in the period between 1991 and 1994. At the macro-level, it has been found that the member states with positive macroeconomic indicators (e.g., low level of inflation, high GDP, low unemployment), tend to have high pro-integration support (Eichenberg and Dalton, 1993). Moreover, national governments often unjustifiably push the blame for the poor performance of national economies on the EU, thereby stirring up

animosity towards European integration. Gabel (1998) rebuts this hypothesis by showing that support for the EU may also drop in an improving economic climate. Moreover, Anderson and Kaltenthaler (1996) also disprove the "national economy" hypothesis, as they have not found a strong correlation between national macroeconomic indicators and EU support. Additionally, Gabel and Palmer (1995) have found that subjective perceptions of a personal financial situation have more powerful explanatory power than objective financial indicators.

Utilitarian motives were not an incentive for Euroscepticism till the beginning of 1990s, since the period between 1960s and 1980s was mainly characterized by economic well-being across member states, with a few short periods of recession. Since the beginning of the 1990s, utilitarian Euroscepticism at both the elite and mass level has started rising due to the economic recession tied to the launching of the European and Monetary Union (EMU), as well as the initial steps taken towards enlargement to poorer Central and Eastern Europe (Leconte, 2010:47). The Maastricht Treaty and EMU altered cost-benefit perceptions of individuals and member states, due to the intrusion of economic and monetary integration into the domain of domestic redistribution and the fear about the future of social welfare. Later on, the Euro additionally galvanized Eurosceptic feelings as a result of the price increase, which was associated with the introduction of the Euro (Aarts and van der Kolk, 2006). On the other hand, at the national level, EMU spurred doubts and reluctance in Germany, due to the abolition of the highly praised Deutsche Mark, its substitution with the new common currency, and the public perception that the national currency had been undervalued during the transition (Leconte, 2010:48). On the other hand, according to Banducci et al. (2003), opposition to EMU was incited by the reforms required by the convergence criteria, which primarily included the reduction of national deficits and debts through spending cutbacks, affecting mostly the low-paid and low-skilled strata of the society. In the post-Maastricht period, the deepening of economic and monetary integration spurred fears among Europeans about possible repercussions of these common policies on individual and national economic situations as well as future prospects. Between 1989 and the early 2000s, scepticism towards further supranational integration in the areas of social security, public

health and monetary policy increased significantly (Eichenberg and Dalton, 2007:142). According to public opinion, European integration started to be associated with the erosion of the national welfare state.

The variations in the presence of Euroscepticism across member states have also been explained by the utilitarian rationale. The high support for the EU in the countries of Southern Europe (Spain, Italy, Greece, and Portugal) has been often interpreted through the utilitarian lens due to the economic benefits these countries received from the EU membership, mostly through cohesion funds (Lubbers and Scheepers, 2010). This cost-benefit calculation affected their support for the EU after the 2004 enlargement when a relatively large number of under-developed countries from Central and Eastern Europe became eligible for EU cohesion funds. In a similar fashion, the ex-communist countries from Central and Eastern demonstrated high levels of support for the accession to the EU due to the perception of collective EU membership benefits, which would foster economic growth and modernisation of this relatively poor part of Europe. However, after joining the EU, citizens moved the focus of their evaluations of the EU from the macro perspective to the micro one, choosing to assess the EU based on the perception of their individual benefits from the membership of their country in the EU (Guerra, 2013). Nevertheless, the level of support for the EU in Central and Eastern Europe has declined over time since not all countries from this region have equally benefited from the EU; recently, identity issues connected with the recent influx of immigrants have come to the foreground in some member states (e.g., Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic), downplaying utilitarian calculations (Magone, 2015).

However, although the 2005 referenda in France and the Netherlands showed a high proportion of less educated blue-collar workers among no-voters, the overall redistribution of “no” votes among the socio-economic structure of French and Dutch electorates called into question the utilitarian hypothesis, primarily because Euroscepticism has shown tendencies of spreading among different socio-economic categories and reaching previously EU-supportive middle class (Leconte, 2010:174). For instance, a Eurobarometer survey (EB 172) shows that some traditionally EU supportive professional groups, such as the self-employed in the Netherlands or civil servants in France, voted No.

Utilitarian reasoning has also been used to explain Euroscepticism among women. Eurobarometer surveys traditionally reveal a lower level of support for EU membership among female respondents. Additionally, the results of EU-related referenda show that women are more numerous among "no" voters. For instance, Bjørklund (1996) has found that only 49 percent of Swedish women (compared with 58 percent of men), 43 percent of Norwegian women (compared to 52 percent of men), and 54 percent of Finnish women (compared with 61 percent of men) voted for EU membership. The explanation in line with utilitarian assumptions highlights the economic vulnerability of women, who outnumber men in hazardous work, low-skilled and low-paid jobs. Additionally, due to their lower level of education, women are more worried about their ability to adjust to the more competitive EU environment (Nelsen and Guth, 2000:281).

Finally, the prolonged economic crisis has certainly affected the public support for European integration. The lack of output legitimacy was mainly evident in negative growth, high levels of unemployment and cutbacks in salaries and social subsidies. Several scholars have investigated the impact of the economic crisis on the support for the EU and found that the crisis did trigger the rise in support for hard-line Eurosceptic parties (Gomez, 2014; Ioannou et al. 2015; Nicoli 2016). Unlike the analyses based on the statistical data, this study examines the interrelation between the economic crisis and the public attitudes on European integration by using qualitative content analysis of crisis-focused Facebook debates. The findings regarding the interplay between Euroscepticism and the two crises are presented in Chapter 6.

2.5.2 Identity factors

The process of European integration has been advanced with the belief that multi-level governance would create multi-layer and mutually inclusive identities (regional, national, and European). The expectation was that the number of people who claim multiple identities would increase over time due to the process of socialisation. Nevertheless, in France and Germany, the number of citizens with multiple identities even diminished during the 1990s, with the decline being particularly sharp in Germany (Schild, 2001:337). Moreover, people who declare multiple identities tend to give priority to their national identity, particularly in the situations where high tensions are the result of clashes in interests between national and European

authorities. For instance, the Eurozone crisis and the migration crisis undoubtedly represent the situation of multiple collisions between the involved member states and EU institutions.

Identity factors as main determinants of Eurosceptic attitudes were brought into the fore with the Maastricht Treaty, which introduced tighter political integration and established EU citizenship as a complementary to the national one. Moreover, the previously introduced EU anthem and flag, the traditional symbols of the national state, accentuated the sense of unease of those with strong national identity. Consequently, scholars started investigating the influence of the identity variable on the level of Euroscepticism, producing a series of compelling studies which have gradually upstaged utilitarian explanations.

The existence of a European identity at an individual level is reported to have an impact on the degree an individual is critical towards the EU. For instance, Weßels (2007) differentiates three types of Eurosceptics — those who ask for the improvement of the EU, those who characterize the pace of integration as hasty and those who advocate the demise of the Union. More importantly, he has found out that the first two groups have a European identity, whereas the third one does not. The media play an important role in the formation of identity, particularly in the case of the EU polity which is relatively recent and still needs the sense of "we-ness" among its citizens. In this regard, Bruter (2005:127) claims that good news about the EU is beneficial for the European identity since positive news in comparison with negative news can increase the level of citizens' attachment of identity with the EU. Moreover, Stoeckel (2009) finds that greater issue salience of EU concerns in the media foster popular identification with the EU.

McLaren (2006) argues that Euroscepticism at the individual level is positively correlated with a general animosity towards other cultures. Since multiculturalism is one of the basic EU tenets, those who feel animosity towards other cultures will oppose the EU as well. Furthermore, Hooghe and Marks (2005, 2009) have found that support for European integration is strongly determined by identity. They distinguish exclusive and inclusive national identity and reveal that people with multiple identities are less Eurosceptic than those who identify with only one nation. Yet, strong national identity does not trigger Euroscepticism

automatically, but their correlation depends on the level of division between national elites over EU issues. According to Hooghe and Marks (2005), exclusive national identity creates Euroscepticism only if national elites clash over EU matters; otherwise, European integration does not impinge on national identity.

Kuhn and Stoeckel (2014) have found the correlation between exclusive and inclusive nationalism, and the redistributive consequences of economic governance: the more citizens identify with Europe, the more they are willing to support redistribution among member states and to show solidarity. Nevertheless, this solidarity may be conditional. According to some studies, Germans are ready to bailout the countries of Southern Europe, but only if these countries implement stringent budgetary restrictions (Lengfeld et al. 2015).

Moreover, diverse national identities and their historical evolution can serve as strong explanatory variables as well. In this interpretation, British Euroscepticism stems from its imperial history and alleged British exceptionalism. On the other hand, Euroscepticism lacks salience among Germans, who are still encumbered by the guilt over the Second World War, and among Spaniards, who still perceive the EU as an opportunity for development and modernization (Medrano, 2003). Euroscepticism has been a longstanding trait of Danish public opinion and political landscape since its accession to the European Economic Community in 1973. The Danes have been mainly concerned about sovereignty issues and the transfer of competences to the supranational level. They have traditionally voted for Eurosceptic parties since the first direct elections for the European Parliament in 1979. Furthermore, the Danish electorate rejected the Maastricht Treaty in the 1992 referendum and said “no” to the euro in 2000. Not only is Euroscepticism determined by national identities, but also by the regional ones. Since representatives of the regions with strong identities seek to attain their objectives at the EU level—circumventing opposition at the national level—they tend to be less prone to Euroscepticism (Chacha, 2012).

Identity concerns downplay utilitarian assumptions in the situations when a policy with clear economic gains is evaluated from the identity perspective and rejected despite its material benefits. For instance, the citizens of the United States and OECD countries with strong national attachment tend to

oppose trade liberalization (Hooghe and Marks, 2005:438). Furthermore, the conspicuous Euroscepticism of particular countries within Central and Eastern Europe during the pre-accession period calls into question utilitarian explanations. For instance, during the accession process of Estonia, identity issues downplayed obvious material gains from the EU membership. Vetik et al. (2006) argue that the official EU discourse, which dominated the pre-accession period, triggered a large percentage of Euroscepticism in the Estonian public opinion. Although the EU membership was considered by Estonian elites as a symbolic return to Europe after the traumatic Soviet era, the language used by EU actors by contrast, was characterized by terms such as "catching up with", "adaptation", "harmonization". This particular form of EU rhetoric was interpreted as a reference to domestic backwardness and alluded to the necessity for an external leader in the process of modernization. As a result, the discourse that the EU employed impinged on the susceptible national identity of Estonians causing public mistrust in both EU and national elites.

Moreover, the citizens of small member states tend to be apprehensive of the loss of sovereignty and marginalization by bigger member states, particularly in the context of enlargement. For example, in Ireland and Netherlands, the loss of national sovereignty was ranked second in the motivations for a negative vote at EU referenda. Opinion polls before the 2005 referendum in the Netherlands showed that 83 percent of respondents thought that small member states would lose influence as a consequence of further integration (Aarts and van der Kolk, 2006:245).

According to Grande and Kriesi (2015), the "pro and anti-EU cleavage" is actually part of a broader "integration-demarcation" (or "cosmopolitan-nationalist") cleavage which has been a consequence of globalisation. This kind of conflict has accentuated the importance of culture and identity in both national and EU politics, particularly empowering the forces of the populist right who have taken advantage of this cleavage very effectively. Despite the fact that the Eurozone crisis is in essence an economic issue, it has nevertheless incited nationalist political groups because of its redistribution consequences for national economies and the strong antagonism between "debtor" and "donor" countries. Both globalisation and European integration produce different consequences for nation states and groups within them, thereby creating "winners" and "losers" and weakening national cohesion. Grande and Kriesi (2015) summarize the

major three factors that have produced this division: economic competition, cultural diversity, and political integration. Economic competition has become increasingly tougher due to the globalisation process; hence, some members of the society feel their socio-economic positions may be endangered by the opening of national borders to foreign workers and capital. Furthermore, the processes of globalisation and European integration have led to the intensification of immigration and therefore, increased diversification of national communities. A continuous influx of migrants—who often differ in physical or cultural characteristics from the national population—have spurred fears among some members of Western societies. Finally, the pooling of sovereign powers into the hands of supranational institutions via political integration, worries the members of national communities, who strongly and exclusively identify with their nation states.

The hostility towards immigration and Euroscepticism are correlated for several reasons. Leconte (2010:183) summarizes them: 1) European integration is based on the principle of free movement of people which clearly increases immigration; 2) national policies on immigration are becoming communautarized resulting in the gradual limiting of national powers and competencies in this policy area; 3) EU legislation is based on the principle of non-discrimination which empowers minorities. Moreover, in the EU context, we can differentiate intra-EU migration and inter-EU migration, which have been strong drivers of Euroscepticism, particularly in the UK (Hobolt, 2016).

The identitarian arguments are central to the questions related to the EU membership. The membership of Turkey in the EU deals with the essence of the European polity and the question "Who are we?" and "Who belongs to us?" (Risse, 2015). In reference to this question, the way in which public discourses are framed is mostly in line with rightest rhetoric; these discourses generally emphasize common European cultural and religious heritage as well as the Turkish distinctness. Nevertheless, this kind of interpretation of the European identity contradicts the criteria established by the *acquis communautaire*: "If Europe and the EU are conceptualized as modern, inclusive, and liberal communities, then Turkey can become a member in principle as long as it respects the Copenhagen criteria" (Risse, 2015:144). When the Turkish membership is debated, concepts such as "common history" or "common values" are used in order

to deny access to Turkey to the European Christian "club". Since 2016 accession negotiations with Turkey have stalled due to the alleged human rights violations and deficits in rule of law, the question of its accession to the EU is currently not on the table. However, the collision between the European, arguably Christian identity, and the "other" non-Christians re-emerged during the migration crisis since a considerable portion of asylum seekers were Muslims.

However, scholarly work does not offer strong evidence about the prevalence of identity factors over the utilitarian calculation as drivers of popular Euroscepticism. Grande and Kriesi (2015) have investigated issue salience in national elections in five EU member states (Austria, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands) in the period from the 1970s to the 2000s, and found that the prominence of cultural issues is still weaker in comparison to economic issues, although there has been a noticeable rise in the importance of cultural topics and a decline in the importance of the economic ones.

De Vries (2018:18) in her very recent contribution on Euroscepticism and the future of the EU questions the ability of both utilitarian and identitarian theory to explain the recent rise of Euroscepticism. Contrary to the utilitarian assumptions, her research revealed that steadfast Eurosceptic party support is high in countries with strong economic performance, which overcame the Eurozone crisis relatively well, and that support for Brexit was high in both economically flourishing and disadvantaged parts of the UK. Likewise, De Vries (2018:19) demonstrates that neither identity factors are able to offer a compelling explanation for rising Euroscepticism. She shows that there is little correlation between people's sense of exclusive national identity (based on Eurobarometer surveys) and the share of Eurosceptic votes in the 2014 European Parliamentary elections. Except for the UK, other countries such as Cyprus, Greece, Bulgaria or Ireland gave little support to hard-Eurosceptic parties, despite the strong exclusive national identity found among their nationals. Thus, De Vries (2018) proposes the benchmark theory, which argues that public attitudes towards European integration are based on a juxtaposition between the benefits of the status quo of membership and those benefits potentially stemming for the exit and the reassertion of sovereign powers. This explains the surprising fact that the British on average evaluate EU policy and regime more positively than the Spanish. However, the citizens evaluations of British policies and regime

tend to be more positive than their European evaluations. On the other hand, the Spanish hold less positive evaluations of policies and the regime at the European level compared to the British, but their national policy and regime evaluations are much more negative than their EU evaluations (De Vries 2018:26).

2.5.3 Political factors

Citizens' attitudes on the EU may be influenced by a series of political factors such as political parties' cues, ideological position, or trust in and support for national governments. In modern democracies, political parties are the most important political organizations that link political elites and citizens, hence the reason individuals are apt to adopt the stance on European integration of the party they support (Steenbergen and Jones, 2002). Furthermore, the level of confrontation between parties regarding EU issues can affect popular attitudes on European integration. Citizens are more ambivalent, less apathetic, and less positive about the EU when domestic elites are more divided over EU issues (Stoeckel, 2013).

Political ideologies are arguably an important determinant of the individual level of Euroscepticism: supporters of centrist parties are less likely to be Eurosceptic, whereas supporters of extreme left-wing or right-wing parties are more likely to be Eurosceptic (Steenbergenet et al., 2007; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2010). Throughout the pre-Maastricht period, the European project followed a clear neoliberal trajectory based on trade liberalisation and the launching of a single market, provoking left-wing Euroscepticism among citizens worried about the fate of the welfare state. Despite the relatively mild leftist disapproval, the public mood about European integration in this period was widely perceived as a "permissive consensus", meaning a tacit consensus of citizens regarding this mainly elite-driven process (Lindberg and Scheingold, 1970).

The Maastricht Treaty was a turning point for the EU in many aspects as it created the Economic and Monetary Union and foresaw the introduction of a common currency, introduced a qualified majority voting beyond single market policies, expanded EU competences to sensitive areas such as defense and foreign policy, and granted EU citizenship as complementary to the national ones. These steps towards further integration triggered Eurosceptic attitudes among the voters of right-wing parties, who started

feeling uneasy due to the gross transfer of sovereignty from the national to the EU level. The right-wing camp started targeting the EU as a serious threat to national identity and sovereignty (McLaren 2006; Hooghe and Marks, 2009) as well as to national cultures (Llamazares and Gramacho, 2007). On the contrary, the leftists were worried about other elements of the new Treaty: EMU and the European Central Bank (ECB). According to leftist reading, the EU supported the unfettered rule of market forces in the form of neoliberal policies, whereas it completely disregarded a common social or fiscal policy or similar forms of "positive integration" (Scharpf, 1996).

Depending on the ideological lens, an observer can derive various interpretations of the effects of European integration. While market liberals view EU policies as overly market-constraining, social democrats perceive them as excessively liberal and an obstacle to the national processes of market regulation (Morgan, 2005:70). These two strands of political thinking express scepticism towards the supranational organization of governance based on the two opposing conceptions of the state: *Rechtsstaat,* a state grounded in civil liberties and the rule of law, and *Sozialstaat*, a state built on social protection and wealth redistribution. The EU, as a form of supranational integration *per se*, does not conform to these two traditional conceptions of the state and, thus, faces disapproval.

Moreover, a welfare state has often been a distinguishing feature of Europe particularly when compared to the United States, which have traditionally had a system based on market competition and deficient in the public mechanisms of social and health protection. In Europe (particularly its continental part), the nation-state has always been the provider of social benefits to its citizens meaning that European integration poses the risk of disrupting the traditional systems of welfare provision. According to social democrats, the EU has been mainly engaged in the so-called "negative integration" epitomized by market liberalization, overlooking "positive integration" such as supranational welfare provisions.

Early studies on European elections and EU referenda argue that popular Euroscepticism actually does not exist and those who cast negative votes in EU referenda or elections for the European Parliament simply intend to punish current governments. During the first elections to the European Parliament, the

electoral results supported “the sanction effect” in eight out of nine countries (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). Franklin et al. (1994) have investigated the correlation between the popularity of current governments and the results of referenda on the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty and found that voters who were dissatisfied with their national executives were more likely to vote against the Treaty. By the same token, during the 2005 referenda in France and the Netherlands, where the Constitutional Treaty was rejected, the incumbent governments were unpopular. Contrariwise, the Treaty was supported by the electorates of Spain and Luxembourg, whose governments enjoyed the support of their electorates (Leconte, 2010:168).

Scholarly findings investigating the correlation between domestic institutional trust and support for the EU are rather ambivalent. According to McLaren (2006), a lower level of trust in national representative institutions coincides with weaker trust in EU institutions, and consequently Euroscepticism. On the other hand, Sanchez-Cuenca (2000) argues that low levels of public trust in national political institutions generate stronger popular support for the EU, since the EU is perceived as an effective substitution for the unsatisfying performance of national governments. However, the public trust in democratic institutions at both national and EU level has considerably eroded thanks to the prolonged economic crises (Armingeon and Guthmann, 2014). The EU has been publicly exposed more than ever and mostly associated with the failed economic policies. Hobolt and Tilley (2014:147) point out: “When people hold the EU responsible for poor performance, but cannot hold it accountable for that performance, they become less trusting of its institutions as a whole”. Therefore, the EU’s weakened reputation and credibility together with the lack of possibility to hold it accountable have caused an overall decline in trust in the European project.

Abstention from voting at European elections or voting for Eurosceptic parties imply popular apathy or opposition towards the EU. Van Spanje and de Vreese (2011) pinpoint five predictors of the Eurosceptic vote in the 2009 elections for the members of the European Parliament: 1) the EU’s democratic performance; 2) negative evaluations of EU membership; 3) negative feelings towards the EU; 4) opposition to EU enlargement; and 5) lack of European identity. Furthermore, excluding member states where voting is compulsory, the average turnout is significantly higher at national than at European elections (Steinbrecher et al., 2007:12). The two major reasons for abstention at the 2014 EP elections were “lack of

trust in politics in general" and "not interested in politics."[2] These reasons confirm both the previously mentioned thesis about the general trend of shrinking trust in politics and political parties and argument on the correlation between attitudes towards the EU and interest in politics. Thus, Euroscepticism may be interpreted as a part of a broader phenomenon of democratic malaise, mainly characterized by alienation from politics and distrust in political parties, primarily in Western democracies (Mair, 2013). Since the perception of domestic politics influences the perception of the EU, disaffection and dissatisfaction with national political systems have affected their attitudes towards the EU and caused increased abstention at European elections and negative votes at EU-related referenda.

Another possible source of Eurosceptic attitudes, according to scholarly contribution, is party cues. Hooghe and Marks (2005) argue that party cues play an important role in the formation of Eurosceptic attitudes, acting jointly with national identity issues and utilitarian calculations. They concisely put this argument in the title of their article: "Calculation, Community and Cues." If we understand the EU as a system of multilevel governance, then a decisive influence of domestic politics on the attitudes towards European integration is expected. Inglehart (1977: 328) argues that political elites more effectively shape public opinion when public preferences are not deeply rooted. The interplay between party positions and public opinion is also determined by idiosyncrasies of national contexts, such as different party systems or particular historical heritage.

Finally, some studies have revealed that political or economic developments in one EU member state may foster party-based or popular Euroscepticism in other member state(s). For instance, the success of Eurosceptic parties in one country may have a contagion effect and stimulate political actors in other countries to pursue a Eurosceptic agenda (Hooghe and Marks, 2009:19). Moreover, Ioannou et al. (2015) report that, in the context of the Euro crisis, increasing economic predicaments in one country have an impact on the level of Euroscepticism in another country.

[2]Data available at:
http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/eurobarometre/2014/post/post_2014_survey_analitical_overview_en.pdf
(Accessed: 23/11/2017)

2.5.4 Other scholarly explanations of popular Euroscepticism

Besides these three most prominent theories of popular Euroscepticism, scholars suggest a number of other relevant hypotheses. "Postmaterialist" thesis (Inglehart, 1977) is based on the claim that people with postmaterialist values are more apt to support European integration than those who have materialist value systems, since the idea of supranational governance is more acceptable and compelling for postmaterialists than for materialists. Consequently, this means that the younger demographic is more EU-supportive than the older one, as surveys have shown higher levels of postmaterialist values among the youth. However, Janssen (1991) contests this thesis, finding no correlation between postmaterialist values and support for Europe, while Gabel (1998) offers an opposing finding, arguing that materialists are more prone to support the EU.

Inglehart's cognitive mobilization theory (1970) is based on the premise that developed cognitive skills—which are usually acquired through higher education—increase political awareness and familiarity with EU affairs. Moreover, Inglehart suggests another possible correlation: the higher level of knowledge about the EU, the stronger support for and appreciation of European integration. The cognitive mobilization theory has been advanced by EU institutions as they commonly attribute the lack of EU legitimacy, evidenced by Eurobarometer polls and negative votes in EU referenda, to an information deficit. Therefore, from an EU perspective, the most effective strategy for garnering support for European integration is the increase in quantity and quality of information on EU affairs, through the multiplication of information and communication activities (see Valentini and Nesti, 2010). The surge in information and communication activities (e.g., EU info-points, live and online debates, consultations, social media channels) has been evident ever since the public support for European integration started to decline.

Although it would be erroneous to ascribe Euroscepticism to ignorance or irrationality, one does need to make a concerted effort in order to understand the complex EU system and its functioning. Unlike the national systems where citizens have been politically socialized, the EU represents an additional, fairly recent level of governance. The trigger for expanding knowledge on the EU may be either interest in politics or potential individual benefits stemming from the integration process (e.g., business opportunities,

opportunities for education abroad). McLaren (2007) has empirically tested the "cognitive mobilization" hypothesis and confirmed its validity. However, she has also discovered that poor knowledge of the EU does not necessarily result in Eurosceptic attitudes, but may only lead to apathy among citizens who are under-informed about EU affaires.

An additional hypothesis of popular Euroscepticism explains the differences in support for European integration based on the length of national membership in the EU. This theory stems from the assumption that member states which have longer membership experiences are more "socialised" due to their increased identification with the EU and better acquaintance with EU issues, and as a result show more appreciation for the EU and its achievements (Eichenberg and Dalton, 1993; Anderson and Reichert, 1995; Anderson and Kaltenthaler, 1996; Gabel, 1998). However, the rise in popular Euroscepticism in founding member states such as France and the Netherlands questions the validity of the "socialisation" hypothesis. Anderson and Kaltenthaler (1996) explain these inconsistencies by the idea of a "ceiling", which presumes that the popular support for the EU after a long period of a country's membership in the EU reaches the "ceiling" and after reaching this maximum level can only drop.

2.6 British Euroscepticism as an ultimate form of opposition to the EU

The overview of the literature on Euroscepticism would be incomplete without a brief review of its preeminent form—British Euroscepticism. Since the outset of the UK's membership in the EC in 1973 and later in the European Union, there has been little enthusiasm and conviction about the process of European integration among many Britons and their political elites; as the headline on the Guardian's front page from 1 January 1973 reads: "We're in—but without the fireworks." The country has been frequently labelled as a reluctant or "awkward" partner (George, 1990), and two referendums on the EU membership prove this firmly embedded British Euro-hesitancy. Although the British government opted for the accession to the EC without asking for popular consent, it held a referendum on the withdrawal from the Communities already in 1975, which resulted in a robust support for continued membership. However, in the 2016 referendum,

the “Leave” option won by 52 percent to 48 percent, ushering in the UK’s withdrawal from the Union, which is planned for March 2019 when two-year negotiations are scheduled to be finalised.

British Euroscepticism is a multifaceted social construct present at the level of public opinion, party system, and the media. As a result of a particularly high level of scepticism towards European integration among the British, Eurobarometer has conducted a special-edition survey dedicated solely to public opinion in the UK. The survey report, published in 2011 and titled “Attitudes towards the EU in the UK” (EB Flash, 318), revealed a remarkably low level of knowledge on the EU, as only 18 percent of respondents felt informed about EU affairs. Respondents felt that the media reported too negatively on the EU, particularly the written press, and almost half of them observed a negative bias in press releases. The Spring 2016 Eurobarometer, which gauged public opinion on the EU immediately before the British referendum, showed that the UK citizens who had a totally negative image of the EU (36 percent) outnumbered those who had entirely positive associations on the EU (31 percent). Moreover, according to the same opinion poll, 59 percent of UK respondents felt as though their voice was not recognized in the EU.

Although Euroscepticism has not been an exclusive characteristic of the British press, it is widely accepted that most British tabloid newspapers are strongly characterized in terms of both negative framing of the EU and the quantity of journalistic output containing this bias. Euroscepticism has been a pervasive trait of tabloids such as *The Sun* and *the Daily Mail*, as well as of certain broadsheet newspapers such as *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* (Daddow, 2012). These newspapers frequently perpetuate what has come to be known as “Euro-myths” — a term coined to denote a series of distorted or false news, which is particularly present in British tabloids. Indeed, some scholars view the Eurosceptic press as one of the main culprits for public distrust towards the Union (Carey and Burton, 2004).

The questions of sovereignty and national identity have been particularly prominent in the British public debate on the EU (Diez Medrano, 2003). With a long democratic tradition and a Parliament which is sometimes described as the “mother of Parliaments,” the UK has been particularly concerned about the alleged democratic deficit of the Union. On the other hand, a number of scholars argue that the UK’s

historic context and geographical location have contributed to its exceptionally high and persistent level of distrust and skepticism towards the process of European integration. Moreover, the Second World War, a traumatic experience for most European countries, was a moment of military glory for Britain, as the country was neither conquered nor occupied. Because of this legacy, the UK has shown little appreciation for the EU as a peace and reconciliation project (Grant, 2007). Furthermore, a contributing factor to British Euroscepticism and its isolationism with continental Europe has been the country strong ties with Commonwealth countries and the USA, particularly due to the shared language, cultural commonalities, and security arrangements.

Furthermore, the UK's imperial past has extended the country's political and economic aspirations beyond the European continent. The Commonwealth represents an alternative community of reference for the British– a community that has been interpreted differentially by the left and the right in terms of obligations and opportunities (Baker et al. 2008). Because of the presence of Euroscepticism in both parties, a UK-exceptionalism emerges in contrast to other European Eurosceptic parties that have generally been marginal, belonging to the family of anti-system protest parties (see Forster, 2002; Daddow, 2013). For instance, in the pre-Maastricht era, the Labour Party was dominantly Eurosceptic and campaigned for the withdrawal at the time of the 1975 referendum, as the EEC was perceived as a pro-business, neoliberal project deprived of social welfare elements. Since the beginning of the 1990s and the Maastricht Treaty, the perception of a threatened sovereignty and national identity has fuelled Eurosceptics among the Conservatives, and, consequently, spurred the emergence of the radical right, notably the UKIP (Ford and Goodwin, 2014).

2.7 Euroscepticism and EU politicization

Euroscepticism and EU politicization are two closely correlated phenomena. Even early observers of the process of European integration did not expect the permissive consensus to endure forever. Lindberg and Scheingold (1970: 277–8) warned that "the level of support or its relationship to the political process would be significantly altered if the supranational polity was to broaden its scope or increase its institutional

capacities markedly." According to De Wilde (2011: 566-7), politicization can be defined as "an increase in polarization of opinions, interests, or values and the extent to which they are publicly advanced towards the process of policy formulation within the EU." Politicization implies political conflicts, clashes of opinions, and intense debates. The criteria used to identify the existence of politicization in practice are: the significant increase in the salience of EU issues in various public spheres, and growing polarization on EU matters among elites in various public spheres (Kriesi et al., 2012). Copious topics may be politicized such as constitutional issues, decision-making at the EU level, or EU policies (Risse, 2015:14).

Current literature exposes evidence of EU politicization in discussions among ordinary citizens (e.g. Hurrelmann et al. 2015; White, 2011), in social and mass media (Risse, 2014; Statham and Trenz, 2013), parliamentary debates (Rauh and de Wilde, 2017; Wendler, 2016), or election campaigns (Hutter and Grande, 2014; Meijers and Rauh, 2016). Risse (2015:143) emphasizes the difference between politicization and Europeanization and the understanding that these processes are not necessarily simultaneous. Politicization without Europeanization may lead to the renationalization of EU issues and a possible disintegration, whereas holistically viewing both processes may frame issues at stake as matters of common European concern and foster European identity and solidarity.

Euroscepticism may be understood as a by-product of EU politicization. Even though politicization inevitably jeopardizes the public support for European integration, "it is a core element of a consolidated political system exercising political authority" (De Wilde and Zurn, 2012:139). However, politicization is not automatically triggered by the rise in EU powers, but it is determined by a series of intermediating variables such as media coverage cycles, national politics, and nationally constructed EU narratives or public discussions stemming from EU-related referendums (De Wide and Zurn, 2012). Unlike the argument that politicization is due to the accumulated political authority, some stress a decisive role of political entrepreneurs and specific set-ups of domestic partisan competition, pointing to cross-national variation in EU politicization (Hutter and Grande, 2014; Hutter et al., 2016).

Not only do scholars disagree over the factors that cause EU politicization, but argue conflicting views over the consequences of politicization for the future of European integration. The most prominent

line of reasoning on the consequences of politicization for European integration is developed in Hooghe and Marks' (2009) post-functionalist theory of European integration. Hooghe and Marks (2009: 14) predict "greater divergence of politically relevant perceptions and a correspondingly constricted scope of agreement". According to this theory, politicization will reduce the bargaining space to political elites, whose decisions on the future of Europe will be heavily dependent on the public opinion.

An alternate viewpoint argues that EU politicization may foster more integration (Rauh and Zürn, 2014). Public debates are an essential part of a political system that aspires to be democratic, as they help in identifying societal interests and preferences regarding the "depth" and the "width" of European integration. Politicization eulogists perceive it as crucial for the survival and sustainability of European integration. If the EU political landscape lacks space for the articulation of popular opposition and EU contestation, two possible repercussions on Eurosceptic attitudes at the popular level are possible: an alienation and complete disengagement from the EU politics or an outright opposition to the principle of European integration (White, 2010).

The recent crises have indisputably amplified politicization of EU affairs in national public spheres (see Kriesi and Grande, 2015). The increased prominence of EU-related issues, such as the future of the Euro or refugee quotas, triggered national and transnational debates on European politics. Prior to the crisis, several scholars identified the lack of politicization of EU affairs as one of the main reasons for the alleged "democratic deficit" (Hix, 2008; Habermas, 2012). According to this strand of literature, a genuine European public sphere and party contestation over policy choices at the EU level are essential for fostering EU democratic credentials. Moreover, the degree of politicization is correlated with the identification with Europe and the EU. Although politicization jeopardizes public support for European integration and limits the room for political elites to manoeuvre, it is an important precondition for the development of a European identity at the individual level. As Harrison and Bruter (2015:165) suggest: "the more European people feel, the more that they appropriate debates on Europe, the more polarized they can become about them, and the more politicized is their perception of "their"—thereby appropriated—system". Thus,

politicization sparks the interiorization of the European identity and the sense of appropriation of the EU polity, which perpetuates the perception of being for the common good and a matter of common interest.

2.8 Euroscepticism and populism

Euroscepticism and populism are often intertwined as both phenomena contain elements of a protest-based, anti-elite discourse. Populism has been perceived as vague, ambiguous, and difficult to define. Due to its "chameleonic quality", it always adapts to the surrounding where it emerges (Tagart, 2000:4). Mudde (2004: 544) defines populism "as an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite", and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté general* of the people." Canovan (1981) distinguishes three conceptualisations of the "people" employed in populist discourse: *united people,* meaning a nation or country in opposition to fractions and parties that divide it, *our people* as opposed to the "others", who do not belong to our group (e.g. immigrants) and *ordinary people,* who are mobilized against highly educated, cosmopolitan elite. On the other hand, according to Kriesi (2014), there are political, cultural and economic ideas of "the people": the people as sovereign, the people as a nation and the people as a class. Based on this division, populist claims may be categorized along the left-right political spectrum or connected to a specific idea of democracy. Populism is commonly blamed for its monist understanding of "the people", ignoring the differences and divisions that exist within "the people". Populists "flatten" the diversity of those whose interests they claim to represent, disregarding minorities in a political community.

Just like populism, Euroscepticism is an elusive phenomenon which takes different forms depending on the national context. According to the constructivist reading of European integration, historical and cultural variables can shape the public perceptions of the European project and their national discourses of European integration (Harmsen, 2008). Both populism and Euroscepticism share "the people vs. elites" dichotomy: the Eurosceptic discourse pits "the virtuous people" to "the corrupt, non-democratic and technocratic Brussels elite" or "the corrupt domestic elites that support and implement EU policies." The Eurosceptic idea of "the people" may refer to a nation whose national identity are endangered by

European integration, or to the ordinary people who oppose the cosmopolitan elites, based on the idea that they reap benefit from the integration. Moreover, since both Euroscepticism and populism are compatible with any position at the Left/Right political spectrum, they represent effective tools for political mobilization of voters with different ideological affiliations. As Mudde (2016) argues, populism is rarely solely applied but rather merged with other ideologies such as nationalism or socialism. Likewise, this applies to Euroscepticism as it is only one of the elements of complex political parties' programs. However, there are exceptions such as the British UKIP, since the exit of the UK from the EU has been its main political goal ever since its inception. It has yet to be seen if the UKIP will disband after the UK definitely leaves the EU or will expand its political agenda.

Populist tools have not only been extensively used by political actors at the right and left ends of the political spectrum, but also by the political mainstream. However, mainstream political elites employ only populist discourse, without implementing populist policies (Mudde, 2016:54). The discrepancy between words and actions exacerbates the feeling of disenchantment and dissatisfaction among voters when their policy preferences are not materialized. Moreover, another factor that aggravates the symptoms of "democratic malaise" among voters is the tendency of mainstream political parties to form "Grand coalitions", in order to marginalize their more radical opponents (Mudde, 2016:55). Consequently, the collaboration of major political parties results in protest parties as the only real opposition and alternative, providing them with an additional appeal.

Fear mongering is another widely used populist instruments. In addition to the negative targeting of immigrants used by some representatives of national political elites, Mudde (2016) warns of a subtler and less conspicuous fear mongering conducted by EU elites, who vilify Eurosceptics as "nationalists," "anti-democratic" and "populists". The Remain Camp in the UK also conducted a scaremongering campaign warning Britons would suffer because of the withdrawal from the European Union.

Although often demonized, populism is not necessarily a negative phenomenon. The primary positive impact of populism on a political community is its capability to bring into the fore the issues that

most citizens care about, and which ruling elites avoid addressing. By the same token, Eurosceptic political parties shed light on the issues that pro-EU political elites seek to insulate from the public attention, by negotiating them "behind the closed door" or entrusting them to technocratic bodies. As a result, both populism and Euroscepticism maximize the democratic efficiency of national and supranational political setups, since they prompt the adoption and implementation of policies and decision-making procedures that are supported by a considerable portion of the electorate.

The rise in frequency of occurrence for both Euroscepticism and populism within political party programming is a fairly new phenomenon, since the older generation of populist parties did not display a pronounced Euroscepticism. However, as the more the permissive consensus on European integration corroded, the more populists capitalized on the growing public suspicion towards European integration. Finally, the European crises have been a fertile ground for the thriving of the parties that combine populist and Eurosceptic attitudes (Kneuer, 2018).

Nevertheless, scholarly contributions on populism focus mainly on the supply side of the phenomenon, by studying populist strategies of political elites, yet little attention has been given to assessing populist attitudes among the public (Jansen, 2011). In other words, the connection between the "supply side" and the "demand side" as well as the way the "people" construct themselves in populist terms has been neglected. Since this study is focused on investigating and exposing the bottom-up perspective on Euroscepticism and populism, the content analysis presented in Chapter 6 examines how the concept of "people" was constructed in the sampled debates.

2.9 Euroscepticism and the European public sphere

The idea of the public sphere has initially departed from the nation state realm, without considering a notion of a supranational public sphere. However, in parallel with the construction of a well-rounded political and economic community of European states, scholars started discussing whether the EU forged the creation of a European public sphere or engaging in a more normative discussions about the necessity of creating one. Since nowadays many politically important decisions are made at the EU level, Eriksen

(2005:342) argues: “Despite the fact that the EU neither is a state nor a nation, its development as a new kind of polity is closely connected to its development as a communicative space”. Although a considerable portion of the scholarly work has studied the European public sphere, there is still no consensus on a common definition of the European public sphere. However, two models of the European public sphere have been developed: a) as a transnational European public sphere and b) a Europeanisation of public spheres of EU member states (Koopmans and Erbe, 2004).

The idea of a transnational European public sphere involves the application of the national concept of the public sphere to the EU level. It posits the existence of a single European public sphere that extends over all member states. However, the main issue that hinders the transnationalisation of national public spheres is the EU language diversity (Machill et al. 2006). A transnational European public sphere would require the existence of a uniform European media system that would ensure the distribution of uniform media content across all the member states. Some EU-wide media do exist, but they are mostly limited to economic, political and intellectual elites (Brüggemann and Kleinen-von Konigslow, 2009). Therefore, the idea of a transnational European public sphere has largely been rejected by research (de Vreese, 2003; Koopmans and Erbe, 2004).

The majority of studies on the European public sphere addressed the process of the Europeanisation of national public spheres (Risse, 2014; de Vreese et al. 2006; Machill et al. 2006). Furthermore, scholars have introduced the distinction of vertical and horizontal Europeanisation (Koopmans and Erbe, 2004; Brüggemann and Kleinen-von Konigslöw, 2009; Wessler et al. 2008). Vertical Europeanisation refers to a connection between the national and EU level, in the sense that EU topics are discussed in the national public spheres (Brüggemann and Kleinen-von Konigslöw, 2009). Horizontal Europeanisation refers to a communicative linkage between the member states in from of an increased attention to events in other EU member states (Brüggemann and Kleinen-von Konigslöw, 2009). Moreover, some scholars have defined the European public sphere by the visibility of EU level actors (vertical) and actors from other member states (horizontal) (e.g. Koopmans and Erbe, 2004).

Another strand of research looks at Europeanisation of collective identities (Wessler, 2008). Collective identities can be perceived as Europeanised if citizens feel a sense of belonging to the European community. In the context of the discussion on the European public sphere, these studies address the question whether actors in the European public sphere are defined or define themselves in national or European terms (e.g. the Polish vs. "we" Europeans) and develop a European identity that distinguishes them from outer groups.

Some scholars have studied the correlation between Euroscepticism and the formation of the European public sphere, defined as the Europeanisation of national media discourses. Dutceac Segesten and Bossetta (2017; 2019) examined if the national media discourses about Euroscepticism are Europeanised. Their findings suggest that Euroscepticism has been a more important driver of Europeanisation than other EU-related themes. Surprisingly, Europeanisation has been propelled by those who opposed the European project more than those who are in favour of it. Consequently, these insights shed light on the capacity of contestation to play a key role in forging a more integrated European communicative space and transnational dialogues. The present study departs from this premise and seeks to identify to which extent the sampled Facebook debates have been Europeanised in terms of topics and a possible emergence of a sense of European "we-ness".

Classical, institutionalist approaches to EU politics almost completely neglected the importance of the media for the process of European integration. Except for special occasions such as summits of the European Council or adoption of new treaties, the visibility of the EU in the media used to be unsurprisingly marginal till the 2000s. However, politicization seems to be directly conditioned by mediatisation (Barisione and Michailidou, 2017). Moreover, Euroscepticism, as a product of increased politicization of EU issues and emerging political conflicts over the EU, is mainly found in the media. De Wilde and Trenz (2012:539) point out: "Media coverage is not so much a reflection or antecedent of Euroscepticism, it is its primary locus." Politicization is directly connected with the increased attention of the media since contestation and polarization of opinions augment the newsworthiness of issues.

The media play a substantial role in both generation and diffusion of Eurosceptic ideas. Throughout the history of European integration, the media used to be nationally oriented and focused primarily on domestic issues, addressing EU-related topics occasionally. Moreover, due to its technocratic and consensual nature, the EU used to capture little media attention, since the lack of apparent political conflict had little newsworthiness. This particularly applied to the private media, which are traditionally profit-oriented and, thus prone to report on salient or controversial topics. The exception was British tabloids that, throughout the British membership in the EU, have been the most important resonant amplifiers of Eurosceptic or Europhobic ideas. British tabloids, such as the Sun or the Daily Mail, are infamous for producing a large quantity of the so-called Euromyths — distorted, exaggerated or untruthful stories about the alleged EU legislation that putatively bans or is planning to ban curved bananas, double-deckers, or mince-pies. However, due to the intensified politicization and controversiality of the EU, many media outlets across Europe have started to report on EU affairs, often using negative frames (De Vreese et al., 2006).

The interplay between the public support for European integration and the media coverage of EU issues has been a matter of academic interest. The media can play a double role in both fuelling and reducing Euroscepticism depending on the pervasiveness of the news and personal characteristics of individuals (De Vreese, 2007). De Wilde et al. (2013) have investigated Euroscepticism in online news articles and readers' comments and found that Euroscepticism was prominent in both sources and that the critical tone of journalistic articles triggered even more critical and fierce debates among readers. Koopmans (2007) shows that government and executive actors are far more represented in Europeanized political debates in comparison to legislative, party and civil society actors. Moreover, the same study reveals a strong correlation between the influence of actors in the Europeanized public sphere and their support for the EU.

Social media has played an important role in boosting the contestation over the desirability of European integration, EU decisions, policies and values (Barisione and Michailidou, 2017). On the other hand, social media has become widely utilized by both individual and collective political actors: local,

regional, national and international institutions and their leaders use social media as a tool for information, communication and mobilization. The availability and almost zero cost of social media facilitated the proliferation of anti-establishment and radical political movements and parties, often characterized by anti-EU sentiments (Caiani and Kluknavská, 2017). According to some polls, a part of the British public thinks that the Brexit campaign would have failed before the advent of social media.[3]

Due to the increased popularity of online news media and social media, the data retrieved from virtual platforms has become an insightful source of information on the issues of public interest. De Wilde and colleagues (2013) investigated how the EU was impugned in online news media of several member states at both the campaign prior to the 2009 European elections and during the initial period of the Eurocrisis. The present dissertation draws on the mentioned study, albeit it has a narrower span of investigation due to limited time and funds. The focus centres on transnational debates on EU issues in social media, notably on Facebook. De Wilde et al. (2013) focalized on national online news media and conducted a cross-national comparison. However, this study investigates only transnational debates and identifies the patterns of EU contestation during the two time intervals when the Eurozone crisis and the migration crisis had their peaks. This study presents the argument that citizens' online commentary is an important element of this new media setting, where social media platforms seem to have an important role in the amplification of EU contestation.

2.10 New approach to Euroscepticism: studying social media debates

The literature review on Euroscepticism presented in previous sections shows the complex and multifaceted nature of this social construct and a series of factors that can generate it. In this study, Euroscepticism is understood as a highly responsive phenomenon, which has been highly sensitive not only to the growth of the EU's authority and competences, but also to justifications employed by politicians and institutions for further integration or, also known as, the pro-European discourse. Going beyond "usual

[3] Source: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/brexit-social-media-new-poll-failed-remain-voters-a7450911.html (Accessed: 28/10/2018)

suspects" such as economic or identity concerns, De Wilde and Trenz (2012:541) introduce the pro-European discourse as a cause of Euroscepticism:

> Eurosceptic opposition is expressed in response to both the continuing European integration process itself and the pro-European arguments employed by political actors—particularly member state governments and supranational institutions—to legitimise this on-going process.

If we understand the EU as a "discursive battleground", then Euroscepticism can be analysed as a counter-narrative that emerges as a reaction to a pro-integrationist narrative advocated by EU and national actors (De Wilde and Trenz, 2012). Social media interactions are rich sources of data for a discursive approach since they represent spaces where people holding an array of different opinions on the EU–from anti-EU to pro-EU–virtually come "face to face" and confront their positions. These positions are the relevant expression of the public opinion on the EU and are able to complement the data obtained from opinion polls. As Barisone and Ceron (2017:78) argue "the spontaneous, unsolicited opinions expressed and posted over a given political issue are a fully legitimate and politically influential form of public opinion." One of the aims of this thesis is to find out how the EU is evaluated and contested in social media during the Greek crisis and the migration crisis, identifying justifications for different evaluations. Yet this study does not argue that these online discussions represent public opinion, but rather explore the different aspects of a fairly recent phenomenon known as popular or "banal" EU contestation that emerges in social media.

As demonstrated throughout the previous sections, the literature dealing with Euroscepticism at the national level has contributed to the better understanding of cross-national differences, pinpointing at nation-specific factors (i.e. historical heritage, different electoral systems, etc.) which can generate more or fewer opportunities for the emergence of public Euroscepticism or Eurosceptic parties. However, the research on Euroscepticism in transnational arenas has been rather limited (see Ruzza and Pejovic, 2019). Therefore, this study underlines the importance to step out of national contexts and look at the manifestations of Eurosceptic attitudes in a "borderless" space. Cyberspace is the closest to the definition of being borderless, as it allows the circumvention of physical boundaries and the creation of truly transnational online communities. Thus, this research taps into transnational discursive interactions that unfolded during the periods frequently defined as critical for the process of European integration.

Furthermore, this research investigates if divisions among national political elites reflect in European publics or there is transnationalization of debates and the formation of coalitions of opinions that transcend national borders.

Another strand of literature on Euroscepticism, reviewed in the previous, examines the presence of Eurosceptic stances and objectives in the programs of political parties and whether and how this has impact on their electoral success (e.g. Taggart, 1998; Kopecky´ and Mudde 2002; Hooghe et al., 2004; Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2008). Throughout its history, the issues regarding European integration have rarely been at the heart of political programs and agendas of political parties. Even at European elections, citizens usually cast their votes based on national agendas of political parties', confirming a widespread notion of European elections as second-order elections (Hix and Marsh, 2011). Moreover, it is difficult to discern if Eurosceptic parties win popular support due to their "soft" or "hard" Euroscepticism or rather due to other elements of their platforms. One of the exceptions is the UK Independence Party, whose main political objective is the exit of the UK from the EU and it is, thereby, evident that their voters normally have clear preferences with regards to European integration. However, as a result of the crises and the rising popular opposition towards the EU, EU affairs are becoming central to the political agendas of various political parties.

As already mentioned, the research on popular Euroscepticism (e.g., Boomgaarden et al. 2011; McLaren 2007; Kuhn, 2011) mainly relies on statistical data from opinion polls, which are undoubtedly valuable and necessary statistical tools, but provide "dry" information with little explanation for the expressed opinions. This is particularly problematic in the case of the evaluations of the EU since respondents have to simplify their often complex evaluations of the EU into one of the three offered options: positive, neutral or negative image of the EU. Furthermore, the questions of standard Eurobarometer are always formulated in the same manner in order to accurately gauge fluctuations in public opinion. Therefore, they are insufficiently sophisticated to capture the richness of thoughts, attitudes and emotions that characterize popular Euroscepticism. Polls are designed to aggregate pieces of information in order to determine correlations and to compare data across time and space. Thus, a

different method of collecting data on popular dissatisfaction with the EU–such as emerging into EU-focused popular discourse– is needed in order to complement traditional polling methods.

Looking beyond the programs of political parties and public opinion polls, Euroscepticism can also be manifested in the media. Mainly due to the series of overlapping crises which involved the EU—both as a part of the problem and the solution—the EU became part of everyday conversations; its citizens became thirsty for EU news and the coverage of EU affairs by traditional media outlets surged. Popular attitudes towards the EU are considerably determined by the media since media outlets are principal actors that inform citizens on EU affairs shaping in this way public perceptions of the EU. The extent to which the EU appears in the media and whether journalists and reporters use positive or negative frames may shape the perceived popularity of the EU among its citizens (De Vrees, 2007; Trenz, 2004). Moreover, the expansion of social media into the political realm and the crises in Europe occurred concurrently, feeding into each other. Thus, the advent of social media in the world of politics has had an impact on the way the EU is communicated and debated.

In order to provide a new perspective on Euroscepticism, this research is based on the content analysis of EU-focused discursive practices present in social media fora administered by EU institutions. This approach is expected to provide a more profound, subtle and comprehensive understanding of the reasons for the shrinking support for the EU, particularly in the light of the recent crises that have undermined EU legitimacy. Moreover, this research addresses the social media pages of two primary EU institutions because of their transnational character and ability to attract participants from all member-nations, which in turn creates a sort of truly EU debate table. For instance, the Facebook page of the European Parliament has more than 2 million followers, hence the potential to engage a considerable number of contributors to discussions.

Going beyond traditional approaches to Euroscepticism, this thesis builds on previous research which has investigated Euroscepticism as an element of discourse (De Wilde and Trenz, 2012; De Wilde et al., 2013). Not only does this study show how Euroscepticism was expressed by ordinary citizens in social

media during the two critical moments for the process of European integration, but it also demonstrates how popular Euroscepticism was perceived by EU elites, notably EU communication officers, and how they responded to the rising popular opposition they used to face on a daily basis. Two conflicting discourses on different aspects of the EU will be presented in this study in order to provide and complete overview of EU contestation from both bottom-up and top-down perspectives.

Chapter 3

The EU in times of crises: (un)democratic and (in)effective?

3.1 Introduction

The history of European integration has been often narrated as a success story (Gilbert, 2014). It has been widely accepted that without the integration process, the European continent would not have been recognized worldwide as a symbol of peace, prosperity and democracy. The EU has successfully resolved the German question by the peaceful integration of this country into its community of states and by the transformation of the united Germany into a leader of the integration process, without spurring fears of other member states that the restored German power may jeopardize their security. Moreover, the process of European integration has played an important democratization role in Greece, Portugal, Spain and the countries from the ex-communist bloc, whose democratic consolidation would have been uncertain without their EU membership. Since the conception of the project of European integration, democracy has been established as the main criterion for the accession to the "club" and as a guiding principle of EU member states. Furthermore, concerning the provision of prosperity and well-being, the common market and EMU have been perceived as EU capital achievements. The free flow of goods, capital, services and people introduced by the common market has generated beneficial effects on economic wellbeing of EU citizens. Moreover, the introduction of the euro spurred exuberant optimism across the EU resulting in the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs adopted in 2000, which promised that the EU would become "the most competitive, knowledge-based economy in the world" by the year 2010.

However, this almost idyllic image of the EU has dramatically changed since 2008, when the financial crisis hit. This economic shock has been followed by a series of disruptive events including: sovereign debt crises, the prolonged recession, numerous terrorist attacks, the migration crisis, and, finally,

Brexit. The fact that the EU has been operating in a crisis-mode for more than a decade has transformed its image of a "promised land" into a dubious project with uncertain prospects. The EU has arguably lost its appeal, as it has proved unable to effectively cope with ever-emerging challenges and provide what it was created for: peace, prosperity, and democracy. Although the project has experienced several crises such as the empty chair crisis or the Constitutional crisis, none of these crises struck the European project as destructively as the collapse of the American banking system and its devastating spillover to Europe. Instead of achieving the ambitious goals of the Lisbon Strategy by 2010, the EU displayed serious structural deficiencies that surfaced due to the economic crisis that struck the poorly designed EMU construction. Moreover, migration and multiculturalism, which have been promoted and furthered by the process of European integration, are now "under siege" by nationalist and populist political forces that have been gaining unprecedented political leverage and public support. The year 2015 saw an unprecedented number of refugees arriving in Europe and many casualties in the Mediterranean. The massive flow of people, fleeing from the conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Eritrea, and Somalia, and asking asylum in Europe, caused the crisis of migration. The main point of friction was the redistribution of incoming migrants among member states and common resolution mechanisms. While the Commission was devising an EU strategy, the majority of affected member states was dealing with migration autonomously, often disregarding acquis communautaire and joint counter-crisis measures. Finally, in parallel with the two crises, the democratic legitimacy of the EU was eroding due to the contentious counter-crisis mechanisms, adopted and implemented mainly by the executive and expert bodies. The EU democratic deficit (e.g. Bellamy and Castiglione 2000; Majone 1998; Hix and Follesdal 2006; Moravcsik 2002), which had been traditionally limited to scholarly discussions, became a commonplace occurrence in the public discourse.

Crisis is manifested by an extraordinary event, characterized by an external visibility, which breaks into the life of a community perturbating operating mechanisms. It is a disruptive moment that alters the existing processes inside and outside of the affected social system, rendering existing rules and norms unfit to solve the emerged predicaments. However, crisis has been often used ideologically in order to impose a desired course of social and political action. In the European context, it has been done by populist political

entrepreneurs who would “invent” it or denied it, depending on their own political interests (see Krzyżanowski, 2019). Moreover, the media have a key role in constructing crisis since they interpret it by highlighting certain ideas, events or possible courses of actions and/or criticizing others. However, in Europe, the media are prevalently limited by national borders and present/construct crisis in line with national interests preventing the creation of common, transnational patterns of interpretation of critical events. Yet, the present study seeks to tap into a nascent transnational online space and identify whether the two crises that hit the European continent generated a European interpretation of crises, their causes and solutions that would go beyond national perspectives.

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the Eurozone-Greek crisis and the migration crisis, primarily focusing on the role of the EU, and to frame the two crises in a more high-level theoretical debate on the democracy and legitimacy of the EU. Section 2 addresses the Euro crisis with a particular attention to the “mini” crisis provoked by the third Greek bailout, which is in the focus of a part of the empirical analysis. Section 3 provides an overview of the migration crisis milestones and reviews EU-devised and national counter-crisis measures. Section 4 elucidates on the broader impact of the democratic quality of counter-crisis measures, while Section 5 discusses how social media have transformed crisis communication. Section 6 draws concluding remarks and the implications of the two crises on the process of European integration.

3.2 From the Maastricht Treaty to the Third Greek Bailout: What Has Gone Wrong?

The first part of this section gives an overview of the process of economic and monetary integration of states within the EU framework and of the Eurozone crisis that jeopardized the common currency. The second part of the section focuses on the Greek crisis, as the most critical component of the Eurozone crisis, explaining the roots of political and economic predicaments of Greece and their recent escalation.

3.2.1 The Economic and Monetary Union: too different to be united?

The Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), introduced by the Maastricht Treaty (1992) represents a hallmark of the process of European integration. EMU includes the coordination of economic and fiscal policies, a common monetary policy, and a common currency (see De Grauwe, 2012; Townsend, 2007). However, only 19 EU member states have adopted the euro as a common currency thus far, creating the Eurozone area, an even more tightly integrated and interdependent cluster of member states. Although the euro was officially and legally launched in 1999, actual euro notes and coins became physically available only in January 2002, after a three-year transition period.

Monetary policy has been entrusted to the European Central Bank (ECB), a technocratic supranational institution without a democratic mandate, whereas fiscal policies have mainly remained reserved for national authorities. It was Germany that insisted on the introduction of EMU provisions that would shield the system from redistribution and burden sharing among member states in case of national economic problems. These provisions mainly included: the prohibition of printing money to finance debt, the prohibition of imposing forced loans on financial institutions, the famous "no-bail-out clause" which forbids granting of financial assistance to other Eurozone member states, and the omission of the previously foreseen bailout fund.

However, the Euro encouraged real estate speculations or the financing of public and private debts, causing a massive capital flow from the North to the South of Europe. Since Southern EU economies gained more credibility and reliability due to their Eurozone membership, their borrowing costs significantly decreased. However, not all member states immediately benefitted from the common currency monetary policy. In the first years of EMU, uniform ECB interest rates negatively impacted Germany, whose economy slipped into a recession, lasting from 2001 till 2005. However, when the global financial crisis hit in 2008, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, and Italy saw the "hot money" influx from the Northern banks desist (see Mody et al., 2012). The effects were disastrous: domestic demand rapidly fell, unemployment dramatically increased, and the governments were forced to intervene becoming even more heavily indebted.

Consequently, the state insolvency became a realistic threat, as the risk premia of government bonds augmented making debt refinancing costly.

Among the EU member states, Greece was most seriously affected by the economic difficulties (Karyotis and Gerodimos, 2015). The danger from the Greek economic default became evident at the beginning of 2010, with heightening concerns about the devaluation of common currency and fall in export competitiveness. French and German banks, the main creditors of the Greek public debt, risked insolvency which could have easily led to the domino effect in other ailing EU economies and a potential Greek exit from the Euro. The fear from the failure of the Euro—the flagship product of the integration process—triggered emergency procedures at the EU level and the willingness to ignore the no-bail-out clause. The rescue operations were mostly directed towards financing public debts of member states who faced high default risk in the international credit markets; primarily these were executed by interventions of the ECB in secondary markets and the reduced-rate credits financed by rescue funds. Since several Eurozone member states needed financial assistance, a permanent rescue fund was necessary in order to cope in a more systematic and organized manner with the economic predicaments of member states on the brink of default. This fund was eventually established in February 2011 and called the "European Stability Mechanism", worth around 500 billion euros. Financial assistance was conditioned by a number of requirements entailed in the "memoranda of understanding", which included drastic budget cuts, increased taxes, and firings in the public sector. These popularly titled "austerity measures" had harsh effects on the economies struggling with the crisis, causing massive unemployment and the contraction of aggregate demand and tax incomes.

The prolonged recession, aggravated by austerity measures, had a tangible impact on the citizens of debtor countries, reducing their purchasing power, depriving them from job opportunities and deteriorating the quality of public services (see Ifanti et al., 2013; Nagle and Coulter, 2015; Perez and Matsaganis, 2018). These draconic measures were tightly associated with the EU since they were defined by the Commission, supervised by the "Troika" and sanctioned by the Ecofin Council. As Scharpf (2012:25) puts forward:

> "practically for the first time in the history of European integration, European policies have a direct and massive impact on the lives and concerns of citizens or on their highly salient political preferences, while European policy-makers are perfectly visible as the authors of these policies."

Furthermore, the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance or popularly called "fiscal compact", signed in March 2012 by twenty-five EU member states (the UK and the Czech Republic opted out), obliges national governments to maintain their budgets in balance or in surplus, otherwise, a surveillance mechanism is triggered. Moreover, economic and fiscal policies of every member state that financially benefits from the European Financial Stability Facility are monitored by a "post-programme surveillance" carried out by the Commission. All these monitoring control mechanisms and leave little space for free choice and autonomy of national governments struggling with sovereign debts.

Majone (2014:215) claims that the absence of procedures and rescue funds in the case of malfunctioning of EMU is a typical characteristic of EU governance: the primacy of process over results. This means that success is taken for granted and a possibility of failure is not considered. Majone labels this tendency of EU decision making as a political culture of "total optimism", which stems from the era of "permissive consensus" when the process of European integration was distant from citizens and not politicised. Another example of total EU optimism is the rejected Constitutional Treaty, whose adoption process did not foresee any "plan B" since the failure had not been seriously considered. As Majone (2014) remarks, this mentality of unrestrained optimism and *fait accompli* also resulted in a premature accession of Greece to the Eurozone, although it was evident that its weak economy, mostly based on tourism and agriculture, could have hardly been an equal partner to the modern industrialized economies of Northern Europe.

One of the most highly-advocated crisis solutions is a stronger supranational centralization of fiscal and social policies that could lead to a further federalization of the EU (Borriello and Crespy, 2015). EMU was designed to be complemented by the European Political Union, which was viewed as an essential companion of the monetary integration and a necessary precondition for its successful functioning (Dosenrode-Lynge, 2018). Since EU and national leaders realized quickly that it would have been difficult to

reach consensus about the design of the political union, EU member states furthered EMU without closer a political unification and more extensive coordination of national fiscal policies.

Since the financial/sovereign debt/the Eurozone crisis lasted for almost a decade, it would have been difficult to analyse its entire duration in this study due to the limited time and resources. Thus, the empirical part of this study focuses on the period of the third Greek bailout crisis, as a peak moment of the Eurozone crisis. In the successive section, the study expounds on the key moments of the Greek crisis in order to provide background details before analysing the interpretation of the crisis in Facebook discursive interactions. At the moment, Greece has received three bailouts and, despite this extensive financial assistance, austerity measures and a set of reforms, is still struggling with economic predicaments and high unemployment rates. The Greek crisis has also triggered numerous debates questioning the existence of solidarity among member states and a common European identity which would facilitate the redistribution of resources.

3.2.2 Greece as the "weakest link" in the Eurozone

It is common knowledge that the Greek political system was imbued with corruption, tax evasion, nepotism and clientelism for almost two hundred years (Mouzelis, 1978). Manolopoulos (2011) uses the metaphor of a "seven-headed hydra" for the seven principal political and economic problems of Greece: cronyism, statism, nepotism, clientelism, corruption, closed shops, and waste. The modern Greek history may explain the aforementioned anomalies. After the fall of the junta and the resurrection of democracy in Greece in 1974, two main parties, the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) and the New Democracy (ND), and three families, the Papandreou, the Karamanlis and the Mitsotakis, entered the Greek political scene and alternated in holding power for more than 40 years. Their networks permeated the entire political, economic, and societal structure, limiting healthy competition and meritocracy. However, the crisis appeared to be a fertile ground for the emergence of SYRIZA and the Golden Dawn, initially two fringe parties whose political power was multiplied due to prolonged economic predicaments and the incapacity of the two mainstream parties to provide efficient solutions (Ovenden, 2015; Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou, 2015).

Shortly after the re-establishment of democracy, Greece joined the European Economic Community and became its tenth member state in January 1981. In 1999 the euro was introduced as an accounting currency in eleven countries, but Greece failed to fulfil fiscal criteria stipulated by the Maastricht Treaty and managed to join the other Eurozone member states only in 2001. Eurozone membership boosted the confidence in the Greek economy and decreased the price of credits, allowing the inflows of cheap money into the country and creating an image of prosperity and wellbeing. Widespread investments, EU structural funds, booming tourism, shipping and service sector boosted the Greek economy and citizens' living standard. While Greece's GDP was 136.191 billion dollars in 2001, it reached its absolute peak at almost triple by 2008, when Greek GDP amounted to approximately 354.461 billion dollars. Since the outset of the crisis, it has been in a constant decline and in 2015 it totalled 195.212 billion dollars.[4] This data clearly illustrates a sharp decline of the Greek economy, preceded by a period of the unprecedented economic boom.

When the world financial crisis hit, Greece was not prepared to cope with a massive public debt without currency devaluation, which was no longer available due to Eurozone membership. It became obvious that "one-size-fits-all" monetary integration was an imprudent and premature step that gathered starkly different economies under the "roof" of the same currency (Krugman, 2013). Although the Stability and Growth Pact spelled out a list of criteria member states should have in place in order to gain Eurozone membership status, the first countries to infringe on these rules were—rather surprisingly—Germany and France. Yet, despite the fact Eurozone member states were not meeting criteria of an optimum currency area, economic and financial convergence was expected to happen as a result of the monetary integration and strong interdependence among their economies. The gap between the mainly agricultural Greek economy and heavily industrialized Northern European countries was particularly conspicuous. Moreover, the Greek accumulated debt was additionally augmented due to the organisation of the 2004 Olympic Games, which costed the state 9 billion euros. New loans resulted in an excessive deficit and debt-to-GDP ratio, which compelled the Commission to put Greece under fiscal monitoring in 2005.

[4] Available at: http://data.worldbank.org/country/greece (accessed: 01/09/16)

The crisis revealed all deficiencies of the Greek economy and its structural problems, causing a loss of autonomy to regulate its own policies and decide on economic choices. Thus, since 2010, Greek economic governance has functioned under the provisions of the Memorandum of understanding signed between the Greek authorities and the Troika. This arrangement, conditioned by a set of austerity measures, provided Greece with loans in order to pay off the public debt. Money instalments to Greece were conditioned by a satisfactory report on the implementation of required economic and financial reforms. However, austerity measures were repeatedly contested due to their alleged inability to resolve the issue of the Greek debt and to halt the unemployment rate and recession. According to the critics, cuts in public and private spending had marginal impact on the debt as well as on economic growth, while the required reforms were poorly executed by the Greek authorities.

In December 2009, the newly elected Greek government admitted that the country's debt had reached 300 billion euros—which was its highest debt in modern history— and announced that the previous government misrepresented the country's finances during the Eurozone accession process. The debt was 113 percent of GDP and almost twice double the Eurozone limit of 60 percent, whereas Greece's budget deficit in 2009 is revealed to be 12.7 percent, more than four times the maximum limit established by EMU rules. Nevertheless, neither politicians nor financial institutions and investors seemed to be very surprised by the news on the Greek finances. For instance, Jones (2013:297) points to the facts that bond yields on the ten-year Greek sovereign debt stood still and that international investments even increased instead of the expected decrease. Thus, this announcement did not provoke the crisis but appeared to be only a public admission of something already widely known.

From December 2009 until May 2010, the EU was hesitating to approve a loan to Greece although rating agencies had significantly downgraded Greek bank and sovereign debt and austerity measures caused riots and strikes. The EU tried to resolve the Greek issues with a safety net of 22 billion and an emergency loan of 30 billion euros, but these rescue measures turned out to be insufficient since Greece was on the brink of default despite extensive financial assistance. Finally, at the beginning of May, the Eurozone members and the IMF decided to grant a 107.3 billion-euro bailout loan to Greece. The largest

portion of money (approximately 22 billion euros) was provided by Germany, whereas other Eurozone member states provided the rest.[5]In addition, the ECB launched the Securities Market Program, which allowed the ECB to buy government bonds of member states with economic difficulties on the secondary market (see Bertocchi, 2014). The aim of this program was to boost the market confidence and prevent a domino effect throughout the Eurozone.

Despite these measures, in June 2011 it was evident that Greece had not resolved its financial issues and it was about to default. EU leaders decided to grant additional financial assistance to Greece as the three major credit rating agencies signalled the country's substantial risk of default. A new tranche of the loan was conditioned by a set of new harsh austerity measures approved by the Greek Parliament in July. Furthermore, a second bailout package worth 100 billion euros was agreed on, in order to prevent Greece from leaving the Eurozone. In addition, interest rates on previous bailout packages were decreased and the repayment periods were significantly extended. However, these changes were classified by rating agencies as a "restricted default." This rescue package also included a 53.5 percent debt write down for private Greek bondholders. In return, Greece committed to reducing its debt-to-GDP ratio from 160 percent to 120.5 percent by 2020.[6]

In October 2011, the Greek Parliament approved a new round of tax increases and wage cuts in the public sector, sparking violent anti-austerity protests and a 48-hour general strike. The Greek government was compelled to raise the retirement age from 60 to 65 as a part of the pension reform required by the Troika. In the follow-up, prime minister Papandreou called for a referendum on the latest rescue package, causing serious turbulences in global financial markets. However, under the pressure of his party members, the opposition, and several EU countries, Papandreou abandoned the idea of holding a referendum and resigned.

[5] The data on the first bailout package retrieved from: http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/occasional_paper/2010/pdf/ocp61_en.pdf (accessed 01/09/2016)

[6] The data on the Second bailout package retrieved from: http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/occasional_paper/2012/pdf/ocp94_en.pdf (accessed 01/09/2016).

During 2011 and 2012, the streets of Athens were often occupied by numerous protests against austerity measures. A tragic figure of this social unrest and a personification of despair at both personal and state levels was a retired pharmacist who committed suicide near the Greek parliament as an act of protest against constant pension cuts. In May 2011, the Greek Indignant Citizens Movement, inspired by a similar Spanish movement, started daily protests.

Parliamentary elections held in May 2012 ushered into the Greek political scene two new important actors: SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left) and the far-right neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party. The ND won approximately 19 percent of the vote, whereas PASOK received only 13 percent of the popular support. SYRIZA achieved a great electoral success thanks to its anti-austerity political program, winning 17 percent of the vote and finishing in high second position, while the Golden Dawn garnered 7 percent of the electoral support.[7] Since none of these parties managed to form a government, new elections held in June changed the proportions of the vote for major political parties. The ND won 30 percent of the vote outpacing SYRIZA, which still achieved an outstanding result by winning 27 percent of the electoral support. PASOK's electoral result remained almost unchanged. [8]The ND formed a coalition government that included PASOK and a smaller Democratic Left party, which withdrew from the government relatively quickly. The rising political leverage of SYRIZA became evident after the European elections in May 2014, when this party finished first, the ND second, and the Golden Dawn third. At early parliamentary elections in January 2015, SYRYZA won 36 percent of the vote and formed the government with the right-wing Independent Greeks.[9] SYRIZA's leader and the new prime minister Alexis Tsipras ran the electoral campaign on an anti-austerity agenda, promising that his party would renegotiate the bailout conditions (see Tsirbas, 2016).

[7] The results of these elections are available at: http://www.igraphics.gr/en/multimedia/2012/05/elections2012 (accessed: 02/09/2016).
[8]The results of these elections are available at: http://www.igraphics.gr/en/multimedia/2012/06/elections2012b (accessed: 02/09/2016).
[9]The results of these elections are available at: http://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/doc/oee/oee-1569-en.pdf (accessed: 02/09/2016).

Already at the outset of his mandate, Tsipras realized that it would be difficult to garner support from other EU countries, EU institutions or the IMF for his plan to abolish the austerity measures introduced by the former government. Thus, he was forced to negotiate with the Troika again and to keep the austerity measures already in place. In return, the bailout package was extended for another four months, although the Troika declined to approve the last tranche of the payment until a new agreement was reached for reform measures relating to pensions, taxation and labour rules.

However, in May 2015, the Greek government warned that its financial funds were not sufficient for paying both a tranche of its debt, wages, and pensions to Greek citizens. Tensions between Greece and Germany were growing, since Germany was determined not to defer to the requirements of the new Greek government. The muffled animosity between the two countries became overt in March 2015 when Tsipras stated that Germany had a moral obligation to pay to Greece the reparations from the Second World War. However, the German government claimed Germany had already fulfilled its war obligations and would not be revisiting this issue.

On the last day of June 2015, the Greek government failed to pay 1.6 billion euros to the IMF. Greece became the first developed country to default to the IMF, while in the recent history only Zimbabwe missed to deliver a debt payment to the Fund in 2001. After a series of tough negotiations and their failure just before the expiration of the bailout program, Tsipras called for a referendum on the EU proposal and invited Greeks to vote “No”. Moreover, the Greek premier introduced capital controls in order to prevent capital flight, limiting bank withdrawals to 60 euros per day and announcing a bank holiday.

Nevertheless, despite the fact 61 percent of Greek citizens who voted on the referendum rejected the new deal, Tsipras eventually appealed to the Greek Parliament to approve the deal, mainly due to the fear from exiting the Eurozone and the creditors’ hard line. The Greek government agreed to introduce additional budget cuts, tax rises and reforms in order to be granted a new package of bailout funds. However, since Tsipras failed to keep his electoral promises and stick to the proclaimed anti-austerity

agenda, he had to deal with the resistance in his ranks and to reshuffle his cabinet by excluding those members who opposed further austerity. As soon as the government received a 7.2-billion-euro loan, it spent it on paying its debts. In July, the Greek government and the creditors started the talks on the third bailout, which was consequently agreed in August and amounted 86 billion euro.

The ineffectiveness of counter-crisis measures is illustrated by the fact that during the period from 2009 to 2013, the amount of money paid for servicing the debt and the amount the government spent on short-term securities and Treasury bills was equivalent to the public debt at the start of the crisis (Michailidou, 2014: 260). From 2010 till May 2016, thirteen austerity packages—which included wage cuts, tax reforms, layoffs of around twenty-five thousand public servants, and pension cuts— were approved by the Greek Parliament. Moreover, as time passed, the willingness of Greek citizens to endure new austerity measure was shrinking.

3.3 The EU under the migratory pressure

The introductory portion of the section provides an overview of the unprecedented migration flows that occurred in 2015 and challenged the capacities of both national and EU actors to provide asylum seekers with essential needs. The second part of the section reviews the response of the EU to the migration crisis, notably the EU-devised system of the redistribution of asylum seekers and the Dublin system. The third part presents responses of EU member states to the migration crisis and beggar-thy-neighbour migration policies introduced by the affected states.

3.3.1 The year 2015 as a peak of migration crisis

In parallel with the Greek debt negotiations, a new crisis characterized by massive immigration to Europe put into jeopardy political, economic, and social stability of member states, challenged once again the efficiency and the problem-solving capacity of the supranational governance (Kingsley, 2016; Goldmeier, 2018). The year 2015 is remembered as a year when Europe received an unprecedented number of refugees, mainly from Syria which has been struggling with an atrocious civil war since 2011. Moreover, the

massive inflow of refugees was followed by a number of economic migrants, spurring popular fears about proper economic and job security. In addition, Islamophobia became prominent in the public discourse as this massive influx of Muslim refugees was interpreted by a part of the European public as a danger for the European values and identity (see Taras, 2012).

The migration crisis provoked manifold divisions. The Commission, together with the national governments of Germany and Sweden, advocated an "open door" policy towards refugees and a system of redistribution among member states based on quotas, supported by Italy and Greece as well. Yet on the contrary, several Central and Eastern European countries were openly hostile towards refugees and refused to accept the quotas. Although all EU member states are legally bound to offer protection to those fleeing persecution and violence—as signatory states of the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees—the absence of effective sanction mechanisms hindered the compliance with these international legal obligations.

Regarding data sets in 2015 approximately 1,255,600 first-time asylum seekers applied for international protection in EU member states. The largest number of applicants came from these six countries: Syria (28.9%), Afghanistan (14.2%), Iraq (9.7%), Kosovo (5.3%), Albania (5.3%) and Pakistan (3.7%). The majority of asylum applications was submitted to a limited number of member states: Germany (35.2%), Hungary (13.9%), Sweden (12.4%), Austria (6.8%), Italy (6.6%) and France (5.6%). Hungary, Sweden, Austria and Germany had the highest per capita number of asylum applications. [10] The main cause of the massive migration was the Syrian conflict, whose consequences have been characterized by the Commission as "the world's largest humanitarian crisis since World War II." However, although EU member states have hosted a considerable share of refugees and provided a substantial financial aid (approximately five billion euros), the largest proportion of Syrian refugees have been actually welcomed by the adjacent countries. Out of the 4.8 million Syrian refugees that fled from Syria to the neighbouring countries by September 2016, over three million are located in Turkey, around 1 million in Lebanon (a country where

[10] http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7203832/3-04032016-AP-EN.pdf/

Syrian refugees represent 25 percent of the total population), around 650 thousand in Jordan (population of 6.5 million), and around 250 thousand in Iraq.[11]

The year 2015 was particularly challenging as the number of refugees seeking asylum in Europe reached unprecedented levels and spurred fervent debates across the European continent. In addition to the beaten track from Libya to Italy across the Mediterranean, notorious for its death tolls, an equally dangerous route going from Turkey to Greek islands was increasingly taken by refugees. In January 2016, European Council President Donald Tusk declared that the EU had no more than two months to save the Schengen Zone and maybe even the union itself.[12] This statement was alike to the statement of Angela Merkel during one of the critical moments of the Eurozone crisis when she said "If the Euro fails, Europe fails."[13] Thus, both the Eurozone and the migration crises have been framed as existential and possibly fatal to the European project. The following subsection provides an overview of the main EU actions aimed at the migration crisis management.

3.3.2 EU response to the migration crisis

The death of over 600 persons, who drowned in the Mediterranean as their vessel sank on its way from Libya to Italy in April 2015, represented the outset of a prolonged period of migration challenges. As a reaction to this tragic event, the European Council promptly gathered for a special meeting and agreed to intensify efforts to avert casualties in the Mediterranean, to prevent smuggling, and to tackle migration causes. In May 2015, the Commission adopted a European agenda on migration, which highlighted the necessity of joint actions in the management of migration flows and a shared responsibility of member states. Later in May, the Commission presented the first package of measures to address the migration crisis, which included an emergency relocation proposal for 40,000 refugees from Italy and Greece to other member states. The proposed action plan contained more specific measures against migrant smuggling,

[11] https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/syria_en.pdf

[12] 'Tusk gives the EU two months to "save Schengen"', EuroNews, 19 January 2016; available at http://www.euronews.com/2016/01/19/tusk-gives-the-eu-two-months-to-save-schengen/.; 'Schengen to Fail in Months if Migration Crisis not "Under Control", says Tusk', DW.com, 19 January 2016; available at http://www.dw.com/en/schengen-to-fail-in-months-if-migration-crisis-not-under-control-says-tusk/a-18989697.

[13] http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/if-the-euro-fails-europe-fails-merkel-says-eu-must-be-bound-closer-together-a-784953.html

guidelines on fingerprinting and a public consultation on the blue card directive that would regulate the entry and residence of highly qualified workers.

In September 2015, the Commission presented a second package of proposals for tackling the migration crisis, which included an emergency relocation proposal for 120,000 people in clear need of international protection from the most afflicted countries, a permanent relocation mechanism for all member states, a common European list of safe countries of origin, and a more effective return policy. This relocation scheme was based on the population size, GDP, the unemployment rate and the average number of applications for asylum over the previous five years relative to the total population. Later in September, the Justice and Home Affairs Council adopted a final decision on the relocation of refugees across the continent in the following two years, and a common list of Safe Countries of Origin which included all Western Balkan countries and Turkey. However, Romania, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary voted against the mandatory quotas.

In October 2015, 19 Eritrean asylum seekers were relocated by plane from Italy to a Swedish town just south of the Polar Circle. However, during the same month Sweden, adopted a stricter asylum law due to the highest per-capita rate of asylum applications in 2015. Moreover, in November, 30 asylum seekers from Syria and Iraq were relocated from Greece to Luxembourg. In addition to the system of quotas, financial assistance was granted to EU member states and candidate countries, who met the stated quota. In February 2016, three billion euros were granted to Turkey in order to deal more effectively with migration. Moreover, the Council approved emergency assistance of 100 million euros in commitments and 80.2 million euros in payments from the 2016 EU budget to support Greece and other member states struggling with the high influx of migrants. By September 2016, out of 160,000 refugees that were planned to be redistributed only 1,156 refugees had been effectively relocated from Italy and 3,734 from Greece.[14]It is evident that the system of quotas has yielded very modest results. The poor realization of refugee relocation stems mainly from a scarce level of solidarity among EU member states since member states

[14]Data retrieved from: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/press-material/docs/state_of_play_-_relocation_en.pdf (Accessed: 30/09/2016)

geographically unexposed to the influx of refugees have been mostly unwilling to implement the redistribution programs, although the number of refugees to be hosted has been mainly unsubstantial.

Since 1999, the EU has been working on forming a Common European Asylum System (CEAS), as well as on advancing the existing legislative framework. The Dublin regulation envisages that the member state where refugees first enter was required to examine their asylum applications, to register them and to record their fingerprints. According to this regulation, member states could return a person to the territory of another member state in which the person had previously sought asylum or used its territory for transit. When asylum seekers request their status in a member state that the Regulation does not define as responsible, the Resolution sets out the procedure for transferring the asylum seeker to the responsible member state. The Dublin II Resolution was replaced in 2013 with the Dublin III Resolution, which was adopted by the EU and defines in even more detail the criteria and mechanisms for determining the member state responsible for considering asylum applications. The intention of the Dublin System was to determine the common standards and to establish cooperation among EU members in order to ensure equal treatment of asylum seekers in an open and just application system.

The Dublin system has been often contested and criticized for unfairly encumbering the countries where asylum seekers initially enter to bear the burden of their registration and reception (Maani, 2018). While the first-entry countries are mainly Italy, Greece, or Hungary, refugees have often refused to be registered in these countries because their ultimate destinations have been Germany, Sweden, or other well-off member states. As already mentioned, under the pressure of massive arrivals during 2015, Germany decided to suspend the Dublin regulation and process the asylum applications of refugees who already reached Germany. Although the resettlement proposed by the EU has not been carried out successfully, the decision of Italy and Greece to allow migrants continue to their desired destination without being registered meant defacto burden-sharing and redistribution (Greenhill, 2016). Since the Dublin system created the overloading of the countries “of the first arrival”, declaring them responsible for administrative procedures of registration of refugees and the provision of food and shelter for new arrivals,

the system of quotas was designed in order to make the Dublin regulations in order to become more equitable and fairer towards affected member states.

The intensified efforts of EU institutions in the crisis management were in line with the preferences of the large majority of EU citizens since the Eurobarometer poll published in October 2015 revealed that 66% of respondents thought that decisions regarding migration issues should be taken at the EU level rather than at the national one. However, as the Dublin system and the redistribution of asylum seekers, the two main common EU instruments, have proven to be inefficient due to low member compliance. The proceeding subsection addresses national reactions to the aforementioned migratory challenges.

3.3.3 National responses to the migration crisis

This massive influx of refugees challenged the capacities of certain EU member states to process, accommodate and care for asylum seekers. The two most prominent collective actors in the migration crisis were Hungary and Germany, each taking starkly different approaches to migration challenges. Hungary became an entry point to the Schengen area for many migrants who arrived in the EU via the Balkan route, while its right-wing leadership was rather hostile towards the migrants crossing the Hungarian territory. The most controversial moves of Hungarian Prime Minister Orban includes the erection of a fence along the country's southern border with Serbia, with the intention to prevent migration flows, and inhuman treatment of migrants trying to enter Hungary or transiting via its territory. On the contrary, Germany applied a policy of "open door". At the end of August 2015, Germany's Federal Office for Migration and Refugees publicly announced not to return Syrian refugees under the Dublin Regulation. Media throughout Europe interpreted these measures as an open invitation of Chancellor Merkel to refugees to come to Germany, and this distorted information powerfully resonated across European publics. Moreover, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán even accused Germany of "moral imperialism". However, the German decision to process all asylum request submitted to the authorities was, to a great extent, a result of reported inhuman treatment of refugees on the Greek islands. Greek authorities seemed unable to cope with the large numbers of incoming asylum seekers given the country's ever-deepening economic crisis.

Greece's outsized share of responsibility for asylum seekers as well as its serious economic predicaments put the rights and well-being of asylum seekers in jeopardy.

However, the fence along the Hungarian border with Serbia was only the first protectionist measure of this kind in a row. Germany introduced temporary border controls with Austria to deal more efficiently with a massive influx of people, whereas Austria adopted a similar approach by sending army troops to support border police at the Hungarian border. By mid-September, the construction of a 175 km fence along Hungary's border with Serbia was completed and a set of strict sanctions on illegal border crossing was introduced. The strict approach of the Hungarian authorities shifted the migration route towards Croatia. However, after completing its fence with Serbia, Hungary began the construction of an additional fence along its border with Croatia.

In November, the willingness of member states to bear the burden of new refugees several started decreasing. For instance, the Austrian government proposed stricter asylum laws, whereas Sweden announced that it would not be able to fulfill its relocation commitments, by accepting 4.358 persons from Greece and Italy, due to an emergency situation in the country due to the large number of asylum requests. Slovenia started the construction of a fence along its border with Croatia. The newly-elected Polish government announced that Poland would not accept migrants under the EU quota system after the Paris attacks. In addition, Austria started constructing a fence along its border with Slovenia, while Macedonia started erecting a fence along its border with Greece. At the beginning of December, Slovakia and Hungary filed a lawsuit at the European Court of Justice against the EU decision on quotas and the plan to redistribute asylum seekers among member states. During the same month, the number of asylum applications in Germany reached 1 million.

Harsh and inflammatory rhetoric against refugees became a part of many leading European politicians' discourse (Wodak, 2018). Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban described migrants as a

"poison" and a "terror risk" and said they were not welcome in Hungary,[15] whereas Polish Law and Justice Party official and former Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski warned that Muslim refugees would "bring parasites and diseases to Europe".[16] The leader of the far-right Freedom Party, Geert Wilders said that Islamic male refugees should be "locked up in asylum centres" in order to protect women from their "sexual jihad".[17] The leader of the National Front in France Marine Le Pen, when was shown the photo of a drowned Syrian toddler, asked: "Do you know if he was a refugee or an illegal immigrant? I don't know."[18] In the UK, the rhetoric regarding refugees and economic migrants is more moderate but still negative. Former British Prime Minister David Cameron compared the migrants stuck in Calais as a "swarm of people coming across the Mediterranean" and highlighted the need for stricter immigration rules.[19]

3.4 Democracy "under the siege"

Though its origins are rooted in Ancient Greece, democracy has been transformed over time and adapted to the needs of a Western modern nation-state, which has promoted democracy as a superior way of organising a political regime. The contemporary conceptualisation of democracy is associated with liberal democratic regimes, which combine representative democracy and constitutional liberalism (Zakaria, 2003). However, not only have democratic credentials become benchmarks for states, but also for hybrid polities such as the EU. Yet, scholars have not reached a consensus if democracy is exclusively reserved for nation-state or other polities can be assessed using democratic criteria as well.

According to Bohman (2007), democracy is tightly associated with the nation-state. Majone (1998) views the EU as a "regulatory state" that derives its legitimacy from the expertise and the output of its independent bodies, insulated from the fluctuations of electoral processes and focused on the quality of

[15]Available at: http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/693994/Hungary-PM-Viktor-Orban-migrants-refugees-poison-terror-risk (Accessed: 20/10/2017)
[16] Available at http://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2015/10/14/right-wing-polishleader-migrants-carry-diseases-to-europe. (Accessed: 20/10/2017)
[17]Available at: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/far-right-dutch-politician-geert-wilders-says-male-refugees-must-be-kept-in-asylum-camps-to-stop-a6828891.html (Accessed: 15/10/2017)
[18]Available at: https://www.ft.com/content/62131206-5473-11e5-8642-453585f2cfcd (Accessed: 15/10/2017)
[19] Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-politics-33714282/david-cameron-swarm-of-migrants-crossing-mediterranean (Accessed: 10/10/2017)

results, efficacy, and impartiality. Majone compares EU bodies to regulatory agencies at the national level—expert and independent entities, not subjected to the procedures of majoritarian democracy. In Majone's reading, democratic legitimacy is necessary only in the case of redistributive effects of EU policies. However, since EU policies produce Pareto optimum results—meaning that at least one individual or preference criterion is better off without making any other individual or preference criterion worse off—they do not have to comply with the criteria of democratic legitimacy.

Alternatively, Moravcsik (2002) claims the EU is democratic because it needs to be an international organization, which draws its legitimacy from democratically elected national executives, who bargain on behalf of their constituencies. Yet, Follesdal and Hix (2006) argue that the EU does suffer from the democratic deficit since the process of European integration has increased the power of the executive and decreased the influence and control of national parliaments. Moreover, European elections are not authentic democratic elections since there are no real European political parties, European-wide media, and transnational debates on EU issues, and the European Parliament has limited powers and competencies. According to other scholars of EU democratic deficit, democracy is linked to a specific community of citizens or demos (Weiler, 1999). According to Bellamy (2013:501), demos is "a group of persons who regard themselves as forming a political community that is capable of self-government." It is widely accepted that the EU lacks a common identity and a sense of "we-ness", and it is not likely that Europeans will develop the sense of commonality and sense of shared destiny in the foreseeable future (Schimmelfennig, 2010). In addition, the EU is further criticized for undermining the functioning of national democracies, through the empowerment of the executive branch vis-à-vis the legislative branch (Schmidt, 2006).

According to a number of scholars, the management of the Eurozone and the migration crises caused the deterioration of EU democratic legitimacy. The evasion of democratic mechanisms is more likely in an internationalised context as there is a spillover effect of crisis consequences and a slower response due to a longer chain of institutions involved in crisis management (Michailidou, 2014:246). Maduro (2012) puts forward the idea that undemocratic handling of the Eurozone crisis is actually one of its main roots.

According to Benz (2013), the parliaments of creditor states had a superior position in comparison to the parliaments of debtor states, which suffered a loss of autonomy and decision-making power. Furthermore, Majone (2014) admits that the crisis has produced clearly redistributive consequences among its countries, as opposed to the pre-crisis period, implicitly recognising the existence of the democratic deficit.

The dominance of certain constituencies over others undermined the democratic credentials of both the EU and its member states, as citizens lost authorisation power in respect to those who devise rules they have to comply with (Fossum, 2014). The predominance of certain member states, notably Germany, additionally jeopardized the EU's fragile input legitimacy. According to Friedrich and Kroger (2013): "political procedures and practices are democratic if they are firmly based on political equality as the 'foundational idea' of democracy".

Furthermore, the European Semester required from Eurozone member states strict budget restraints and obliged them to coordinate their budgetary policies ex-ante in cooperation with the EU, which issued individual policy recommendations. This procedure significantly decreased the powers of national parliaments, as budgetary proceedings are one of their main responsibilities. Moreover, the Eurozone crisis reinforced the role of the executive and technocrats (Fossum, 2014). The bodies of experts—such as the European Central Bank, the European Court of Justice or the International Monetary Fund—gained the upper hand in the crisis management due to their knowledge, competencies, and independence from lengthy democratic procedures. Since the crisis was framed as a technical problem, with the resolution requiring efficiency, the expertise of independent agencies granted them the mandate to decide on and implement counter-crisis measures. The crisis has also strengthened the role of the European Council, notably the role of Germany and France, whose bilateral decisions steered EU actions. Moreover, as the crisis required swift decision-making and reduced time for negotiation over legislative changes, European leaders opted for intergovernmental treaties such as the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union. Nevertheless, the Commission was given a sanctioning role in the implementation of decisions adopted via intergovernmental bargaining.

Economic decisions of debtor countries were perceived as imposed by EU institutions as well as by the authorities of other member states such as Merkel, Sarkozy, or Schäuble. Many economic, social and labour-market decisions had to comply with the requirements of the creditors and to be under their supervision. Therefore, a partial segment of citizens in debtor countries perceived the crisis management as a "political dictatorship" and an "economic protectorate", executed by those who they were not able to hold accountable. In contrast, creditor states had to explain to their electorates the allocation of a part of taxpayers' money into rescue funds and financial guarantees. Overall, the parliaments of both creditor and debtor countries had minor roles in the crisis resolution or were faced with *faits accomplis*.

Although a referendum is often seen as a genuine embodiment of direct democracy, the July 2015 referendum in Greece can be hardly characterised as such. The Greeks were asked to decide on two highly technical documents, while they were given only a few days to get informed on a set of complex issues at stake, as the referendum was organized very hastily and without almost any public debate. Moreover, in the situation of capital controls and closed banks, the feeling of despair and uncertainty could easily blur rational thinking and argument-based decision-making.

The migration crisis was not as contentious as the Eurozone crisis since it involved less controversial counter-crisis measures. Still, the migration crisis was also characterised by a dominance of the executive in the crisis management, whereas national parliaments and the EP were, for the most part, side-lined. The Schengen agreement, which has abolished the borders between a large number of EU member states and allowed a free flow of citizens, has also shown deficiencies under the pressure of massive migration. The countries of "the first entrance" have not been often able or willing to register asylum seekers and they have been just let into the Schengen zone to move freely towards their targeted destinations. Thus, national leaders made decisions independently or more influential member states shaped EU-proposed solutions. The agreement reached between the EU and Turkey to divert the flow of refugees from the Eastern Mediterranean was allegedly imposed on EU member states by German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Deeply uneven national experiences with migration, unequal capacities to respond to unprecedented migration flows and uneven exposure to migration due to different geographical positions of member states hindered a common approach to asylum. Moreover, the different conditions of integration and diverse quality of life in individual countries affected the selection of destination among migrants. Countries with favourable economic and socials conditions attracted a larger number of asylum seekers and refugees, while those with unfavourable conditions were mainly transit countries. During the crisis, particular heads of states and governments emerged in leadership roles, notably the leaders of Germany and Hungary. In addition to the two leaders and several informal constellations of like-minded groups of states appeared—North-western member states, the Visegrad Four and southern EU member states. This type of regional fragmentation obstructed a more coherent response, since these groupings usually agreed on one aspect of crisis response and vehemently disagreed on others. At the EU level, no single political leader emerged as the core decision-maker, so key rulings had to be negotiated in the Council in the European Union or even the European Council, while resolutions made without full consensus tended to quickly lose legitimacy. As a consequence, most member states autonomously responded to the crisis, disregarding the proposed allocations and the Dublin regulations.

Finally, the lack of a genuine European demos and identity became painfully apparent in times of crisis, hindering decisions that involved the redistribution of financial resources or asylum seekers. While redistribution is common within nation states (e.g. from wealthier to poorer regions), due to its long practice and a cherished sense of solidarity among compatriots, the EU as a hybrid polity has difficulties to convince its member states and their citizens to approve a decision that they perceive as unfavourable for their national or personal interests, in order to help another member state in trouble. However, this study will demonstrate that a certain “Europeanism” emerged in social media, suggesting that the digital era may generate a cyber-mediated European demos.

3.5 Crises and social media

A crisis inevitably attracts the attention of the media and the public interest increases due to the atmosphere of fear and uncertainty which characterizes these times (Seeger et al. 2003). Social media is growingly used in crisis communication strategies by governments and political organizations, such as political parties, non-governmental organizations, and advocacy groups (Wendling et al. 2013). Furthermore, what differentiates the mediatization of a crisis in 2000s, from the one prior to the era of ubiquitous digitalization, is the wide use of the Internet and particularly social media. Both have dramatically changed the media landscape by taking away the monopoly from traditional news media outlets. Online communication channels have also contributed to the informational and participatory independence of citizens (Wendling et al. 2013), by enabling citizens to create information contents (e.g. citizens' journalism, blogs, online commenting). Moreover, the network-based architecture of social media facilitates mobilization, connection, and coordination of civil and political activists.

Online discussion arenas may generate and foster innovative crisis-related solutions since these platforms serve as grassroots movements which have the potential to transform into agents of change or, at a minimum, to put political pressure on decision makers. Public communication is a key element of crisis governance, in the areas of both top-down communication from political elites towards their constituencies and multidirectional public debate (Michailidou, 2017). In general, the media enable the illumination of alternative political choices related to the crisis-resolutions and provide spaces for political elites to publicly legitimize these counter-crisis measures.

The emergence of pan-European online movements of opinions was evidenced in social media by the diffusion of hashtags such as #refugeeswelcome, #strongerin, #takecontrol or #PrayforParis. The reflection of the recent crises in online media has received some academic attention, albeit limited. The public discourse on the Eurozone/Greek crisis was investigated looking at the Greek digital space (e.g. Touri and Kostarella, 2016) or transnational Twittersphere (Michailidou, 2017). Barisione and Ceron (2017) analysed Twitter users' comments over austerity and conceptualized the notion of a "digital movement of

opinion" that emerged in Europe during the crisis and which was "materialized" by real-world anti-austerity protests. Moreover, Twitter served as a data source for several recent scholarly contributions focusing on the media discourse related to the refugee crisis (e.g. Bennett, 2018; Krzyżanowski, 2018a). Although the relationship between political attitudes and online social media has received considerable scholarly attention (e.g. Brundidge et al. 2014; Johnson and Kaye, 2014; De Wilde et al.2013), Facebook as a locus of Eurosceptic attitudes have received rather modest attention (e.g. Ruzza and Pejovic, 2019). This study argues that Facebook presents an important arena for political communication due to its unparalleled popularity and debate-friendly interface. Citizens' Facebook commentary is a new form of public opinion, which deserves academic investigation, and, thus, this study seeks to contribute the literature focused on the role of social media in EU politics by scrutising EU-related Facebook debates.

3.6 Conclusion

Jean Monnet, an EU founding father, stated: "Europe will be forged in crises and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises." Similarly, functional integration theory posits that each crisis would propel further integration and the delegation of new functions to the supranational level. In functionalist and neo-functionalist reading, further integration is often interpreted as an "unintended consequence" (Haas, 1964) of previously introduced measures and policies, as national and supranational actors realize a necessity to deepen integration in order to ensure the effectiveness of formerly communitised policies. Neo-functionalists, such as Schmitter (2002) and Haas (2003), argue that only the final stages of the integration process would entail the integration of *polities* rather than *policies* and extensive democratic legitimation. Many view a common EU fiscal policy as an ultimate step towards federalization or as an indispensable complement of the existing monetary union in order to function properly. The EU has already introduced some limited fiscal instruments such as the European Fund for Strategic Investment and the European Unemployment Benefit Scheme. Nonetheless, despite the modest efforts to propel fiscal integration, some crucial prerequisites for a more extensive common fiscal policy—such as the increase of the EU budget—are still absent.

In reviewing common migration policies, the lack of a common European asylum policy may produce externalities for asylum seekers as well as for member states. If a member state adopts more restrictive asylum rules, other member states may experience an increase in the number of applicants, or vice-versa. Thus, interstate cooperation, coordination, and harmonization of asylum policies play a key role in preventing the so-called "race to the bottom", when states tend to reduce benefits for asylum seekers in order to prevent a high number of asylum applications. As countries tend to slash expenditures for the accommodation and integration of refugees, this downward competition brings refugees to an even more difficult and precarious position. Moreover, when heading to their desired destinations, asylum seekers determine autonomously their routes, often very dangerous or not optimal. Moreover, if refugees were redistributed to the countries with lower marginal costs of their reception and integration, a common European approach to the refugee issue would also increase cost efficiency. Therefore, a joint approach to the reception and integration of refugees is essential in order to prevent human tragedies, increase cost efficiency for member states and offer better future prospects to refugees.

Even though the Eurozone and the migration crises were triggered by external events, they brought to the forefront internal deficiencies of the EU set-up. The leap into EMU was premature due to the diversity of Eurozone economies, whereas the lack of procedures in the situation of a crisis and inexistence of bailout funds additionally hindered the crisis management. Furthermore, the Schengen system lacks a fully-fledged and functional asylum system, supported by all member states. However, since the Commission and different blocks of member states hold opposing visions on the common asylum system, the development of a coherent, equitable and operational strategy towards third-country nationals is still far-fetched.

Weak solidarity among EU member states in times of crisis may be rooted in the lack of a European identity. Being a conglomerate of diverse nation-states, the European project has often faced difficulties when defining peoplehood and fostering the sense of community and a shared identity among EU citizens (see Eder, 2009; Fuchs, 2011; Brutter, 2005). Some scholars have singled out multiculturalism as the first victim of a simultaneous growth of economic woes, security and immigration issues (Cihodariu and

Dumitrescu, 2013). However, Risse (2015:157), after having analysed the data from Eurobarometer surveys, reveal that the crisis actually increased the level of identification with the EU, without causing significant divergence in identification levels between creditor and debtor countries. The present study will show that common predicaments yielded pan-European online activism characterized by the same patterns of interpretation of both the EU and the two crises. Moreover, this study provides evidence of online Europeanism, which emerged in the time of crises, characterized by a sense of "we-ness" contrasted to the "otherness" of EU elites or their alleged protégés, namely financial institutions or migrants.

Chapter 4

Research design, methodology, and data sources

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methods used to collect and analyse the data and justifies their choice, while its last section discusses some limitations of the selected research design. In order to understand the type of EU polity evaluations present in social media pages managed by EU institutions and the way EU civil servants in charge of these social media channels perceive different public attitudes towards European integration and communicate with the social media public, this study employed qualitative research methods. Qualitative research aims at understanding human behaviour and attitudes in specific contexts they occur (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). This study seeks to understand Eurosceptic attitudes within a specific online setting and in a particular time period. It also tries to comprehend the discourse and the views of EU communicators responding to EU-critical or EU-phobic remarks on behalf of EU institutions by analysing the social media content they share and by interviewing them. Since the fundamental rule of qualitative research is its context-dependence, the findings and conclusions of this study are reported by highlighting their limitation to certain people, certain time frames and certain situations.

Unlike the positivist approach to social sciences which posits that people's actions and attitudes can be explained by the social norms they have been exposed to through their socialisation, as well as their social class, gender and national background, the interpretivist approach views people's actions and attitudes as time and context bound. A plethora of different hypotheses about major causes of Euroscepticism shows that it is difficult to make causal statements or predictions about the social world. Therefore, this research is line with the interpretivist research paradigm, whose aim is to understand and

interpret the meanings in human behaviour rather than to generalize and predict causes and effects (Neuman, 2000; Hudson and Ozanne, 1988).

This study provides a top-down view at the outlooks of the EU civil servants, who manage the monitored social media pages, on popular opposition to the process of European integration. By using rhetorical analysis and semi-structured elite interviews, this research elucidates the modus operandi of EU communicators, their discursive interactions with Facebook followers, their perceptions of public discontent and their communication strategies. Moreover, the present study addresses social media Euroscepticism that emerged in the context of the Greek and migration crises and sheds light on the public perceptions of the EU and its role in the two crises by employing content analysis.

4.2 Studying Euroscepticism: the added value of qualitative research methods

Euroscepticism is not a linear phenomenon, but a mix of often contradictory behaviours, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships between individuals and institutions. As explained in Chapter 2, popular Euroscepticism has been mainly investigated by using quantitative analysis of opinion poll results. However, when embarking on this study, my intention was to conduct a research which would complement the studies relying on statistical data by providing insights into a new form of Euroscepticism—social media Euroscepticism. Popular Euroscepticism evident in social media debates is a discursive phenomenon which requires an in-depth qualitative analysis and the illustration of the most salient concepts and lines of argument. This study argues that qualitative methods accommodate the richness and the variations in the perceptions of Euroscepticism by both citizens and EU civil servants. Qualitative research enables researchers to access the thoughts and feelings of individuals whose attitudes and experience they investigate, unlike quantitative research methods which are concerned with the number of persons who behave in a certain way and have certain attitudes or sentiments. Although this study takes a qualitative approach when analysing social media content, it also quantifies some of the findings in order to show the preponderance of certain concepts. However, by showing the quantitative representation of the findings, I do not claim their representativeness with respect to the broader population, but try to identify the most

salient EU evaluations and arguments within the selected sample. Moreover, since this study draws on the work of De Wilde and colleagues (2013), the findings were quantified with the intention of comparing the findings of the two studies (see Chapter 6 and Chapter 7).

As already highlighted, the present study aims at providing an in-depth understanding of the recent form of Euroscepticism present in social media. While the largest portion of the literature on popular Euroscepticism is based on the quantitative analysis of statistical data derived from a substantial sample of respondents, the findings obtained by using qualitative methods, such as qualitative content analysis, provide a corpus of detailed information about a smaller batch of individuals. This study applies qualitative research methods to social media content, which are argued to be a relevant form of public opinion. These social media fora actually resemble the earliest forms of public opinion, which preceded the era of opinion polls. The social and interactive nature of online platforms revives the spirit of the coffee-house–an institution of central importance in the development of public opinion and the public sphere–which became widespread throughout Europe in the mid-17th century (Habermas, 1989). The Internet seems to be making news more social and participatory, reviving the lively discursive spirit of the era before the mass media.

The importance of social media in communication with EU citizens has been recognised by all EU institutions. The Parliament and the Commission have formed social media teams, which continuously update a multitude of social media channels and maintain contact with an ever-increasing number of followers. However, these followers are an interactive public, constantly commenting and inquiring about different aspects of EU governance (Tarta, 2017). Social media pages administered by EU institutions are settings that provide a plethora of data on public attitudes towards European integration. In these particular online environments, citizens' views are spontaneously expressed, without being determined by standardized questions and a set of limited answers, as in the case of surveys and questionnaires. Although the administrators of the institutional Facebook pages do occasionally pose some questions to their public in order to foster debates, their Facebook followers are allowed to share comments on any topic, regardless of the question, as long as a moderation policy is respected. These debates resemble mundane

conversations people have with their family members, friends or colleagues. This is why collecting data on public attitudes by downloading targeted Facebook debates enables the capturing of "vernacular speech" and the authentic, crude arguments of ordinary Europeans. Focus groups could arguably generate similar discussions, but Facebook debates attract a much higher number of participants, thus allowing more comprehensive insights into the investigated phenomenon. Moreover, focus groups are always relatively structured, guided and influenced by the facilitator. While Facebook pages administered by EU institutions are by default characterised by a distinct transnationality and heterogeneity of participant profiles, the conduction of transnational focus groups would entail elevated costs and complex logistic issues. Furthermore, the Facebook discussions addressed by this study are more informative and revealing than focus groups because the participants in these debates interact with the employees of EU institutions. It was evident from the wording of the commentary that the monitored Facebook public had a perception of interacting directly with those in charge, which incited them to voice their views, concerns and suggestions.

As previously mentioned, qualitative semi-structured elite interviews have been used in order to explore the views, experiences, beliefs and motivations of the members of social media teams of the Parliament and the Commission. This decision is justified by a relatively small number of people whose views would be informative for answering the research questions and by the intention to obtain detailed insights from a limited number of interviewees. When using quantitative methods such as surveys and questionnaires, researchers ask all participants identical questions in the same order, while the categories of responses are "closed-ended" or fixed. The advantage of this inflexibility is that it allows for the comparison of responses across participants and different studies. On the other hand, qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews are more flexible and adaptable to different respondents and allow the interviewer to adapt the questions to the profile of a single interviewee and obtain a rich data set. This is why I opted for this method, rather than for distributing questionnaires or surveys to all the members of social media teams of the two institutions. Moreover, the interviews are used to triangulate the findings obtained via rhetorical and content analyses, complementing and validating the insights.

4.3 Facebook focus

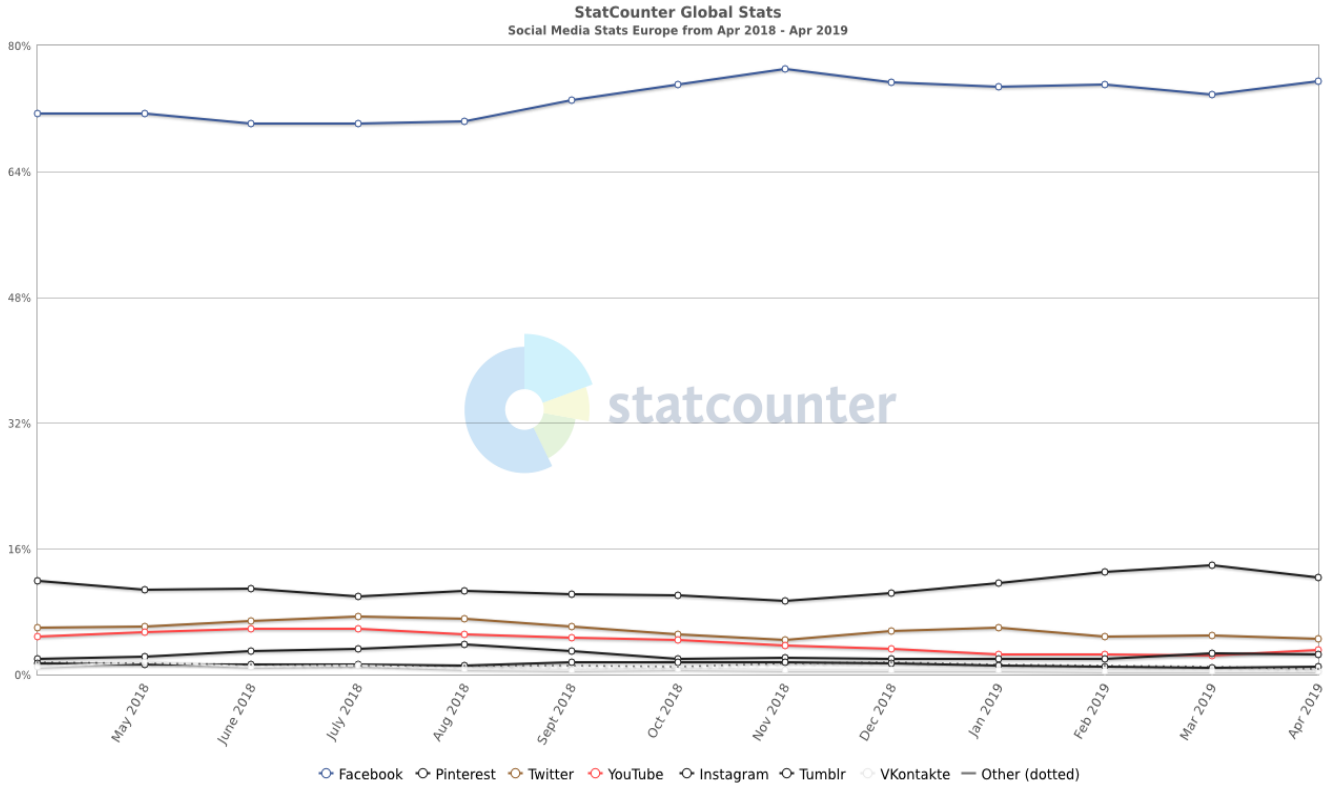
Facebook was launched in 2004 as an elitist college network, and rapidly spread through mainstream online communication, connecting primarily its users with their offline social contacts. It is a network of people who create reciprocal relations among themselves by accepting to become "friends". Facebook is the most popular social network worldwide: as of the third quarter of 2018, Facebook had 2.27 billion monthly active users, whereas in the third quarter of 2012, the number of active Facebook users had surpassed one billion, making it the first social network ever to do so.[20] In the second quarter of 2018, there were 376 million Facebook users in Europe. The number of users slightly decreased in comparison to the first quarter of 2018 and CEO Mark Zuckerberg attributed this unprecedented loss of users to the introduction of the European General Data Protection Regulation.[21] Furthermore, as illustrated by Figure 1, Facebook is by far the most popular social media in Europe, with Pinterest, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram lagging significantly behind. Due to the massive number of users both in Europe and worldwide, Facebook tends to reflect "offline" demographics more precisely than any other social media (Bossetta et al., 2017). On the other hand, Twitter, for instance, mainly gathers users interested in politics and is characterised by an Anglo-Saxon bias (Bossetta et al., 2017). However, the pervasiveness of Facebook this does not imply its overall representativeness. Thus, this study argues that debates unfolding on Facebook have the capacity to attract variegated demographics, but without claiming that Facebook debates could be a proxy for public opinion. Moreover, the transnational character of these pages has been confirmed by the social media team of the Parliament, who provided me with the statistics on the demographics of their followers. These data show the Facebook public following the page of the Parliament is composed of users located in different European countries (mostly in metropolitan centres) and of an almost equal number of male and female followers (see Chapter 5, Section 5.4.1).

[20] According to the statistics available at: https://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/ (Accessed: 08/11/2018)

[21] Available at: https://www.statista.com/statistics/745400/facebook-europe-mau-by-quarter/ (Accessed: 15/08/2018).

Figure 1: Social Media Statistics in Europe - April 2019

Source: Statcounter



As a result of its unprecedented popularity, Facebook has penetrated into many areas of private life, business and public affairs, evolving from an entertainment platform into an important marketing and political tool. Moreover, Facebook has a vital role in the dissemination of informative contents from news media and in the encouragement of news-inspired debates. All prominent news outlets are linked to Facebook and offer the option of sharing or recommending articles to Facebook contacts. The majority of news media channels regularly update their Facebook pages, sharing some of the articles and videos. These posts often elicit debates, which may have a transnational character if posted by influential media outlets whose output transcends national borders. Facebook has spread as a means of transnational communication due to its technological affordability, international availability, and user-friendly platform.

The Facebook pages of the Commission and the Parliament are unique fora where the representatives of the two major EU institutions "face" the transnational European public, which enquiries about a spectrum of EU themes, contests or praises different aspects of European integration. The

Parliament has almost 2 500 000 followers and their number is growing steadily, while the Facebook page of the Commission is followed by almost 900 000 users. At the time when I started my research the number of the Facebook followers of the Parliament was just under 2 million people, while the number of people following the Commission's page was around half a million. The evident surge in the number of people that regularly receive EU-related updates through Facebook is a result of the synergy of two tendencies: the rise of interest in EU affairs and the increase in the popularity of social media in general. The members of social media teams regularly update these pages with the news on the activities of the Commission or the Parliament and other EU-related news, often supporting their posts with statements from high-level officials of the two institutions. By means of unmediated communication, the EU institutions are capable of circumventing traditional media channels and disseminating first-hand information to their followers.

Facebook users who follow the pages of the Commission and the Parliament and decide to engage with the content published by the administrators of the two pages usually interact by posting comments or diffusing posts published by the institutions by "liking" or "sharing" them. "Liking" the page of the Parliament or the Commission does not necessarily imply support for these institutions, but is also a way for those who are against or critical of European integration to follow the discussions and posts comments. However, "liking" a comment or a post most probably implies agreement with published content. At the time when this research was conducted, Facebook had not still introduced the possibility of "reactions" and the only options were to "like" or "share" content. As a result, users who disagreed with a statement or an action needed to make an additional effort by posting a comment in order to express difference of opinion. Thus, unlike the supportive part of the public who could express their approval by a single "like" click, those users who were critical had to share comments, thereby amplifying the negative tone of debates.

The Parliament and the Commission try to incite discussions by asking questions and to ensure a quality debate by applying moderation policies, which aim at establishing these pages as safe places for an exchange of opinions, free of trolls and hate speech. Furthermore, these pages are the places of encounter of users with different cultural and national backgrounds, where they virtually gather to discuss EU affairs by posting comments. This is a very diversified public not only in terms of their national origin, but also in

terms of age, education, and profession. However, the element that most likely unites the members of the Facebook public following the pages of the Parliament and the Commission is their interest in the EU or in politics in general. The fact that Facebook users "liked" one or both pages in question does not imply their pro-EU attitude, but presumptively shows their interest in first-hand EU-related information and their potential willingness to engage in a conversation with the representatives of EU institutions. Presumably, this particular public aims at capturing the attention of the two institutions and perceives Facebook as a channel for articulating their views or grievances and reaching out EU policy makers.

As a facilitator of EU-focused debates, Facebook has more advantages with respect to the previous platforms established by EU institutions such as "Debate Europe", since it has become both an everyday communication tool and a source of information (see Kutay, 2014: 77). Therefore, users who follow a Facebook page of an EU institution receive information shared by the administrators by simply checking their newsfeeds and have the opportunity to directly engage in an EU-related discussion, without making the additional effort of visiting a separate debate platform. Moreover, Facebook users mostly participate in discussions using their real identities, which renders the conversation more similar to an offline discussion, where participants do not hide behind invented usernames, as is the case of other online discussion platforms.

4.4 Rhetorical analysis

One of the aims of this study is to investigate how the administrators of the two Facebook pages interacted with their transnational public during the peak moments of the two crises. Thus, I opted for rhetorical analysis as a tool for scrutinising Facebook posts published by the Commission and the Parliament and for identifying the language strategies they used when interacting with the social media public. This section defines rhetoric and rhetorical analysis and elucidates the rationale for employing this particular method for the research purposes of the present study.

Rhetoric has manifold meanings. In mundane discourse, rhetoric is often associated with insincere speeches and half-truths and carries pejorative connotations (Edwards et al. 2004). However, the term

rhetoric may also denote an academic discipline, a technique of using rhetorical instruments in written or oral communication, or the strategic use of language. In this study, I understand rhetoric as the use of language intended to influence an audience. Pursuing this line of reasoning, rhetoric can be defined as "a type of discourse, and rhetorical practices as discursive practices that are strategic in the sense that they are employed to create understandings, endorsing particular views and perspectives while silencing others" (Moisander et al., 2016: 970). As will be demonstrated in Chapter 5, the EU institutions utilized rhetorical strategies in their social media communications in order to legitimise their decisions and policies, hush opposing voices and interpret EU-related issues in line with the institutional interests.

The rhetorical analysis conducted for the purposes of this study is based on the five canons or phases of developing a persuasive speech, first identified by Cicero: invention, disposition, style, memory, and delivery. The tools of classical rhetoric have been selected due to the omnipresence of these five canons in a variety of communication contents, including the digital (Thomas 2007:1). According to Thomas (2007), all modern forms of communication unconsciously reproduce antique rhetorical practices. For instance, modern systems of marketing and advertising heavily rely on the techniques of persuasion identified by classical writers. However, they lack the moral standards and ethical principles that early orators and rhetoricians possessed (Pullman, 2007).

As regards the five canons, the canon of invention refers to the type of arguments that are used to support one's point of view (Corbett, 1999). The sender of a message may attempt to obtain the support and consent of recipients by appealing to them in three different ways: through ethos, pathos or logos (Aristotle, 1996). Ethos refers to the recipient's trust in the sender of the message, based on the sender's credibility or authority. Pathos appeals to the recipient's emotions and mood, while logos appeals to the recipient's common sense and intellect. Although invention is considered the most important canon, other canons also contribute to the effectiveness of a message. The canon of disposition is concerned with the way discourse is organized for rhetorical effect. The canon of style refers to the choice of words, their order, figurative language, and conventions of reading, interpreting, and representing (Leach, 2000). An important element are the tropes, which represent the figures of speech used to shift the meaning of

words from their literal meaning, such as analogies, metaphors, metonymy, hyperbole and irony (Corbett and Connors, 1999). As regards memory canon, discourses occasionally invoke cultural memories shared by authors and their audiences (Lipsitz, 1990). The fifth canon "delivery" referred originally to how effectively the speech was delivered, particularly to the use of voice and gestures.

Rhetorical analysis is a methodological tool which focuses on the way messages are delivered, and with what effects, by looking at different elements of communicative content, such as structural elements, styles of argumentation, and figurative or metaphorical expressions. Rhetorical analysis involves the examination of rhetorical situations, persuasive discourses, and the five rhetorical canons. Rhetorical analysis assumes that texts and symbols participate in the construction of reality, rather than merely reflect it. By using this technique, the researcher identifies strategies used to persuade the public to agree to and support certain opinions, courses of actions, or constructions of reality (Edwards et al. 2004; Majone, 1989). Rhetoric is particularly important in situations where the audience has conflicting goals and values and needs to be convinced to accept certain decisions or policies.

Although rhetoric has its origins in Ancient Greece and Rome, rhetoric analysis has become a widely spread modern research technique which can be applied to various forms of communication such as news content and political speeches (McCroskey, 1993). There is a contemporary revival of the popularity of rhetorical analysis, due to the unprecedented rise in the production of texts and symbols (Burke, 1966) and the expansion of new media that facilitate their massive dissemination (McLuhan, 1964). Moreover, following the "linguistic turn" in the social sciences (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000), the analysis of language is gaining importance.

The need to persuade citizens to adopt a particular course of action is inherent to both politics and policies because there are often several alternative ways for addressing an issue (Majone, 1989). Rhetoric as persuasive communication is crucial for the acceptance of reality constructions, truths and courses of action presented by decision-makers. Thus, this study employed rhetorical analysis as the most appropriate method for the analysis of the posts and comments published by the administrators of the two pages.

During the peak moments of the two crises, the aim of the administrators was to inform as well as to gain support for the lines of action advocated by the EU or to justify counter-crisis measures implemented. However, while the social media team of the Parliament had a rather nonpartisan and informative approach as a result of the lack of mandate to answer political questions, the Commission's team took a more assertive and bold communication modus operandi, seeking to defend EU-devised decisions and policies and garner popular approval.

In order to understand how EU communication officers interact with their audience, the content of their posts was scrutinized in order to determine word choice, style, and structure of the texts. Since the ethical appeal (ethos), the emotional appeal (pathos), and the rational appeal (logos) are the fundamental elements of rhetorical analysis (Leach 2000: 214), the major part of the analysis deals with the identification of rhetorical strategies that tend to appeal to the moral values, emotions or intellect of the monitored Facebook public. However, the canons of disposition, style, memory, and delivery were also briefly analyzed. As Leach (2000:218) points out, it would be neither interesting nor informative to apply each of the cannons to every text one analyses. The findings of the rhetorical analysis of the sampled posts and comments are presented in Chapter 5.

4.5 Interviews

In order to complement and validate the findings obtained through rhetorical analysis, I conducted a series of interviews with EU civil servants who are directly or indirectly in charge of the two Facebook pages. Triangulation—meaning using more than one method to collect data on the same topic—is a well-established practice in social sciences, since it helps obtain richer data and validate research findings. One of the goals of the present study is the explanation of the modus operandi of EU social media teams and their perceptions regarding online Euroscepticism they encounter on daily basis. Since personal impressions and experiences are most effectively detected through a conversation, interviews are an optimal method for identifying EU communicators' perceptions of Euroscepticism, communication strategies and online EU-

focused interactions. Moreover, interviews allow for in-depth and further probing and questioning of respondents based on their responses.

Interviews are apt instruments for eliciting narrative data, which provide better insight into individual experiences and beliefs (Kvale, 1996). Interviews allow the researcher to obtain in-depth information around a topic and to possibly complement the data collected by using another research method. Since events are usually not directly observable, conversing with their actors or eyewitnesses is an effective way for obtaining "insider" information on the events, situations or phenomena that are of interest for a researcher (Kvale, 1996). Moreover, interviewing is a natural mode of interaction as it takes the form of a conversation. It is also a highly interpretative method since interviewees construe phenomena by speaking about them and bring them meaning. This feature of interviews speaks to the interpretivist nature of the present study and its intention to illuminate mainly perceptions.

As concerns the type of interviews used, I opted for semi-structured interviews, as they give flexibility to both interviewers and interviewees (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Semi-structured interviews were conducted relying on a loose structure which consisted of open-ended questions in the form of a topic guide. The topic guide contained a list of key questions and some cues that would spur the respondents to address specific issues. Six semi-structured interviews were conducted with the members of the social media teams of the Parliament and the Commission in the period from September 2017 to February 2018. The interviews lasted around one hour on average and were all conducted in person. I first contacted the heads of social media units of both the Parliament and the Commission via email, as they are the key persons who formulate general social media strategies and monitor the daily management of the institutional Facebook pages. After interviewing these two key persons, I employed the snowballing technique since they suggested other people working in their units who could provide useful insights for my research. Between October 2017 and February 2018, I was a Blue Book trainee in the Research Executive Agency of the Commission, and working for a Brussels-based EU institution facilitated contacts with interviewees. As regards the most important ethical issues— consent and confidentiality—the interviewees accepted to take part in the interview but asked for anonymity. Accordingly, in Chapter 5, when quoting or

paraphrasing their statements, I differentiate interviewees by using numbers (e.g. Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2). Nevertheless, I specify if a person works for the Parliament or the Commission as this distinction is important for the meaningful interpretation of their answers. In addition, all direct quotations have been approved by the interviewees. Moreover, the interviews were audio-recorded and, consequently, partially transcribed. The findings stemming from these interviews are presented in Chapter 5, while Annex 1 provides the list of interviewees specifying their roles as well as dates and locations of interviews.

4.6 Content analysis

In order to identify how the role of the EU in the two crises was assessed and how European integration in more general terms was evaluated by the Facebook public, this study employed content analysis of Facebook commentary. Content analysis can be defined as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2004:18). Due to the proliferation of social media, content analysis has become an extensively used technique for dealing with digital materials in the area of social sciences.

4.6.1 Choice of content analysis

Content analysis is used "to identify and document the attitudes, views, and interests of individuals, small groups, or large and diverse cultural groups" (Drisko and Maschi, 2016:2). Indeed, this study aims at elucidating popular attitudes to European integration in social media and the interpretation of the two crises by the Facebook public active on the pages of the Commission and the Parliament. While research methods such as surveys, statistical analysis or controlled laboratory experiments present opinions, attitudes or behaviours without taking into consideration the specificities of their natural context (Krippendorff, 2004:41-42), an important quality of content analysis is its context sensitivity. In fact, the background against which the sampled online debates emerged is central to the present analysis due to its crises-focused nature. Since the meanings of texts are relative to the particular contexts, discourses, or purposes for which they are used, I dedicated special attention to the description and the analysis of the

context in which these Facebook comments were published. This has been done through a description and analysis of the two crises (Chapter 3), theoretical and empirical analyses of Euroscepticism (Chapter 2) and the illumination of the role of social media in the EU political and institutional order (Chapter 1 and Chapter 5).

According to Krippendorff (2004), one of the key features of content analysis is its capacity to deal with large volumes of data and to classify them around themes. As Weber (1990:12) states, "a central idea in content analysis is that the many words of the text are classified into much fewer categories." As content analysis is a well-established method for dealing with large amounts of data, it is an appropriate methodological tool for dissecting the sample of over 7000 comments, selected for for the purposes of the present research.

In the case of content analysis, a qualitative versus quantitative distinction is often inadequate. Many times, this distinction is inappropriate because the coding of texts frequently entails qualitative coding techniques, while the results are often numerically expressed. Yet, certain interpretative approaches to content analysis do not involve any form of quantification, rather they address the data set in a descriptive and interpretative way. This research relies on qualitative content analysis. Since I read and reread the commentary and manually coded the relevant parts classifying them into concepts related to the research questions, the conducted content analysis was qualitative, although certain characteristics of the text were quantified. The frequency of relevant concepts is treated as a technique for determining the relative importance of specific content.

Qualitative content analysis is assessed by copious scholars as an optimal method for describing meaning in communications (Mayring, 2004; Morgan, 1993; Sandelowski, 2000). Sandelowski (2000:338) argues that qualitative content analysis is the least interpretative of all forms of qualitative research "in that there is no mandate to represent the data in any other form but their own." However, in addition to explicit meanings, this study addressed latent content, inasmuch as Facebook comments take the shape of colloquial speech, which inevitably contains double meanings, irony or sarcasm. The researcher who

scrutinizes this type of data has to occasionally move beyond manifest, literal meaning by interpreting the context and the gestalt of communication. Context is the essential element for understanding the meaning of communicative contents, whose interpretation depends heavily on the situational locus where these contents originated. Moreover, this analysis, as most qualitative content analyses, provides numerous links back to the primary data in order to ensure credibility and reliability.

4.6.2 Data collection and sampling

Sampling is necessary for determining the textual units that are the most likely to answer to a research question. The sample used for this study flows from research questions, and is thus a relevance sample or purposive sample (Riffe et al., 1998:86). According to Drisko and Maschi (2015:98), "purposive sampling is employed to raise awareness, provide new perspectives, or provide descriptions of events, beliefs, and actions." Purposive sampling is, hence, an apt sampling technique for the present research, since this study does address a novel phenomenon: attitudes towards the EU among a recently formed transnational group that "gathers" in social media forums in the situation of the two crises, which have been unprecedented in many ways. However, as this study opted for purposive sample selection, it claims no transferability or generalization to a larger group with different characteristics.

Since purposive sampling is often a multistage process (Krippendorff, 2004:119), the amount of initially downloaded raw textual data was gradually reduced to their most relevant components for tackling the research problem at hand. The resulting corpus of commentary is not intended to be representative of the group of comments, but to contain the most informative parts of the large volumes of data. Logically, the comment threads under the posts tackling crises-related issues were likely to be dominantly dealing with the two crises and the role of the EU in their outbreak, evolution and resolution. Since social media are prone to generating large amount of reactions, mostly comments, "filtering" of raw data is essential in order to obtain the most appropriate and informative sample for the study's purpose.

Initially, the time framework of my analysis was determined and the relevant posts and comments were downloaded. The data were extracted using a Facebook application "Netvizz"[22], which facilitated the retrieval of Facebook contents. After the selection of posts addressing the Greek third bailout and the migration crisis, the Facebook commentary published in reaction to the contents of these posts was downloaded. Furthermore, I used a qualitative research software Atlas.ti in order to code the large quantity of downloaded comments. Before using Atlas.ti, I completed a brief course which provided me with necessary knowledge of the software.

As concerns the time frame of the analysis, the apex of the Greek crisis occurred between the end of June 2015 and mid-July 2015. As explained in Chapter 3, at the end of June 2015 the Greek government failed to pay a tranche of its debt and withdrew from negotiations with the Troika, announcing a referendum on the Troika's new bailout proposal. The referendum was held on July 5, and the Greek authorities accepted the deal proposed by their creditors in mid-July, although the majority of the Greek electorate voted against it. Hence, the administrators of the two Facebook pages almost all posts dealing with the third Greek bailout published during these weeks. As a result, I downloaded 11 posts addressing the Greek question and 1803 respective comments from the Facebook page of the Parliament, and 7 posts and 1751 comments from the Facebook page of the Commission. These posts were published in the period between June 28 and July 17 2015. The Parliament published 36 posts which provoked the Facebook followers to write 6584 comments, while the most commented post was the one on the EP plenary on Greece (1168 comments). In addition to the Greek crisis, the posts addressed the following topics: youth, gender equality, TTIP, data protection, migration, environment, etc. On the other hand, the Commission published 24 Facebook posts in total, meaning that almost a third of the posts addressed the crisis in Greece. These posts generated 2679 comments, while the most commented post was a post "Greece is Europe, Europe is Greece", which contained a link to a press conference by Jean-Claude Juncker (346 comments). Other topics covered by the Commission's posts were: TTIP negotiations, the Energy Union, the end of roaming charges, new policy proposals, etc. Therefore, these numbers illustrate the of salience of

[22]Netvizz is a tool that extracts data from different sections of the Facebook platform (groups, pages, search) for research purposes. File outputs can be easily analyzed in standard software.

crisis communication and its prevalence in comparison to other topics. Moreover, the posts that addressed the negotiations on the Greek debt received the largest number of comments and reactions.

Unlike the Greek crisis which was brief and intense, the migration crisis lasted longer and varied in intensity. As explained in Chapter 3, the critical moments of the migration crisis happened between August and October 2015. During this period the largest number of asylum seekers arrived in Europe and, consequently, the unprecedented influx of people generated a crisis of migration management at both national and EU levels. This time period saw several important events: Germany announced their willingness to accept all Syrian refugee arrivals; the EU program for refugee redistribution among member states was adopted and the first refugees reallocated; and several EU member states overtly protested against the redistribution scheme and/or started building fences along borders with both EU and non-EU countries in order to prevent the transit of migrants through their territories. Thus, I selected the posts dealing with the migration crisis which were published between August 5 and October 26 2015. The Commission was much more active in terms of Facebook interactions due to its leading role in crisis management and a particularly high profile of president Juncker, who was cited multiple times by the administrators of the Commission's Facebook page. Therefore, I selected 37 posts from the Commission's page and 1721 comments published as reactions to these posts, and 13 posts from the Parliament's page and 1805 respective comments. During the aforementioned period, the Parliament published 117 posts which generated 19828 comments. Other posts tackled the following themes: health, environment, various international days, agriculture, economic and monetary issues, historical events, etc. On the other hand, the Commission published 122 posts, so almost a third of the total number of posts addressed the topics related to the migration crisis. As reaction to these posts, the Facebook public published 6086 comments in total. Other topics covered by the Commission's posts were: economic and monetary policies, trade and investment strategies, environment, youth policies, social innovation, various contests, holidays, etc. As already highlighted, the intensity of crisis-related communication by the Commission was higher than the Parliament's. However, during one of the interviews I conducted, a communication officer from the

Parliament revealed that they intentionally decreased the frequency of posts dealing with the migration crisis due to an enormous number of xenophobic and racist comments.

I made a rough selection by discarding comments deemed as spam and those in languages other than English, Italian, French, Spanish, and Serbo-Croatian (approximately 15 percent of the comments). Although the administrators of the two pages allowed comments in all languages, the prevalent language of the discussions was English. Moreover, the practice of the two institutions to update the two transnational pages with content almost exclusively in this language has propelled the establishment of English as the common language of the Facebook discussions analysed. Thus, the omission of comments in other languages did not distort the results of the analysis to a significant extent.

Since English has become a modern lingua franca, one can argue that the predominance of English enhances the transnationality of the debates. Although the prevalence of English disincentivizes non-English speaking individuals from contributing to these debates, English is the optimal language choice in the absence of a common European language. However, the monitoring of the two pages revealed that the administrators tended to answer questions in the language the questions were asked. Moreover, a translation tool, "Bing", has been integrated in the Facebook platform, facilitating discussions between users speaking different languages. Although "Bing" translates more accurately for some languages than for others, it is certainly an important tool for more inclusive and diversified debates.

It should be noted that Facebook pages include not only texts (such as posts or comments), but also photos, videos and hyperlinks. The administrators of the Facebook pages of the Parliament and the Commission consistently complemented textual content with non-textual elements, whereas their Facebook followers mostly post textual comments and rarely add any multimedia content. Therefore, I decided to code only textual content and focus on the verbal interactions between EU institutions and their Facebook followers. This decision was motivated by the fact that multimedia elements mostly featured in the posts and the comments of the two institutions—and rarely in citizens' responses— and served as an

adjunct to the main body of a post. The coding of the accompanying content would have hindered the content analysis and rendered the coding process unnecessarily complex.

In order to ensure respectful conversations, the two institutions have developed moderation policies, which mainly entail the removal of spam, uncivilized and offensive comments, and hate speech. Notwithstanding the moderation policies, it was evident throughout the analysis that the rules were not consistently applied and that spam, trolls, and inappropriate statements were still evident in the commentary. This is likely due to the large number of comments and the lack of human resources to monitor the ever-increasing number of comments. However, comments that contain anti-EU or critical opinions on the EU or one of the institutions are not censored by the administrators as long as they are not offensive, discriminatory or contain obscene language. This demonstrates that these fora are liberal and permissive spaces for debate, which respect the diversity of opinions.

As concerns the set-up of regular activities on the Facebook page on the Parliament, its social media team usually publishes between 2 and 4 posts per day. On the other hand, the Commission is slightly less prolific and publishes 2 posts a day on average. However, as we could see from the data presented above, the Commission used to be very active during the peak of the migration crisis and updated its Facebook page more often than the Parliament did. Most of the published by the social media teams address political and currently relevant issues, whereas a smaller portion of posts speaks about more general cultural topics, public holidays, international days, or similar. Irrespective of the topic they address, all posts have the same structural pattern: posts consist of either a photo or a video, and a short text description, which complements the visual element. The textual part contains minimum information on a recent or currently unfolding event or matter of public concern, usually by referring to the activity of the Parliament and the Commission, and a link to additional information. Moreover, a considerable portion of posts also asks for public feedback, usually by posing a question to incite the discussion.

4.6.3 Coding technique and coding scheme

Content analysis may use either deductive, a priori coding, or inductive coding techniques, or a combination of both techniques. This study employs both techniques: first, a preliminary coding list was

outlined by using previous work and theory. In respect of the attitudes towards European integration, the extensive scholarly work generated theoretical contemplations as well as empirical studies (see Chapter 2). As discussed previously, I decided to use a coding scheme which had been applied to a set of data with similar characteristics and which had helped in answering analogous research questions. However, since the two crises are fairly recent phenomena, there were no well-established coding schemes which could effectively capture important concepts in the crisis-focused debates. As a result, I created a preliminary list of codes that I tested on a part of the sample and then revised it, using the insights obtained from the data. When devising a set of crisis-related codes, I relied on the scholarship, the existing facts about the two crises, the main political milestones, and the way these two critical periods have been interpreted by the media. After developing a preliminary coding list based on the available literature, empirical data and the media discourse, it was necessary to become completely familiar with the data set by "immersing" myself in the data (Miles and Huberman, 1984). Only after having obtained in-depth knowledge of the data did I revise the code book by adding new categories and modifying the existing ones. The coding process was time-consuming, since it required multiple revisions of codes and review of the material in order to effectively condense the meaning of frequently occurring themes into appropriate codes.

Coding units are units that are used for recording of different categories which are relevant for an analysis. Forming units makes the link between sampling and the coding process. Researchers define recording units—often called "quotations"—in order to make larger texts more manageable and to identify the relevant parts of texts. The label attributed to a recording unit is a code name (Weber, 1990). The frequency of certain codes is used to show the salience of relevant concepts or their relative importance in comparison to other concepts. In the present study, the unit of analysis is a relevant Facebook comment published in a thread under the selected posts. Within this unit of analysis, I differentiate the units of coding or, in other words, "quasi-sentences" containing statements associated with the selected categories. When identifying comments that answered the questions regarding the different forms of EU polity, I coded the comments that contained evaluations of European integration or the EU. Evaluations are

statements that appraise the worth of something. Evaluation can be positive or negative, depending on adjectives or verbs used to qualify the object of evaluation.

The coding scheme I use in order to identify different forms of EU polity evaluation is borrowed from De Wilde et al. (2013). Their scheme draws on Morgan's (2005) three dimensions of justifications for European integration: the principle of integration, the institutional and constitutional set up, and future trajectories of integration. According to Morgan (2005), both supporters and opponents of European integration ground their arguments on the following three questions: Why should we support or oppose the principle of European integration? Why is the institutional and constitutional design of the EU appropriate/inappropriate? What future avenues for the EU are desirable or feasible?

The principle of integration concerns the dilemma whether European states are better off cooperating and pooling sovereignty in certain areas, or acting as independent, fully sovereign Westphalian states, which resist the currents of globalization. While the principle of integration is an integral category, the categories "the EU current set-up" and "the future of the European project" are divided in sub-categories by using three dimensions of integration: level, scope and inclusiveness. Lindberg and Scheingold (1970) introduced the differentiation between the level and the scope of integration. The level of integration concerns EU powers in relation to the member states, EU decision-making procedures, and the distribution of powers among member states within the EU framework. For instance, EU polity evaluations address the level of integration if they claim that the European Parliament has insufficient power (current EU set-up-level-negative) or advocate a federal EU (future EU set-up-level-positive). The scope of integration regards policy fields that the EU should regulate and have competences in. As an illustration, one can praise the euro as a generator of prosperity (current EU set-up-scope-positive) or advocate regression towards a mere common market (future of integration-scope-negative). Moreover, De Wilde and colleagues (2013) add a third category named "inclusiveness", which refers to different groups of people that are affected by EU decisions and (un)represented at the EU level. These groups include nations, minorities, young people, or even very general categories such as "ordinary people."

In order to classify a statement as an EU polity evaluation it has to address at least one of these variables: the principle of European integration, the institutional set up or the project of integration. The variable "principle of integration" can have three values: positive, negative or not available. The other two variables "institutional set up of the EU" and "project of integration" can have following values: level – positive, level – negative, scope – positive, scope – negative, inclusiveness – positive, inclusiveness – negative, and not available (NA).

Table 4.1: Typology of EU polity evaluation

		Principle of Integration			
		Positive		Negative	
		EU Polity			
		Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
Project of Integration	Positive	Affirmative European	Alter-European	–	–
	Negative	Status Quo	Eurocritical	Pragmatic	Anti-European

Source: De Wilde et al. (2013)

Six types of EU polity evaluations can be derived by combining the three above mentioned variables: the principle of integration, the current set-up, and the future of integration. Affirmative European evaluations are characterized by positive evaluations of the principle of integration and/or the current set-up and/or the future of integration and, thus, completely devoid of negative assessments of European integration. Anti-European evaluations lie on the opposite side of the spectrum and denounce all three dimensions of European integration. Status-quo evaluations positively assess the principle of integration and the current institutional set up, while rejecting further integration. Eurocritical statements are in favour of European integration in principle, but they oppose both the current institutional set up and further integration. Pragmatic statements are those which denounce the principle of integration, while

supporting the current institutional set up. Although this kind of position towards European integration may seem paradoxical, De Wilde et al. (2013:14) explain that people who hold these kinds of views usually see the EU as undesirable in principle, but—since it has been already created—its dissolution might be too costly or almost unfeasible. However, no pragmatic EU polity evaluations were found in the Facebook comments sampled, and therefore this category was excluded from the findings. Alter-European evaluations disapprove the current EU institutional set up, while positively assessing the future of the project of European integration. For instance, the holders of Alter-European views would argue that the current EU set-up is insufficiently democratic, and that the EU needs to take account of the popular voice to a greater extent and enhance its democratic credentials in the future.

EU polity evaluations rarely address all three of these dimensions concurrently, rather one or two of them. Thus, another category— "diffuse Eurosceptic evaluations"—was introduced in order to put these underspecified statements under an umbrella term. Diffuse Eurosceptic evaluations fail to provide fully informative insights into popular preferences for future integration or elaborate views on the current state of affairs, and offer a limited understanding of Eurosceptic attitudes. Nevertheless, these evaluations do provide valuable input regarding popular attitudes towards some aspects of European integration: for instance, how citizens perceive the democratic qualities of the current EU institutional set-up or whether they are in favour of further enlargement. Moreover, it would be unrealistic to expect extensive elaborations of their viewpoints on EU affairs from citizens, bearing in mind the nature of the discussion forum as well as the deficit in EU-related information and knowledge.

De Wilde et al. (2013:35) complement their coding scheme with justifications of worth. This additional layer provides a more comprehensive understanding of underlying arguments for evaluations. Justifications allow for a better comprehension of the sources of Euroscepticism—revealing the most prominent factors that fuel Eurosceptic attitudes—as well as of rationales for EU-supportive attitudes. Morgan (2005:3) highlights the importance of justification for European integration:

> Proponents of European integration need to pay more attention to the fundamental question posed by eurosceptics: What is the justification for European political

> integration? Unless this question can be answered satisfactorily, there is no good reason for citizens to lend their support to parties, governments, and political leaders who favour European political integration.

According to De Wilde et al. (2013), EU legitimacy can be defended or contested based on the following justifications: 1) the EU increases/decreases democracy; 2) the EU contributes to the conservation/destruction of European cultural heritage and shared values; 3) European integration is necessary in order to effectively deal with modern challenges/is redundant; 4) European integration enhances/hinders economic prosperity; 5) the EU contributes/does not contribute to safety against internal or external threats.

Democracy, culture, efficiency, economic prosperity, and safety are crucial public goods in all modern Western societies, and, therefore, it is important to find out if the process of European integration has been assessed as beneficial or detrimental to these six pillars of the Western paradigm of the state. However, the EU is not a state and, at least for the moment, federalist lines of thoughts have lost prominence due to a series of predicaments the EU has faced. The fact that citizens assess the EU based on these justifications of worth, traditionally attributed to the state, demonstrates that the EU has evolved into a political entity that its citizens perceive as state-like, and expect EU authorities to ensure the provision of essential public goods. However, the EU still lacks competences to regulate large portions of these areas of public interest or has to co-decide with national authorities.

The other part of the coding scheme was developed in order to answer three questions regarding the nature of the Greek and migration crisis and the role of the EU in them. The questions are the following:

1) How was the role of the EU evaluated in these specific contexts?
2) What were the main reasons for the crises were and what was the best solution according to the contributors to these discussions?
3) How were different type of actors (EU, member states' and other) were evaluated in these discussions?

As previously explained, the coding scheme for this segment of the study was initially developed based on the analysis of the nature and development of the two crisis that has been done in the Chapter 3. Consequently, it was tested on a small sample of comments and then adjusted in order to match the frequent concepts featuring in the selected debates.

Different evaluations of the EU response to the Greek crisis have been summarized in six categories:

1) Ineffective;
2) Undemocratic;
1) Unfair towards Greece;
3) Unfair towards other member states;
4) Successful;
5) Other.

Many commentators put forward their views regarding the main reasons for the Greek crisis. These reasons were classified into the following categories:

1) German lack of solidarity and imperial aspirations;
2) Greek structural deficiencies;
3) Euro system and/or policies of the ECB;
4) Shared responsibility between Greece and the EU;
5) Misconduct of private financial actors;
6) Other.

Facebook users interacting with the two institutions were very active in proposing different mechanisms for the resolution of the crisis. These different solutions to the crisis were clustered into different categories:

1) Debt relief/restructuring;
2) Deeper integration of EU member states;
3) EU control over Greece;
4) Extensive reforms in Greece;
5) Greek repayment of debts;
6) Grexit from the EU;
7) Grexit from the Eurozone;
8) Growth stimulus and/or abolition of austerity measures;
9) New loan to Greece;
10) Suspension of financial assistance to Greece;
11) Other.

The evaluations of the EU response to the migration crisis in the sampled debates can be summarized by using the following adjectives:

1) Harmful to European culture and identity;
2) Ineffective;
3) Inhuman towards migrants;
4) Successful and efficient;
5) Undemocratic;
6) Unfair towards EU citizens;
7) Other.

The escalation of the migration crisis in Europe was attributed to the following factors:

1) Military involvement of some EU countries in war zones;
2) Decisions of the German government regarding migration;
3) National responses without a common perspective;
4) US military involvement in war zones;
5) Other.

However, the Facebook public did not only express their views of the culprits, but also of the mechanisms for the resolution of the crisis:

1) Australian model of asylum policy;
2) Refusal of entrance to migrants and/or their deportation;
3) EU military, peacekeeping or humanitarian actions in war zones;
4) Redistribution of refugees to extra European countries;
5) Funding of refugee camps in neighbouring countries;
6) Joint EU approach to the crisis management;
7) Accommodation of refugees only by certain member states;
8) Help for real refugees;
9) Cessation of EU member states' involvement in war zones;
10) Other.

In order to find out how different actors were framed in the sampled debates, I coded every comment where an individual actor was mentioned and recorded if he/she was framed in positive, negative or neutral terms. The actors were classified in three categories:

1. EU actors,
2. EU member state actors,
3. Other actors

4.7 Reporting of findings

The data—Facebook comments, Facebook posts and interview transcripts—were analysed by using the thematic analysis, where all the data was examined in order to identify the common issues that recur, and identify the main themes that summarise the views.

As regards the coding, the findings are presented in a narrative manner by identifying the core themes, summarizing how and to what extent these themes were addressed by the commentators and using quotations in order to show how the original views were expressed and portrayed. Moreover, in order to facilitate navigation among and understanding of the numerous categories dealing both with the attitudes towards the EU and the two crises, the findings are also presented by using charts, which provide the frequency statistics and the numerical proportions of different categories. According to Schreier (2012), using frequencies to present the results of qualitative content analysis is helpful as these statistics show the relative prevalence of each category. However, since these frequencies are derived from a limited sample, they are not representative of larger samples.

4.8 Limitations

The research design presented on the previous pages has, as all designs do, some limitations. As concerns the content analysis, due to the lack of additional funding, it was not possible to hire other coders to code a sample of more than 7000 comments. Thus, the absence of an intercoder reliability test may raise doubts about the reliability and the replicability of the findings. However, I rigorously applied the coding scheme to the selected sample and reviewed the posts and comments several times in order to minimize the occurrence of mistakes. I returned to the data set many times in order to ensure that codes, themes, explanations, interpretations and conclusions reflect the nature of the phenomenon being investigated. In addition, a colleague of mine coded a small number of comments in order to ensure there was a congruence check whether we both ascribed the same codes to quotations.

Moreover, interviews—as well as qualitative research more broadly—are often criticized for being biased, descriptive, unsystematic, difficult to replicate or not generalizable. However, interviews are far from biased and unsystematic. In this thesis, I used excerpts from qualitative interviews to illustrate a particular view or to support an argument, but these examples and illustrations were not random, but systematically singled out after a detailed analysis of the data using theoretical reasoning. Interviews provide us with the empathetic understanding of the world seen through the eyes of the actual actors.

However, it is true that an intrinsic trait of qualitative interviews is their unreplicability since they are social interactions that include many elements that determine their outcome such as place and context where an interview takes place or power relations between an interviewer and an interviewee (Crow and Pope, 2008). Furthermore, rhetorical analysis is a highly interpretative and discursive method, since it involves creating arguments about arguments. However, language is not a transparent means, but requires interpretation within a context and time frame. Nevertheless, when conducting the rhetorical analysis, I used well established rhetorical tools and excerpts from the posts and comments in other to support my interpretations.

Another method that could have been used for the analysis of Facebook posts of the Parliament and the Commission is critical discourse analysis (CDA). According to Wodak (2006:53), critical discourse analysis is "fundamentally interested in analyzing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control when these are manifested in language. In other words, CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, constituted, and legitimized by language use." CDA and rhetorical analysis often overlap since they both look at purpose, situation, genre, diction, and style as well as at the interplay between power and language. Rhetoric has also been concerned with the power of spoken and written discourses and the ways in which language can be used to persuade audiences about important public issues. Moreover, they are both concerned with material, social, historical, and cultural context. Rhetoricians are strongly interested in the context since the persuasiveness of any piece of discourse is highly dependent on the audience, purpose, and setting in which it is deployed. Similarly, CDA focuses on the connection of the text with broader ideas in history, society and politics.

However, since my research question is concerned with communication strategies that are used by the web communication teams of the Parliament and the Commission during the critical moments for the process of European integration, I opted for rhetorical analysis due to its stronger focus on the strategic use of language, discourse in argumentation and persuasion. My aim has been to identify language strategies rather than to look at power relations, often defined as abuse and dominance in CDA literature (e.g.Van Dijk, 2015). Moreover, the Facebook pages of the Commission and the Parliament are structured mostly as

"debate tables", where the communication officers post information and moderate the discussion, but everybody is free to join and post a comment as long as they respect moderation policies, which are defined in quite reasonable terms (see section 5.4). Despite undeniable supremacy of the institutions that are owners and managers of the two Facebook pages, the fact there is a two-way communication between the institutions and their followers does add an egalitarian "touch" to these platforms.

Chapter 5

Top-down approach to the public contestation of European integration in social media

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the rhetorical strategies utilized by the social media teams of the Commission and the Parliament in Facebook interactions with their public, as identified in the textual analysis, as well as the findings of semi-structured interviews with the members of these social media teams. Since Chapter 6 will highlight strong dissatisfaction and frustration with the EU and its policies as evident in Facebook debates, the present chapter describes the rhetorical strategies EU institutions use to strengthen public legitimation for their decisions, neutralise negative popular sentiments and underline affective ties among Europeans. By reading and re-reading Facebook posts and comments of the Commission and the Parliament, I singled out recurrent features in texts used to address popular resistance and gain approval for counter-crisis measures. To this end, the present study employs rhetorical analysis, a methodological tool designed for investigating the strategic use of language. In addition to the analysis of the Facebook posts of the Parliament and the Commission, six semi-structured interviews were conducted with communication practitioners employed by these two institutions. All interviewees are EU civil servants directly or indirectly in charge of the two Facebook pages that form the object of this study. The six interviewees were asked a

set of questions in order to discover the strategy behind online interactions with citizens and their insights regarding the contestation of European integration among ordinary citizens on social media. The interview material is used to supplement and corroborate or challenge the evidence produced from the rhetorical analysis. Details regarding the research design and the choice of methodological tools are discussed in Chapter 4.

The present chapter is organised as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of EU communication activities—from initial, rather limited communication campaigns to fully-fledged communication policies. Section 3 presents the findings of the rhetorical analysis applied to Facebook posts of the Parliament and the Commission during the Greek and the migration crises. Section 3 seeks to triangulate the findings obtained through rhetorical and content analyses by presenting the data received from the interviewees and interpreting these insights. Section 4 provides concluding remarks on the online activities of EU communicators and the relation between these activities and online Euroscepticism.

5.2 Overview of EU communication policies

If we assume that organizational survival ultimately depends on the legitimacy granted by key constituencies (Di Maggio and Powell, 1983; Meyer and Rowan, 1977), both national and supranational elites involved in European integration should have incentives to engage in legitimation efforts. The construction of legitimacy is a two-sided process: not only do constituencies grant legitimacy to governmental institutions, but governmental actors also engage in active legitimation efforts (Barker, 2001; Weber, 1978). Politicization thus "drives organizations to engage in strategic communication in order to manage legitimacy" (Ecker-Ehrhardt, 2017). In the complex arena of European multi-level governance, various supranational, national and partisan actors face different constituencies with varying demands, while synchronically shaping the authoritative discourse. Since supranational actors are those who have most to lose if European integration slows or even falters, it is expected that EU institutions will engage in strategic communication in order to embed proper legitimacy, trust and authority.

Despite the fact that the letter of the Treaties does not contain any specific provisions about information and communication policy, it is generally accepted that the EU has a duty to inform its citizens about supranational policies and decisions (Morganti and Audenhove, 2012). However, stimulating public attention and involving citizens in supranational decision-making has not always been considered desirable or prioritized. When Emanuelle Gazzo founded a news service "Agence Europe" in 1954, Jean Monnet asked for the project to be ended immediately. Monnet opted for a technocratic approach to European integration, which kept citizens distant and uninvolved, ensuring a smooth elite-driven development of the European project and avoiding the public contestation and politicisation of quantum leaps into further supranational integration.

Although the founding father of the European Communities sought to insulate them against public attention, the first steps towards connecting the supranational institutions with citizens were taken in the 1970s (Terra, 2010). At that time, the Commission's Directorate General for Information produced information programmes, while the Parliament passed resolutions and authored reports on the imperative to connect with European citizens via informing them on the process of European integration. For instance, the 1975 information programme of the Commission contains the earliest signs of concerns related to the importance of informed public opinion for the process of European integration: "Europe cannot build itself without its citizens, and therefore cannot be built with ignorance or indifference" (EC, 1975: 2). Furthermore, in the 1980s the main target of information campaigns of the EC was the business sector, since the launching of a single market was a priority at that time, and specialised economic information was considered crucial for the success of this major integrative step (Terra, 2010). Overall, during the 1970s and 1980s information and communication activities were dominantly directed to and tailored for experts in different areas of integration, who were expected to act as multipliers and spread information across the different echelons of European societies.

As EU competences expanded significantly throughout decades, this "arcane" approach had to be abandoned; the Santer Commission, which took office in 1995, ushered in a new, more transparent and interactive approach (Bruggemann, 2005). However, these pioneering initiatives faced certain obstacles. On

the one hand, they were hindered by citizens' disinterest, apathy and indifference to EU affairs, cultivated for decades by the EU itself. On the other hand, the idiosyncratic character of the European project—such as its multilevel setup and polycentric organization of governance—hampered the elucidation of its structure and policies to the general public.

The primary means of connecting with the general public was the so-called Prince program "Priority Information Programs for the Citizens of Europe." The Prince programs were initiated in the second half of the 90s and included a myriad of topics such as the internal market ("Citizens First"), the Amsterdam Treaty and institutional reform ("Building Europe Together"), the Euro, "big-bang" enlargement, the future of the European Union, the "Area of Freedom, Security and Justice" and "the Role of the European Union in the World." These campaigns were designed to raise public awareness about the evolution of EU policies and the EU's set-up, emphasising the benefits offered to ordinary citizens and providing them with the necessary information to profit from possibilities ushered in by "deeper" and "wider" European integration.

The rejection of the Constitutional Treaty in 2005 spurred numerous institutional and inter-institutional activities, debates, and action plans in order to prioritize the information and communication policy and bridge the alarming gap between the EU and its citizens (Valentini and Nesti, 2010). The "no" vote of two traditionally Europhile founding member states, France and the Netherlands, resonated across Europe, undermining EU legitimacy. Shortly after the referendums, the European Council decided to postpone the ratification of the Treaty and announced a "period of reflection" —a period of wide public debate on the future of European integration involving European institutions, member states, national parliaments, political parties, civil society and citizens.

During this period, a prominent role was given to the Commission, which acted as a facilitator of these debates. In response to the new order of priorities, Margot Wallström was appointed as the new Commissioner for communication. Since this portfolio had not existed prior to the establishment of the first Barroso Commission, its introduction was a clear sign of the prioritization of communication activities following the Treaty rejection. In July 2005, Commissioner Wallström presented the Plan-D – for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate, which aimed to expand and modernize EU information and

communication activities. Consequently, in 2006, the Commission published the White Paper on a European Communication Policy, which placed particular emphasis on multilevel coordination and collaboration between EU institutions, national, regional and local authorities, European political parties, and civil society organizations, in the communication of EU issues. However, the three main institutions (Commission, Parliament, and Council) implemented their information and communication policies more or less autonomously, employing various instruments and strategies and ensuring only sporadic coordination.

Internet proliferation has drastically improved the transparency of EU decision-making, notably after the creation of the EUROPA website in 1995 (Michailidou, 2008). Furthermore, the EU, and particularly the Commission, has launched several initiatives in order to engage citizens online: an online discussion forum on the future of Europe in the light of the Constitutional Debate called "Futurum" (Wodak and Wright, 2006), its successor "Debate Europe," and its most recent version, "Debating Europe" (Cmeciu and Cmeciu, 2014). The purpose of these platforms has been to host and encourage debates among citizens, EU politicians and experts. Additionally, in 2008 EU Tube was launched, with the intention to raise awareness of EU issues and inform citizens via a variation on the popular platform YouTube.

The initiatives outlined have yielded rather unsatisfactory results, mainly due to limited public participation. Yet the social network sites of EU institutions and their officials, on the other hand, have evolved into densely populated arenas for political discussion, far surpassing the aforementioned discussion platforms in terms of numbers of contributors. EU institutions use social media for the distribution of official announcements, statements, and press releases, for the promotion of EU policies, as well as for interaction with the public (Oberer and Erkollar, 2012). The European Parliament has a very extensive network of social media which includes Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google +, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Flickr, Instagram, EP Newshub and Reddit. Moreover, the webpage "European Parliament—Social Media at a Glance" features consistent content updates published across all the social media pages of the Parliament. The European Commission is present on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Google+, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram and Storify. However, their Facebook pages are the most important and have the

largest following when compared to the other accounts. Thus, these pages, as quintessential examples of EU social media activities, will be analysed in the remaining part of the chapter.

5.3 Rhetorical analysis of EU institutions' communication on Facebook

In order to understand how the communicators from the two EU institutions interact with their Facebook audience, I considered both the content of their posts as well as the choice of vocabulary, style and structure of the texts. As a whole, these textual elements are fashioned in a way that mobilizes the audience. I looked for evidence of the three types of persuasive genres and canons of rhetoric in the sampled Facebook posts. As explained in Chapter 4, the canon of invention includes ethical appeal (ethos), emotional appeal (pathos), and rational appeal (logos). Since these three types of appeal are the "essential ingredients" of rhetorical analysis (Leach 2000: 214), the major part of the present analysis focuses on the identification of rhetorical strategies that appeal to the three "modes of persuasion" introduced by Aristotle's work— ethos, pathos or logos. This study also includes a brief analysis of the canons of disposition, style, and memory. In order to identify rhetorical strategies related to canon disposition, I looked at the organization of the posts and comments, and how this was related to the argument presented. With regards to style, I focused on word choice, expressions, metaphors, irony, and sarcasm, as employed by the communication teams of the Parliament and the Commission. Moreover, I looked at the way shared cultural memories were conveyed in the messages directed to the Facebook audience. The canon "delivery" was omitted from this analysis, since this canon mainly refers to oral forms of communication.

5.3.1 Greek crisis

This section presents the analysis of the Facebook posts published on the pages of the Parliament and the Commission during the peak period of the Greek crisis in 2015. The overall finding from the analysis was that communication officers of EU institutions tend to reframe controversial issues by presenting them in a technical and bureaucratic manner, which often provokes emotional reactions among citizens. This primarily manifested in invoking special norms of rationality, law, or contracts as references of authority

and justifications for unpopular measures. Examining the sampled set of Facebook posts related to the Greek crisis, I observed that EU communication officers mainly used rhetorical devices that appealed to the recipients' logos. For instance, the Greek debt was conceptualized as a purely economic question and the Commission's proposed solution was presented as the most appropriate means to urgently act upon the debt crisis by preventing the Greek default, and to stabilize the economy of Greece in the long run by addressing its structural issues. The solution proposed by the Commission was framed as fully beneficial for Greece and its citizens, while the fears of additional austerity measures were tried to be neutralized by extensive explanations of the new Troika's proposal for Greece.

The pragmatic and procedural legitimacy of EU decisions were defended by meticulously described cost-benefit calculations and economically rational arguments. By outlining these granular rationales, EU institutions—in a neofunctionalist fashion—sought to shift attention from emotionally sensitive questions to more technical, economic issues. In the online contributions of the Commission's communication officers, the EU's approach to the Greek crisis was portrayed as a rational choice based on expert knowledge and described in a precise and detailed manner. However, this strategy may have additionally antagonised some of the Facebook users interacting with EU institutions, as this approach to the Greek question could be seen as too technocratic and technical to be understood by an average citizen with limited knowledge on the specific macroeconomic issues the social media teams referenced. Highly technical communication content may inhibit the discussion of alternative courses of action, as a large portion of citizens are not likely to understand some of technicalities; therefore, they choose to simply oppose the EU or its policies as a matter of principle. Moreover, during a month of an intense debate on the Greek debt, the Commission' Facebook posts reiterated several times that the Greek government had withdrawn from negotiations with Troika, exacerbating in this way the severity of the situation and causing uncertainty. This strategy was presumably used to shift responsibility from the EU and its actors, who were held responsible for the Greek crisis by some of the commentators.

The Facebook posts published by the Commission's Social Media Team were rather brief and contained links to their website that provided more extensive information on the crisis and negotiations

between Greek authorities and the Troika. However, when the deal was finally achieved, the Commission presented it as its own accomplishment:

> The Commission mobilises additional €35 billion support for #Greece. President Jean-Claude Juncker said: “After at times painstaking months of negotiations, we now need to look to the future. This new start for jobs and growth is the Commission’s contribution. I trust the European Parliament and Member States will play their part so we can unlock the money swiftly. More information: http://europa.eu/!Xw96xQ (Facebook page of the Commission, 15/07/2015)

President Juncker and Vice-President Dombrovskis were frequently cited in the posts and comments published by the Commission during the key moments of the Greek crisis.

When replying to commentators who lamented the democratic deficit of the EU, the Social Media Team explained the procedures and mechanisms that ensure the democratic legitimacy of the Union extensively:

> Hi Victor Rodriguez, thanks for your comment. The quote actually reads: "President Juncker is consulting with the democratically elected leaders of the other 18 Eurozone members" (Greece being the other one out of the 19-member euro area: http://europa.eu/!bR33BR). A new team of 28 Commissioners (one from each EU Member State) is appointed every five years. The first step is electing a President. The European Council (heads of state/government of EU Member States) proposes a candidate to become President of the Commission to the European Parliament. The Commission President is then elected by the European Parliament by a majority of its MEPs (at least 376 out of 751 votes). Following this election, the President-elect (not yet 'President') selects the 27 other members of the Commission on the basis of the suggestions made by Member States. This list of Commissioners-designate (not yet 'Commissioners') has to be agreed between the President-elect and the Council. The Commissioners-designate are then assessed directly by the European Parliament committees in 'hearings'. Only then – having received the full consent of the European Parliament for both the President AND Commissioners – does the European Commission as a whole come into being. […] (Facebook page of the Commission, 06/07/2015)

The Social Media Team of the Commission aimed at gaining support from the Facebook public by invoking “ethos” arguments, relying on the recipient’s trust in the sender of the message as derived from the sender’s credibility or authority. In the cited post, the Social Media Team bases the credibility and the authority of the Commission and the EU as a whole on its democratic legitimacy, as evidenced by the direct or indirect dependency of EU institutions on the popular vote.

Europe was frequently portrayed as a family and Greece as an indispensable part of this family; however, as shown by the following citation, a distinction was made between the Greek authorities, who are urged to take responsibility and fully inform their citizens, and the Greek people, who supposedly lack veracious information on the issues at stake:

> Greece is NOT an enemy. Greece is a member of the European family and as Jean-Claude Juncker said, we want this family to stand together. “This is a highly important moment for the Greek people and for the people of Europe. It’s the time for Greeks to speak up. It is time for Greece's political leaders to shoulder their responsibility, to tell their people what is really at stake, that it will not be easy but necessary. I will never let the Greek people down - and I know that the Greek people don't want to let down the European Union. On our side these negotiations have always been in a true European spirit – based on rules, based on mutual trust. […] There has never been an "ultimatum or take-it-or-leave-it-approach". Our sole concern has always been and still is to help make a fair and balanced deal. Every citizen deserves the whole story and the truth and they have to know that - on our side - the door is still open. Best, The Social Media Team. (Facebook page of the Commission, 29/06/2015)

Using the metaphor “family” to denote the European Union and referring to Greece as a “family member” were intended to appeal to emotions or pathos of the Facebook audience. Moreover, the use of emotionally charged words and expressions such as “the Greek people don’t want to let down the European Union” or that “the door is still open” clearly show the intention to impact on the sentiments of the audience. Moreover, by using the pronouns “we” and “our” and the adjective “European”, the senders demonstrate an intention to spark the sense of community and common destiny among the recipients of messages.

When describing the deal proposed by the Commission, the Social Media Team provides an extensive overview of the package for Greece, meticulously explaining details of the agreement:

> The package lowers the fiscal targets and means more time to achieve medium-term fiscal goals. Compared to the previous deal, more than 12 billion less in savings were requested from Greece in the coming years. Fiscal consolidation does not mean austerity: it means keeping public finances in control while boosting opportunities for jobs and growth. Many Member States have even higher fiscal targets despite having lower levels of debt. There are no wage cuts in this package, and nor were they ever on the table: There is a commitment to modernise the wage grid of the public sector to make sure that wages are in line with responsibilities and performance. Wages for higher performers should actually go up. And, for the private sector, there is a clear opening to review collective bargaining practices in line with the best European practices and consultation of international organisation such as the ILO. There are no pension cuts in this package:

> Everyone agrees “and so does the Greek government” that the Greek pension system urgently needs further reform to be fully sustainable… (Facebook page of the Commission, 28/06/2015)

In its communication endeavours, the Social Media Team of the Commission tried to alleviate the main concerns of Greek citizens, notably about austerity measures, and to present the new package as “fiscal consolidation” which excluded “notorious” wage cuts and pension cuts. Furthermore, the team argued that the package included the best international practices in labour regulations, rewarding workers according to their performance with the aim of creating a more equitable welfare state. The afore-quoted paragraph may be interpreted as a sign of the Commission’s clear intention to alleviate popular fears and present the proposed bailout package as the optimal solution for Greece.

The posts published by the Parliament related to the Greek crisis were rather brief and provided information on plenary sessions prioritizing the question of the Greek debt in their agendas. In addition, a partial selection of the posts published during the period monitored contained references to the statements of Martin Schulz, the President of the Parliament. When interacting with the online public, the communication officers of the Parliament mostly reminded contributors about the moderation policy and urged respectful debate. If a comment had been deleted, the page administrators posted a comment informing the commentator of the reason for the comment’s removal. Moderation-related issues were the most common reason for the European Parliament to intervene in the debate. However, on some occasions, the administrators defended the democratic legitimacy of the Parliament in their comments:

> The European Parliament is an EU body directly elected by the peoples of Europe. One good way to exercise your democratic rights would be to engage in conversations with the representatives you elected at the European Parliament and exchange views with them, or of course keep conversing with us here! (Facebook page of the Parliament, 08/07/2015)

5.3.2 Migration crisis

Public engagement through the Facebook communications of the Commission and the Parliament during the migration crisis was aimed at creating a sense of duty among citizens, mainly by referring to international obligations to guarantee asylum to those who are persecuted. To this end, EU communication officers mainly shared direct quotations from EU high officials, who recalled Europe’s own history of migration -- caused by poverty, the Holocaust or the Cold War, which created a moral obligation to help

those in need. Arguments relying on legal obligations under international law, as well as moral obligations to act in accordance with proclaimed values and principles, were used to garner popular support for proposed migration policies and the system of redistribution of asylum seekers. Thus, the refusal to process asylum requests and offer protection to people coming from war zones was implicitly represented as a dishonourable and unlawful action, contrary to previously agreed commitments. EU communication officers used a mixed rhetorical strategy: the arguments addressing the legal obligations of EU member states under international law targeted the "logos" of the Facebook audience, while the arguments dealing with the moral obligation to give a hand to humans in need were directed at their emotions.

The Commission's communication officers tried to underline consensus and joint decisions in order to gain approval in a situation where the dominance of certain member states, particularly Germany, was lamented by many as undemocratic and problematic. The following quote illustrates this rhetorical tactic: "The meeting of Heads and State and Government was based on consensus; everyone was making efforts to come to common conclusions | #refugeecrisis #EUCO" (Facebook page of the Commission, 24/09/2015).

As the post cited below demonstrates, the need for solidarity and responsibility was frequently highlighted in the Commission's posts; this tendency may be interpreted as channelling both empathy and the sense of duty of the Facebook public following these updates.

> We have set out priority actions for the next six months which President Jean-Claude Juncker will present to Heads of State and Government tonight. As the situation has worsened, the #RefugeeCrisis needs to be managed swiftly by showing solidarity and taking responsibility (Facebook page of the Commission, 23/09/2015).

Quotes from President Juncker, Commissioner for migration Avramopoulos, and the First Vice-President of the Commission Timmermans were frequently featured in the Commission's posts.

The migration crisis was also framed as a European crisis, and thus as one that must be solved at the European level and not by unsynchronised, national actions. In the situation of emerging "walls" and international divisions, the Commission sought to revive a fading unity and underline the European dimension of the refugee issue; the following post shows the Commission's appeal to solve the migration issue by a joint and decisive response:

> The refugee crisis is not just Austrian, Hungarian, Greek, Italian or German. It is a European crisis. Europe as a whole must provide swift responses to the ongoing developments. To achieve this, we have put forward a number of proposals, outlined in the European Agenda on Migration: http://europa.eu/!xc94GH #migrationEU #RefugeeCrisis (Facebook page of the Commission, 07/09/2015).[23]

As an answer to frequent arguments claiming that refugees were actually economic migrants, the social media team of the Commission reiterated several times that the relocation mechanism would be applied only to the nationals of countries that had an average EU-wide asylum recognition rate equal to or higher than 75%, mostly Syrians, Iraqis, and Eritreans. Moreover, a moral obligation to help people in need and treat them fairly was also highlighted by the Commission's communications in the critical moments of the migration crisis: "Humans should be treated in a humane manner. #RefugeeCrisis #WesternBalkansRoute."(Facebook page of the Commission, 26/10/2015)

Emotionally charged statements by EU officials were cited several times as a reply to anti-immigrant views expressed by Facebook commentators. The following excerpt of the speech given by Frans Timmermans, the First Vice-President of the Commission, used as a Facebook post, suggests the intention of the Commission's communication officers to appeal to the emotions and morals of their online followers by referring to spiritual concepts such as the soul and the sense of humanity:

> First Vice-President Frans Timmermans said in the European Parliament this morning: "We are not advocating the opening of all borders, but we are advocating staying in touch with our souls, not saying to people who flee from war and persecution: You should stay away from Europe's shores." (Facebook page of the Commission, 17/09/2015)

The Social Media Team of the Commission repeatedly tried to rebut accusations of the alleged undemocratic character of the Commission and its unaccountability by pointing to the Spitzenkandidat procedure—which grants the Commission Presidency to the "lead candidate" from the

[23] Another example is President Juncker's quotation posted by the Commission's Social Media Team: "There is no simple nor single answer to the challenges posed by migration. And it is no more realistic to think that we could simply open our borders to all our neighbours any more than it is to think we just cordon ourselves off all distress fear and misery. But what is clear is that there are no national solutions. No EU Member State can effectively address migration alone. We need a strong European approach. And we need it now. (Jean-Claude Juncker in New Europe). #MigrationEU" (Facebook page of the Commission, 24/08/2015)

European political party that won the most seats at the European elections—and to the hearings of each Commissioner designate:

> Hello, for the first time, the appointed lead candidate of the winning party in the European elections has become the President of the new European Commission. The individual Commissioners were nominated by national (elected) Governments. Each Commissioner went through a hearing in the European Parliament and - as a last step - the new Commission was approved as a whole by a European Parliament's plenary vote. More about who chooses the Commission at http://ec.europa.eu/about/index_en.htm#president - Best, the Social Media Team. (Facebook page of the Commission, 10/09/2015)

Both social media teams repeatedly outlined the democratic character of the EU, backing their arguments up with explanations of participation channels for EU citizens within EU decision-making. In particular, they addressed the accountability the Commission, whose public legitimacy had been repeatedly denounced.

The analysis of the online participation of the Commission's Social Media Team reveals a strong tendency to act as an informant. The communication officers of the Commission provided their Facebook followers with an array of links to various websites dealing with relevant EU programs, strategies or funds. They elaborated on the Commission's efforts to tackle the migration problem by listing and repeating concrete measures that had been previously taken.[24] This approach was frequently used in order to refute a large number of comments contesting EU institutions' effectiveness to deal with migratory pressures.

EU communication officers appealed to the sense of pride and exceptionality of Europeans in order to curb resistance to pro-refugee policies and the system of quotas proposed by the Commission. The emphasis on European uniqueness and excellence in humanitarian standards was used to justify solidarity with humans in need: "Europe has the highest asylum standards in the world and we will never turn people away when they come to us in need of protection." This type of argumentation appeared in the responses to the relatively frequent remarks that the EU should have taken a restrictive approach to migration such as Australia did: "[…] The EU has the highest asylum policy standards and rights in the world, and we have no

[24] For instance, it was reiterated several times that 23 multi-annual national programmes under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the Internal Security Fund, worth 2.4 billion Euros, had been approved in August 2015. Moreover, the communicators of the Commission referred to the programmes for boosting development in Third World countries, addressing in this way the root causes of migration, and to cooperation with third countries in order to ensure effective return and readmission for those not eligible for international protection.

intention of lowering those. Therefore, the Australian method can never be an example for us […]". Established EU standards and values were moreover frequently spelled out by the Commission's Social Media Team: "[…] the EU is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities."

Although the Social Media Team of the Commission tended to use formal language and vocabulary, typical of so-called "Eurospeak", occasionally the Commission's communicators shifted away from the usual EU parlance by using archaic expressions, humour or sarcasm:

> We have not yet updated our moderation policy to include Elizabethan era insults. However, the point remains valid for every member of this community: please do not be a quarrelsome cacodemon as there are many laboured souls who will be forced to bear the weight of your vitriolic rebuke. Sincerely, your dutiful and obedient Social Media Team. (Facebook page of the Commission, 26/10/2015)

However, a colloquial communication style may be interpreted positively or negatively, depending on the sensibility of followers. While a part of the public may view a casual communication style characterized by humour, irony or a colloquial language positively, others may see it as inappropriate for the communication output of a public institution, particularly when informing them on a serious topic such as a crisis. Thus, page administrators mostly sought to provide information on the latest developments to their followers and to disseminate statements by EU officials, avoiding potentially provocative posts or comments.

Since commentators repeatedly contested the refugee status of incoming migrants, the Social Media Team of the Commission used factual data in order to demonstrate that a large proportion of asylum seekers had arrived from war zones and, thus, qualified for international protection:

> Thanks for your comment. Let's briefly consider your statement: "no more than 10% of the "refugees" are actual refugees". Since January, in the Western Balkans (43%) and Eastern Mediterranean (65%) a total of 54% of asylum seekers were from Syria. UNHCR notes the recognition rate for Syrian refugees to be at least 75% (in reality, this is 90+%). With these figures in mind, statistically speaking (even in the hypothetical situation that not one of the other 46% of non-Syrian asylum seekers are granted refugee status) this would mean that AT LEAST 40% of these refugees would be "actual

> refugees". Of course, in reality, that number is much, much higher. (Facebook page of the Commission, 26/10/2015)

The Social Media Team of the Commission tried to stress the legal obligations of EU member states to provide asylum seekers with protection on their territories:

> Thanks for your comment. Just to clarify: these humans are not "invading borders as barbarians" - they are seeking asylum, as is their fundamental right. To ensure this, all countries have responsibilities and obligations under international law, in particular the Geneva Convention. Those migrants who are not in need of international protection should be swiftly returned to their countries of origin. Kind regards, the Social Media Team. (Facebook page of the Commission, 26/10/2015)

Contrary to the posts of the Commission, which reflected a clear stance on migration, the communications officers of the Parliament tended to be rather neutral when conveying messages through the Facebook page of the Parliament; they published short posts without taking a robust stance on the issue of migration and tried to inquire about people's views of the crisis. The following posts serve as an illustration:

> Parliament urged EU governments to take more action to address the migration and refugee crisis. Read to see where each political group stands @ http://epfacebook.eu/msWb and tell us have you already experienced the consequences of this crisis? (Facebook page of the Parliament, 06/10/2015)

Similarly, one may note a rather informative approach and a tendency to spark debate and public participation in the following example:

> Migrant routes are changing. In four days more than 20 000 people have required assistance in Croatia where authorities are overwhelmed. In the largest migration crisis since the Second World War Europe decided to relocate 120 000 refugees among member states. What else can be done?" (Facebook page of the Parliament, 26/09/2015)

Since the EU's putative undemocratic nature was repeatedly raised by the Facebook public, the Web Communication Team of the Parliament occasionally intervened in the debate in order to justify the legitimacy of the only directly elected EU institution:

> Hi. The Ministers who agreed to our proposal to relocate 160,000 people in clear need of international protection are the elected leaders of EU countries. This followed approval by the European Parliament, made up of MEPs who were also elected by the peoples of Europe. (Facebook page of the Parliament, 06/10/2015)

The comments published by the Parliament were less lengthy and informative than the Commission's posts, usually providing a short factual message which was followed by a link to a webpage, where more extensive explanations were available: "Asylum status is not granted automatically, part of the process is proper identification, you can read how it is done here: http://epfacebook.eu/mtDw" (Facebook page of the Parliament, 08/10/2015). Similarly to the Commission, the communication officers of the Parliament quote the statements of high-level individuals, notably Parliament President Martin Schulz:

> Lesley, in the words of the President of the European Parliament Martin Schulz "compassion compels us to lend refugees a helping hand. But moral duty and international law do too." On the other hand, it is up to the member states to decide whether they will accept or not any of the economic migrants coming from countries not torn by war. It is worth taking a look at the speech Martin Schulz delivered during the informal meeting of heads of state and government yesterday, where you will find answers to many of your questions [...]. (Facebook page of the Parliament, 24/09/2015)

When faced with frequent critical comments, like those denouncing the Parliament for its ineffective response to the migration crisis, the Web Communication Unit spelled out the measures and proposals made by the Parliament:

> To help refugees and deter attempts to abuse the EU's asylum system, the Parliament is working on a proposal for a common EU list of safe countries of origin (countries where there is no persecution, torture, threat of violence or armed conflicts). Applications from nationals of these countries will be fast-tracked, allowing for faster returns when the assessment confirms no right of asylum. More @ http://epfacebook.eu/mpPq. (Facebook page of the Parliament, 26/09/2015)

Unlike the Social Media Team of the Commission, the Web Communication Team of the Parliament primarily acted to moderate the discussion without actively engaging in two-way communication with citizens. This distinction is likely due to the different roles the two institutions play. While the Parliament represents all EU citizens and, thus, should be restrained from any form of biased messages, the Commission, as a guardian of the Treaties and the "engine" of supranational integration, has a mandate to garner popular support and justify supranational decisions taking a bold pro-EU stance.

5.4 Interviews with social media teams

In order to collect first-hand insights about the way the EU has been contested online and the dual strategy the Commission and Parliament employ to both communicate their messages and steer the debate, six

semi-structured interviews were carried out with the members of the social media teams between September 2017 and February 2018.

5.4.1 Online interactions: a top-down perspective

When asked about the general strategy that the Commission's Social Media Team takes when communicating with citizens online, one communication officer said that the Commission is mainly focused on informing and responding to inquiries. Moreover, according to the interviewee, the Social Media Team aims to engage with people on social media, acting as more than a simple broadcaster. The correspondent describes the Facebook page of the Commission as a "debate table", open to everyone to join and participate; in addition, the Commission participates and presents its position on discussion topics. However, not only does the Commission set the agenda, but also the media and the users—the Commission aims at a finding balance between its own priorities and user interests. (Interviewee 3).

According to one of the interviewees, the most important social media project of the Parliament is its Facebook page. Unlike the Commission that takes a strong pro-European stance, the social media team represents the views of all the factions within the Parliament—from Europhiles to Europhobes—hence, avoiding entering into political conversations. According to the coordinator of the Web Communication Unit of the Parliament, the main guidelines for interacting with citizens are: "avoid political discussions, provide as much information as possible, and keep the place as a respectful and safe space for debate." With regards to the general strategy for social media activism of the Parliament, its activities have two main objectives: to inform and to engage (Interviewee 1).

According to the words of a communication officer of the Parliament, their team strives to engage with followers who make genuine inquiries in hope of a response, avoiding interactions with "trolls". This decision is also motivated by the Facebook algorithm, which prioritises comments given a response by classifying them as "top comments" and granting them more visibility and prominence. Consequently, EU communicators are particularly cautious when replying to comments that contain misleading and false information (Interviewee 2).

Another interviewee stated that the Commission's team is able to respond only to a limited number of comments and questions. On the one hand, if a comment is completely unconstructive, it is disregarded. On the other, if a claim is obviously false, the Commission's team uses factual information to rebut it and construct a valid argument. Moreover, the lack of human resources impedes the Commission's team from following up on all users' comments, since monitoring of the page and replying to individual reactions is a time-consuming process (Interviewee 3). According to another interviewee, the Commission's Social Media Team employs fifteen people, who are all involved in different projects, and lack time for community management activities (Interviewee 4).

The social media coordinator of the Parliament emphasises the importance of the moderation policy adopted in order to combat racist, xenophobic and aggressive comments and spam. However, the correspondent highlights that the large quantity of comments hinders the enforcement of the moderation policy. Consequently, a pre-moderation tool—which automatically hides certain comments based on keywords pre-defined as inappropriate, discriminatory or disrespectful—has been introduced. The interviewee mentioned an example of pro-Assad organisations that were posting thousands of comments at one moment, but all were filtered and banned by using the pre-moderation tool. In addition, numerous links to fake news allegedly created by Russian trolls are also pre-moderated (Interviewee 1). A communication officer at the Commission says that commentators are first asked to rephrase their comments, and where they refuse to comply, offensive comments are hidden. According to the interviewee, many people use social media to obstruct the discussion: the trolls' objective is to hijack the discussion and prevent others from expressing their opinions (Interviewee 3). Comments commonly eliminated by the moderation policy include: racist and xenophobic comments, discriminatory comments based on religion, gender, or sexual orientation and comments containing obscene and offensive language. According to the respondents, additional controls to the moderation policies on the commentary are not applied—even if a comment deviates from the topic of the post, it is not eliminated.

When asked if the reactions transmitted via the two Facebook pages reach the policymakers or the members of the Parliament, the members of both social media teams say this does happen, albeit a

seldom occurrence. For instance, the Web Communication Unit of the Parliament was asked to provide feedback on comments reacting to the speech on the state of the Union given by Commission President Juncker. According to the interviewees, suggestions put forward by the Facebook public are hardly transformable into concrete decisions or policies. Moreover, consultations via Facebook also spark democratic concerns since the Facebook public is not representative of European constituencies. Nevertheless, social media commentary may play a democratic role as a form of public pressure on EU institutions, since the respondents confirmed the existence of a reporting system which ensures that feedback received via social media occasionally reaches higher-ranking political office holders.

The interviews confirmed the transnational character of the two Facebook pages: the fact that English is the main language of discussion does not impinge on the diversity of participants. These assertions are supported by the statistics on the demographic structure of the followers of the Facebook page of the Parliament, provided by the Web Communication Unit. According to this data, the number of male and female followers is almost equal, as is their distribution among different age groups. The most represented nationals among the Facebook followers of the Parliament—in a declining order —are: Italians, Romanians, Germans, Spaniards, French, Portuguese, British, Greeks, Bulgarians, and Belgians. It should be noted that the British are only the seventh most represented member state citizens among the Facebook followers, despite English being the official language of the Page. Furthermore, the majority of the Facebook followers of the Parliament are located in big metropolitan centres such as Bucharest, London, Athens, Paris, Sofia, Brussels, Rome, Lisbon, Budapest, and Milan.

5.4.2 Online Euroscepticism and crises

All the interviewees agree that the majority of Facebook commentary is negative, though the level of criticism varies. Two interviewees from the Parliament highlighted the fact that hard Eurosceptics almost never come to speak with members of the EP or other representatives when live chats are organised by the social media team. As one pointed out:

> They [hard Eurosceptics] are not interested in engaging in a true conversation as it might be easier to simply comment on a general post than to address a person directly. They

> are not interested in getting an answer. The fervent Eurosceptics did not even come to the chat room with Nigel Farage." (Interviewee 1)

According to a communication officer from the Commission, social media have given a voice to the noisiest part of the public by providing a means to express their disgruntlement (Interviewee 3). In the pre-social media era, public discontent was aired via traditional media, demonstrations, riots or—in more extreme cases—revolutions. However, with the advent of social media, dissatisfaction with public affairs is easily disseminated and mobilised by means of online platforms on smartphones or computers, with almost non-existent "transaction costs" (Holmes and McNeal, 2018; Kahne and Bowyer, 2018).

Furthermore, one of the interviewees remarked that likes and positive emojis are more numerous than negative comments. However, according to the same interviewee, one can still see a higher ratio of negative to positive comments, since people are more motivated to put an effort into expressing criticism than into showing praise:

> Criticizers are the most proactive social media users in this context; people who are positive will only "like" a post, while people who are negative feel need to leave comments after comments. Although they are not representative of the whole, hard Eurosceptics are a very visible, active and vocal minority. (Interviewee 2)

Moreover, another interviewee notes that the possibility to create fake profiles and hide personal identities liberates contributors from moral constraints when publishing comments (Interviewee 5).

The same member of the Web Communication Unit of the Parliament argues that it is difficult to measure the impact of social media and EU communication strategies on public attitudes towards the EU—many users only watch a video or read a post, without reacting to it, but its contents do reach them. This interviewee also emphasises the existence of another cluster of EU-enthusiasts who demonstrate a keen interest in EU affairs, but are not as visible and loud as Europhobes and Eurosceptics:

> We announce Facebook live events several days in advance, and reactions that we see below live videos are serious comments and constructive questions either for the Parliament or for the rapporteur. There are many positive comments on live videos. On Facebook live we see people who are really interested and ask questions, and this encourages us to continue. Moreover, many young people use Snapchat to ask the Parliament about different issues (Interviewee 5).

The social media coordinator of the Parliament described the comments of Facebook users who react to the migration crisis as "the end of humanity." Charged with the continuous monitoring of the Parliament's page and with responding to inquiries and comments, this interviewee noticed a conspicuous rise in the quantity and negativity of reactions in parallel with the escalation of the migration crisis and increases in the number of refugees. In response to the surge of xenophobic comments and hate speech, the Parliament's team ceased promoting discussions on migration-related issues (Interviewee 1). However, after the agreement with Turkey, which led to a decrease in the number of refugees coming to the EU via Greece, the number of comments shrunk. Although less numerous, the comments were still very negative towards refugees (Interviewee 5). Regarding the Greek crisis, another interviewee from the Parliament noticed an increase in interest in European affairs, but not necessarily Euroscepticism or Europhobia (Interviewee 2).

A respondent from the Commission noted that the migration crisis was particularly complex and problematic because nobody had an answer to public concerns— neither the Commission nor politicians. According to the same respondent, during the migration crisis, the Commission selected one spokesperson to deal with migration. The social media team contacted this representative for answers to the most popular queries on Facebook. The same interviewee observed that the Commission was dealt criticism from both sides— from the camp advocating the closure of borders as well as from the pro-refugee camp. However, he added: "nothing is comparable to Brexit or Catalonia in terms of interactions and the number of comments received." (Interviewee 3)

The study's questionnaire contained a question regarding the impact of Brexit on the public contestation of European integration on Facebook, in terms of both content and quantity. Although a more Brexit analysis falls out of the scope of the present study, it was considered useful making enquiries about possible changes of the tone of Facebook debates in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum in comparison with the two debates addressed by this work. The social media coordinator of the Parliament noted that Facebook debates on the Parliament's page have become more positive towards European integration in the aftermath of Brexit—the number of benevolent and EU-supportive comments has grown, with the

transnational Facebook public increasingly defending the EU and its values (Interviewee 1). A social media officer from the Commission had the same impression—the post-Brexit period saw an unprecedented level of popular appreciation for EU achievements. Consequently, the interviewees emphasise that the Commission's team has been trying to address positive comments more extensively and to express gratitude for participation in debates or positive evaluations. According to a communication officer at the Commission, after the Brexit referendum, the pro-EU camp, which used to be silent (the so-called "silent majority") appeared to be encouraged to speak up and underline benefits stemming from EU membership, such as the single market or the customs union. The same interviewee drew attention to an important EU anniversary and its favourable effect on support for European integration:

> The social media team has clearly seen a growing support for the EU project in social media after the celebration of the 60-years anniversary of the Rome Treaties and this is also reflected on Eurobarometer surveys. (Interviewee 3)

However, according to another interviewee from the Parliament, British Eurosceptics are more active on social media than ever (Interviewee 2). The correspondent from the Commission confirmed that most Leavers never ceased their online campaign, arguably because they want to exert social pressure regarding certain topics during the negotiation phase. According to the interviewee, Brexiteers have not lowered the frequency of contributions, but the pro-EU bloc has become more engaged and active after the Brexit referendum (Interviewee 3). When asked if the communication strategies of the Commission have changed as a result of Brexit, one of the respondents replied:

> The attitude is to do as much the business as usual and to focus on the future of Europe and to talk positively about what we are going to do, instead of dwelling on the past and present. The UK representation is still involved in the corporate campaigns and they were previously very active with Euro-myths' busting. It is still a great resource for us. It tends to be more talking about the EU 27 rather than the EU 28. We are trying to be positive and move on. UK representation is not only focused on negotiations between the UK government and the EU, but also talks for instance about the benefits of research cooperation. However, they always get troll reactions to almost everything they post. (Interviewee 4)

5.4.3 Language and argumentation

EU communication output is often criticised for being too technical and bureaucratic as well as for dispelling myths instead of passing on a positive message. One interviewee from the Commission says that

the communication team is aware of these limitations to their messages; thus, they have started adapting their communications in terms of content and register in order to make them more intelligible and appealing for the social media audience:

> Giving just facts back doesn't really give any effect— you need to have some more positive arguments and messages. The idea is not only to give statistics and hard facts but to give more crafted arguments that are adapted to the general public. We are trying to change the tone of communication and pass a more positive and overarching message, instead of just saying "you are wrong" or "that's false".

However, the Commission has a clear hierarchical structure: communication output requires validation from a higher level prior to dissemination. According to the communication officers interviewed, it is challenging to introduce novelties and adopt engaging strategies such as those deployed by private companies in the context of a bureaucratic and highly hierarchical institution such as the Commission.

One of the interviewees, who works on the Commission's program dedicated to Euro-myth busting, says that the websites of the Directorates General serve as the main source of information for dispelling deeply embedded stereotypes and preventing misinformation. However, the interviewee also pointed out that the information present on these websites is often very technical, requiring additional effort in order to be "translated" into more accessible language. Yet frequently these efforts prove futile due to the aforementioned system of approval. Draft texts are checked and approved by superiors, who tend to perpetuate traditional EU communication patterns:

> The difficulty we have is that every fact sheet we write we have to send it to the SPP [the Spokesperson's Service] for validation and what tends to happen is that they will transform it back to the original bureaucratic language. We are trying to fight that because the SPP are talking to the media and we are talking to the citizens and that's a kind of difference we have to push back a bit and try to reach a compromise sometimes. That's a challenge... And sometimes there are complicated topics, so it is hard to explain them in a simple language… But this is our job as communicators—EU communication officers should use more "down-to-earth" language.

Since the Commission has a hierarchical structure, a lengthy chain of approval over the outgoing flow of information is to be expected. Senior management, traditionally more sceptical towards novelties, tend to be reluctant when it comes to giving consent to the release of content that deviates from the standard EU style. The effect of the "Euro-bubble" is also reflected in the communication output of the

Commission, thus making it difficult for EU communicators to step over the line of usual EU parlance and style:

> When you work in the Commission, you are used to hear all those acronyms and this kind of strange bureaucratic way of talking about things and you become desensitised to it… And you don't immediately realise that what you are writing as a response sounds as a robot almost… And we have to speak as a real person, with a real human voice, otherwise it doesn't work for sure. And that's we are trying to do in these fact sheets, but sometimes I read over them and think we could have said that in a different way as well. It's a work in progress for sure… (Interviewee 5)

5.5 Conclusion

The Greek crisis and the migration crisis constituted two disruptive periods for the process of European integration for a series of reasons explored in Chapter 3. Crisis response implies finding solutions for situations that are often unknown, thus requiring solutions that differ from standard ones applied in routine situations. As a crisis is a situation of uncertainty and anxiety, decision-makers are expected to alleviate public uneasiness by providing an authoritative account of the present situation, the reasons for it and the solutions (Saurugger, 2016). Decision-makers have to explain why the chosen solutions are preferred over others and to guide the constituency through the complexity, uncertainty and ambiguity of crisis situations. Thus, EU institutions and their communication teams have extensively engaged in providing crisis-related information and justifying EU-devised decisions in order to alleviate public discontent and anxiety.

The findings presented that stem from the rhetorical analysis of Facebook posts and semi-structured interviews with EU communication officers revealed a comprehensive strategy of self-legitimation undertaken by the communication teams of the Parliament and the Commission. Faced with increased politicization and negative evaluations of the EU and the effectiveness of its counter-crisis measures, EU communicators engaged in an extensive information campaign. From the analysis of Facebook posts, one could observe that the administrators of the Commission's page mostly sought to appeal to the "logos" of its Facebook public, by thoroughly explaining counter-crisis measures and for the most part relying on facts and rational arguments. However, during the Greek crisis, a cross-section of posts

and comments also contained elements of text appealing to the emotions of the public by comparing the relations between Greece and the EU to family bonds. During the migration crisis, "pathos" arguments appealing to the humanity of Facebook followers were used to justify pro-refugee policies. When faced with contributors who contested the democratic quality of the EU or one of the institutions, EU communication officers invoked multiple channels of democratic representation existing within the EU set-up and, thus, underlined how its authority and credibility stemming from the popular vote ("ethos" persuasive technique).

The interventions of the Parliament (by its page administrators) appeared much more limited. Most of the comments had the purpose of justifying the deletion of abusive comments, indicating the source of the photo or video contained in the original post by the European Parliament or replying to other comments from users, either by offering answers to questions or additional information. This very low level of interaction and response is mainly explained by the Web Communication team's inability to respond to political questions, as they are communicators of an institution rather than of a particular political group. In contrast, the Commission's team intervened more extensively in discussions, since the Commission has a mandate to take a bolder pro-EU position when interacting with their public and discuss political issues. However, we could expect an opposite approach of the two institutions to regular institutional activities: "ordinary" members of the public usually expect parliaments to be political, and the executive to be neutral.

Based on the rhetorical analysis of Facebook posts originating from these two major EU institutions and the interviews with members of the two communication teams, one could observe that neo-functionalist language and Euro-jargon still dominate online communication contents. Despite the fact that communication means have evolved, EU institutions perpetuate the ingrained communication *modus operandi* characterized by a bureaucratic register and technical contents. The hierarchical structure of EU institutions and the approval chain also impinge on the attempts of communication officers to adapt messages to the sensibility of the general public. According to Diez, the language of neofunctionalism prevails at the EU level and perpetuates the notion of the EU democratic deficit: "the institutional language

of neofunctionalism has prevailed until today and provides the ground to continuously reconstruct the EU as a monster bureaucracy concerned with technical matters" (2006:429).

The two Facebook pages are mainly self-centred and provide links to the websites of the two institutions. After carefully looking into the content of the Facebook updates of the Parliament and the Commission, the prevailing conclusion is these two institutions tend to be inward-looking, self-promoting, and rarely refer to information sources beyond the EU structure in their online activism. However, despite being institutionally preoccupied, the two pages allow almost all types of comments including those that are Eurosceptic or overtly anti-EU. Therefore, the role of the administrators is mainly unbiased and focuses on the application of the moderation policy, which is defined in reasonable terms and imposes a very narrow set of restrictions on Facebook users.

EU communication officers construct the audience they address through the characteristics of the communicative contents they deliver to their followers in their posts and comments. These messages seek to inform the public and often to mobilize their support for decisions or policy measures. It is particularly difficult to approach a very diverse, transnational public with conflicting interests, and therefore common interests and destiny are underlined by using first person plural pronouns "We, Europeans" as a rhetorical strategy (canon "memory").

While Twitter is mainly a forum for elites, media, and political actors and only to a smaller extent for "ordinary" citizens, Facebook is a medium used by the broader citizenry. Nevertheless, this analysis shows that the EU institutions have not sufficiently adapted their communication to this modern platform hosting a wide European citizenry, but rather have conserved some previous patterns in EU political communication such as "autopoiesis" and elitism (Krzyżanowski, 2018b). As demonstrated, Facebook posts and comments published by the two EU institutions were characterized by bureaucratic and technical language, which might be perceived as rather hermetic by an average Facebook user. Thus, despite evident efforts, the attempts of the EU institutions to connect with the European constituency appeared maladroit, suggesting persistent desensitization of EU civil servants to the profile and needs of an average citizen.

Chapter 6

Debating the Union in crisis mode: an analysis of public attitudes towards European integration

6.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates how the European Union was contested in the context of the third Greek bailout crisis and the migration crisis. Crises as critical moments in the process of European integration are particularly conducive to a wide variety of debates between Eurosceptics and Europhiles. As outlined in the first three chapters, public, media, and academic attention has turned to the EU not only because of its prominent role in resolving these crises, but also due to widespread perceptions that the EU has partly triggered these crises by its unsuccessful economic and migration policies or aggravated them by the consequences of ineffective crisis management. As the survival of the two hallmarks of the European

project—the Euro and the Schengen agreement—have been brought into question, this issue has consequently spurred debates about the existence of the entire project of European integration. Moreover, the decision by UK voters to leave the Union taken in 2016 was another disruptive event which weakened the EU structure. However, while a fascinating case study, this issue is beyond the scope of this thesis, and surpasses the dedicated time and resource limitations.

The aim of this chapter is to delve into the public discourse and analyse transnational Facebook debates on the two above-mentioned crises in order to reveal:

1) how the EU was evaluated in terms of its principle of integration, its current set-up, and the future of integration;
2) what justifications for these evaluations were put forward;
3) how the role of the EU was evaluated in these specific contexts;
4) what the main reasons for the crises were and what the best solution would have been according to the contributors to these discussions;
5) how different type of actors (EU, member states' and other) were framed in these discussions;
6) whether a comparison of two sets of results corresponding to these two crises generates insights into the nature of EU polity contestation in more general terms.

As Chapter 4 highlighted, the Facebook commentary has been analysed using qualitative content analysis. However, in the aftermath of the coding the finding were also quantitatively represented in order to show the prevalence of certain concepts over others since some of the coding categories were more prominent in comparison to the others. The numerical illustration of the findings does not imply that the study claims statistical representativeness of the findings, but it seeks to share with the reader the leverage of recurrent ideas within the sample. It should be noted that the findings stemming from the rhetorical analysis of Facebook posts and the interviews (see Chapter 5) have not been translated into numbers since there was no a specific coding scheme for the analysis of the data, but the study looked at different rhetorical elements present in the selected Facebook posts and the most relevant ideas put forward by the interviewees.

The chapter is organised as follows. Section 2 investigates how the EU was contested in the context of the Greek crisis by presenting the results of the content analysis and interpreting them. Section 3 follows the same pattern as Section 2, but addresses the migration crisis and EU contestation. Section 4 compares the results of two sets of findings and draws more general conclusions on the nature of public attitudes towards the EU in terms of the principle of integration, the present state of affairs, and future perspectives. It also elaborates on the differences and similarities of popular perceptions of these two crises in terms of the cause, the solution and the role of the EU as a crisis manager.

6.2 Third Greek bailout in public discourse

The proposition of offering a new financial assistance package to Greece provoked fervent debates across the EU due to a number of reasons. First, it became clear that more than five years of EU-led management of the Greek sovereign debt crisis had proven unsuccessful as the country was again on the brink of bankruptcy. Second, the issue of a new loan to the Greeks triggered discussions on solidarity and redistribution among member states, highlighting the prosperity gap between Southern and Northern Europe and the problematic nature of the decision to create a common currency despite conspicuous economic divergences among the states. The German government took a particularly hard line on Greek debt since Germany was notably the main creditor, but also a supporter of austerity measures as the main mechanism for tackling the Greek economic predicament. On the other hand, the Greek government under Tsipras was elected on an explicit anti-austerity platform. Third, Greek debt reopened the issue of the viability of the common currency and its future. At the peak of the crisis, the possibility of Grexit from the Eurozone or even the EU became a reoccurring issue in the discourse of the media and political elites, while Grexit was framed as a frightening scenario that would doom the Euro and possibly the entire EU project.

The steady advancement of European integration that was generating an ever-closer union of states, risked taking a step back for the first time in its history; the tacit consensus said it should have been prevented at any cost. The much-cited maxim of German Chancellor Angela Merkel “If the Euro fails, Europe fails” demonstrates the level of importance that was attributed to the preservation of the common

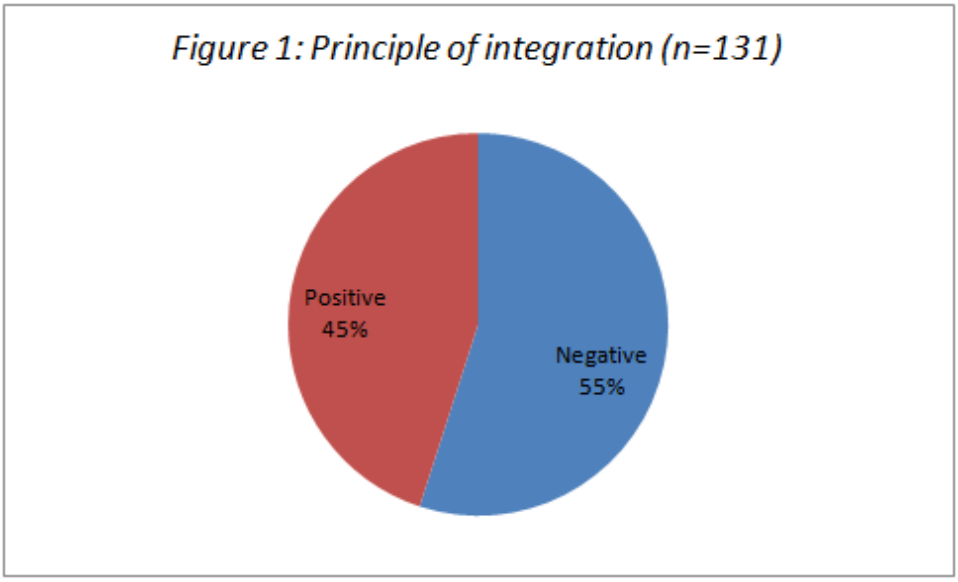
currency and the integrity of the Eurozone. Nevertheless, although the Union managed to avoid the immediate threat of moving backward at the time of the negotiations with Greece, one year later British voters decided to restore British sovereignty and leave the EU, showing that EU disintegration should not be considered as a taboo topic, but rather as a plausible scenario for the future of the European project. The following subsections address how the three dimensions of European integration were challenged in the context of the negotiations on the third bailout for Greece and the immediate danger of Grexit. The coding scheme used for the coding of debates and data sampling is explained in Chapter 4.

6.2.1 Principle of integration: better off together or on our own?

The commentators who assessed the principle of European integration were quite polarized in their views on the utility of the process of integration of European states (for the distinction between the project and process of integration see Morgan, 2005). A tight majority maintained that their countries would be better off being out of the European project, since in their view the EU either had only harmed their countries by means of causing pauperization and depriving their countries of sovereignty or impact on decision-making in Brussels. By looking more in-depth into these evaluations, one can note that a large proportion of commentators were from the UK and from crisis-ridden countries, mostly Greece, but also Spain, Ireland, Italy, and Cyprus. These commentators explicitly mentioned their national affiliations in their contributions. These findings coincide with the geographical pattern of Euroscepticism identified by recent Eurobarometer surveys indicating a strong presence of anti-EU attitudes in Southern Europe and the UK (see Standard Eurobarometer 67-89). A traditionally "awkward partner", the UK finally acted on its strongly embedded suspicion towards European integration by deciding to leave the Union. In addition to those commentators who specified their nationality and called for their country's exit from the Union, some simply denied the desirability of the European project, putting forward various arguments, such as its putative undemocratic character and its self-serving elites. The following comment illustrates the way the EU is contested in principle:

> It's already a monstrosity. The future of the EU is total financial dominance by the bigger countries. It is a long way from a union trading block it began with. No thanks, I'm not at all

interested in an undemocratic/unelected giant European corporation deciding to protect private banks over the fate of ordinary citizens. If ever I get to vote, it's out! (Facebook page of the Parliament, 07/07/2015)



Nevertheless, as shown by Figure 1, approximately 45 percent of commentators who evaluated the principle of integration recognised the necessity for a close cooperation among European states and praised the EU as a capital achievement of modern Europe. These commentators highlighted the most important accomplishments of the project of European integration such as the Schengen zone, the Euro, the Erasmus programs, and long-lasting peace among EU member states. The positive evaluations of the principle of integration were often wedded to calls for the preservation of the unity of the Union and its membership, and necessity for deeper, not wider, integration. Commentators headlined the need for solidarity between member states, compared the EU to a family and its member states to brothers, or praised its fundamental principles such as democracy, human rights, equality, and liberty, calling for them to be nurtured in times of crisis. The following comment illustrates these affirmative evaluations of the principle of integration:

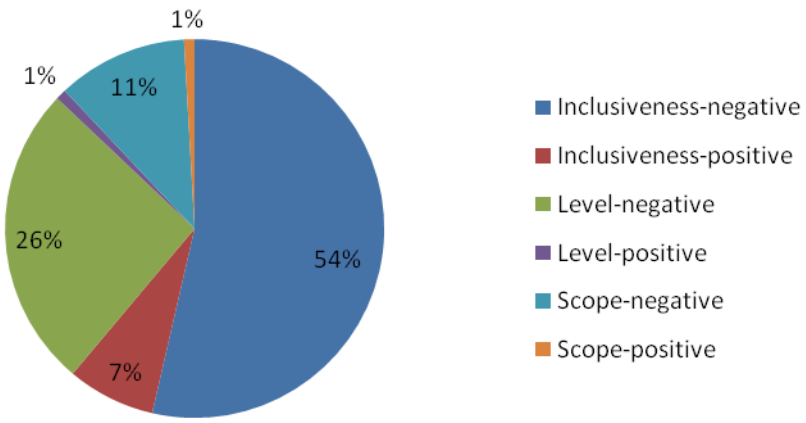
> The problem with people like you is that you think that EU is useless... Roaming will disappear in 2018 (thank you EU, don't forget it when you will call abroad) crossing boarders without queuing (thank you EU), I don't need anymore dollars to go abroad (thank you EU), Erasmus (thank you EU maybe you are / were one of those students?), Leonardo (thank you EU), 70 years of peace (thank you EU) (Facebook page of the Commission, 06/07/2015).

However, the number of the evaluations of the principle was several times smaller than the number of evaluations of the current EU set up, as it will be shown in the next section. Thus, it seems that the mini-transnational public, via their online contributions, rarely discussed the rationale of European integration and implicitly recognised the necessity of "doing things together", all while having been openly critical towards the current state of EU affairs, EU institutions, or EU competencies.

6.2.2 Current EU set up: the European Union lacks "the people"

The most contested dimension of the EU polity was the current EU set-up, since the majority of commentators assessed the value of the EU based on its current inclusiveness, level of power and/or scope of integration. The largest part of these comments evaluated the EU polity based on the criteria of inclusiveness, while the level and the scope were evaluated to a much lesser extent (see Figure 2). These findings show that the transnational Facebook mini-public was prone to judge the EU mostly based on the current state of affairs and reflected little on the desirability of integration in general terms and on the future avenues of European integration. The evaluations of the current EU set-up were mostly negative and expressed dissatisfaction with the degree of inclusion of citizens in EU policy making, but also with the degree of inclusion in the reallocation of benefits that European integration had generated.

Figure 2: Current EU set-up (n=332)



Despite having found a large number of comments that criticised the EU for "humiliating", "impoverishing", "enslaving" "killing" or "abusing" the Greeks, this type of criticism was typically only an introductory statement for more general accusations that the EU had completely excluded a much broader category of "ordinary people" from the current decision-making process. The following comment illustrates this category of arguments:

> The EU has brought Greece to its knees - democracy is dead there now. Humiliated and brought to heel. You may think you have won, by using vast amounts of our money to prop up your euro project - all you have done is to speed up the process of collapse of your vile institution. […] *The nations and peoples of Europe can survive and thrive without you - you cannot exist without us - we don't need you - you need us - and it seems to me that you have lost the will of the people*. [emphasis added] (Facebook page of the Parliament, 13/07/2015).

Commentators repeatedly expressed the complaint that ordinary people had no say or that their voice was insufficiently heard at the EU level. This category of popular dissatisfaction with the EU is tightly connected with the idea of the alleged democratic deficit (Follesdal and Hix, 2006; Moravcsik, 2008; Hobolt, 2012). However, public criticism was phrased in very general terms without specifying concrete procedures and channels of representation that citizens were excluded from; and consequently, explicit proposals for potential reforms aimed at the alleviation of the democratic deficit were almost completely absent.

Even though popular discontent with EU democratic credentials was framed in a vague manner, diffused popular frustration with the EU and occasionally with political and financial elites, in general, resonated powerfully across the examined discussion forums. Interestingly, the cleavage that the commentators most recurrently referred to was not the one reflecting national or regional divides (e.g. Greece versus Germany, Southern Europe versus Northern Europe), but the one delineating the gap between "the people" and "the elites."

The sense of popular detachment from both EU and national political elites feeds into a growing populism view that has been gaining momentum across both EU countries and the US. Due to rising populism, liberal democracies are running the risk of transforming into illiberal ones. As Mudde (2015) puts forward in his contribution to *the Guardian*: "In short, populism is an illiberal democratic response to

undemocratic liberalism. It criticises the exclusion of important issues from the political agenda by the elites and calls for their repoliticisation."[25] The Eurozone crisis and the Greek crisis, as one of its episodes, have triggered a rise in populism precisely due to the technocratic decisions that were made without popular involvement and a noticeable domination of certain countries in the crisis resolution and, consequently, a marginalization of the majority of others. Treaty generating through intergovernmental negotiations, which occurred behind closed doors, alienated people from elites and rendered them deprived of any power and say. Furthermore, although their voice was not heard, they had to bear the consequences of these anti-crisis decisions: either harsh austerity (Southern Europe) or reallocation of financial resources to crisis-ridden member states (Northern and Western Europe). The findings of this study suggest that the transnational Facebook public became allied against both national and EU elites, demanding more democratic procedures. They did not consider themselves in this context as Greeks, Portuguese or Irish, but as "the people"—"betrayed", "beggared", and "disempowered". Despite dominantly negative evaluations of the current state of EU affairs, the emergence of a transnationally shared sense of a common destiny might be interpreted as a positive sign of a nascent European-ness: "One thing is clear after the debate: The friction is running along worldviews - not borders anymore. This is a good sign. We are already Europeans (Facebook page of the Parliament, 08/07/2015)."

The second aspect of excluding "the people" focused on their deprivation of the benefits generated through EU policies: commentators perceived themselves as the underdogs of the process of European integration, whereas political, financial or business elites were viewed as absolute winners. One idea brought to the forefront of the Greek crisis debate was that the EU was too neoliberal and promoted the interest of banks and corporate interests at the expense of the public good. Some commentators criticised the growth-oriented EU or the EU that neglected the most vulnerable parts of the society:

> This money [the new loan to Greece] will be available to immediately resume financing for investments supporting growth and jobs. Meaning, going to private sector and bank subsidies. As opposed to keeping the assistance for elderly retirees living under 400 euro/month going, or funding more than one meal for school kids. It has been 30 years

[25]Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/17/problem-populism-syriza-podemos-dark-side-europe (Accessed: 23/02/2018)

> with IMF pushed neoliberalism, and we are quite full and fed up with catchphrases like 'jobs' and 'growth'. Leave aside 'investments'. This is Europe. If people wanted Eu to push sociopathic neoliberalism like how it is in United States, they would immigrate there (Facebook page of the Commission, 15/07/2015).

Another example of disapproval of alleged EU neoliberalism is:

> Well done Greece! National debt is non-sustainable and it is only hurting more and more ordinary people with no power and responsibility in a situation created by politicians and financial institutions. European politicians and bankers are destroying social democracy. However, there is a different Europe than the neo-liberal vision we are permanently bombarded with as the only way out and the only absolute truth. It is high time to demand what is it labelled by those in power as impossible. It is possible, it simply requires simple things and gestures such as the acquittal of the national debt, as it was offered to Germany 60 years ago (Facebook page of the Commission, 06/07/2015).

What emerged in the public discourse on the Greek debt is the popular perception that the traditional model of the European welfare state is shrinking as a result of increasing economic constraints and the ambition to increase the competitiveness of the EU at the global scale. However, many commentators denounced the enfeeblement of the social state, which was qualified as a European "trademark" and a distinctive feature with respect to its extra-European counterparts, such as the US.

The dissatisfaction with the procedures of EU decision making, the outcome of EU policies or the counter-crisis measures brings us to the conclusion that the EU, during the Greek crisis, failed to meet the requirements of both input and output legitimacy (Scharpf, 1999). As is often put forth in the literature, the EU used to draw popular support based on the output of its policies, although the input process, understood as citizens' involvement in the decision-making process, has been always considered flawed despite numerous reforms aimed at improving the democratic quality of the EU set-up. However, since the outbreak of the economic crisis, many believe that the EU has conformed neither to the principles of "the government by the people" nor "the government for the people."

On the other hand, those who evaluated the current EU set-up as inclusive represent only a small portion of the commentators who expressed their opinion on the current state of affairs in the EU. These commentators usually referred to the high level of inclusion of people in the EU construction and decision-making process through a number of channels and procedures that strengthen the democratic quality of

the EU. Some comments portrayed the EU as a "family" and urge for the preservation of its unity by keeping the Greeks inside.

Approximately a quarter of commentators who addressed their views on the current EU set-up via online contributions evaluated the current level of power held by the EU as negative. The EU is often said to exercise its powers in an undemocratic way and that certain member states, specifically Germany, have more *defacto* powers in comparison to others. The Union is accused of, among others, depriving national states of their sovereignty, self-interested acting, and imperial aspirations.

The affirmative evaluations of the current level of power of the EU and its current scope were almost non-existent in the sampled set of data. In contrast, negative evaluations were quite numerous when examining the current scope of integration. They addressed the Euro system and the EMU which were characterized as harmful for national economies, premature, or excessively dominated by certain participating countries. The other policies that were contested by citizens were immigration policies and some regulatory policies.

6.2.3 Future of the Union: Grexit and/or disintegration

Commentators assessed the future of the European integration in rather negative terms: 67.2 percent of the commentators who expressed their views on future avenues of European integration were not in favour of further European integration in terms of one of the three dimensions of integration. As Figure 3 shows, the largest proportion of evaluations of further prospects of European integration—almost 40 percent—negatively assessed the inclusiveness, almost a quarter of those evaluations assessed the level, whereas the amount of evaluations based on the future scope of integration is rather low.

The largest proportion of the commentators who suggested the exclusion of certain categories of people from the European project in the future referred to Greece as a "burden" that should be "offloaded", whereas a minority suggested that Germany should have been deprived of EU membership. However, none of commentators expressed negative attitudes towards future enlargement. This lack of negative references to the potential expansion of the EU to the Balkans can be interpreted in two ways: as

a sign of approval of the further widening of European integration or as a sign of such low salience of the issue of enlargement among EU publics that predominantly goes unmentioned. The second interpretation is more probable as the enlargement was placed at the bottom of the EU agenda due to the EU's own "malaise", but also due to widespread belief that the acceptance of some Central and Eastern European states to "the club" had been premature. The lack of salience of enlargement in the examined debates is confirmed by the fact that those who explicitly opt for a more inclusive Union constitute a small portion of commentators. This rather miniscule group of commentators referred to the accession of the Western Balkans and Turkey (only in a few instances) or called for more extensive inclusion of EU citizens in the process of EU decision-making in the future.

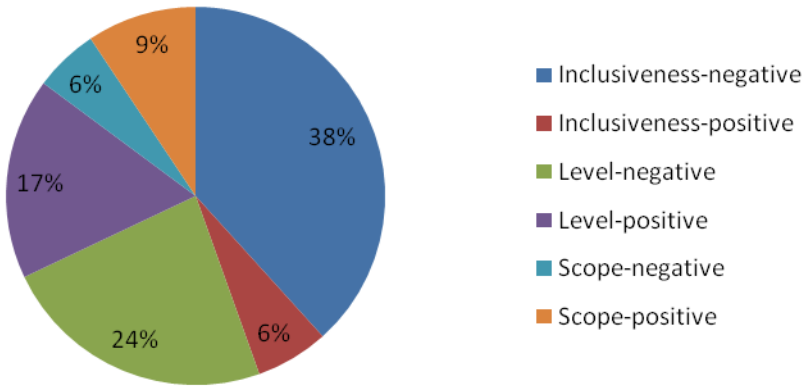
Negative comments on the future of European integration in terms of the level of power suggested that the EU will/should "disintegrate", "dissolve", "die", "break into pieces", "be consigned to the dustbin of history". These comments were loaded with negativity towards the EU, emotionally intense, and usually contest European integration in principle. However, a minority of commentators was more moderate and called for recessing to the European Economic Community.

Those commentators that advocated further integration in terms of the level of power of the EU offered a myriad of suggestions: the federalization of Europe and the formation of the "United States of Europe", a genuine political union, a stronger European Parliament, or a European Constitution. These ideas were usually put into the context of the crisis and framed as solutions for economic predicaments that some member states were facing, as well as a preventive mechanism for similar challenges in the future.

Negative evaluations of the future scope of integration usually consisted of arguments that the EU should have reverted to a free trade area or to national currencies. These comments mainly encompassed the idea that the EU had gone too far and that the primary remedy needed for EU citizens and member states is a simple trading block of European states.

In contrast, positive evaluations of the future of European integration revolved around the idea that the EU needed to evolve into a fiscal union. This argument is mostly linked to the notion that the monetary union is only sustainable if there is a common fiscal policy which permits monetary transfers between the member states.

Figure 3: Future of the EU (n=128)

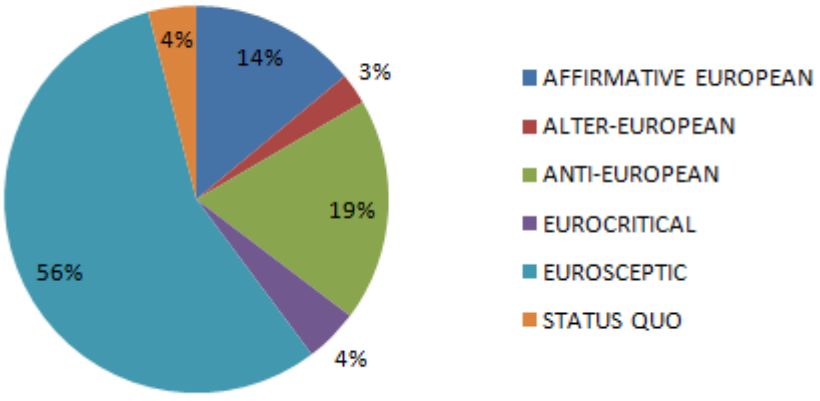


6.2.4 EU polity evaluations

As already explained in Chapter 4, combining these three variables— the principle of integration, the current set-up, and the future of integration — one can derive seven types of: Affirmative European, Alter-European, Anti-European, Eurocritical, Eurosceptic, Pragmatic, and Status Quo. Yet in the debates addressing the Greek crisis, commentators presented no "Pragmatic" evaluations. Figure 4 shows that Eurosceptic evaluations represented the largest part of the total number of EU polity evaluations present in the Facebook discussions regarding the Greek crisis; more than a half of evaluations are Eurosceptic, which means that they assessed negatively either the current EU set-up, the future of integration, or both. However, they contained no evaluations of the principle of integration. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of Eurosceptic evaluations targeted only the current EU set up, while the remaining portion targeted either the future or both the current set-up and the future of European integration.

The two categories with the greatest representation in the data set were Anti-European and Affirmative European evaluations. This finding demonstrates a significant polarization of opinions on European integration and the tendency of the Facebook mini-public to evaluate this process in purely negative or purely positive terms, and a lack of more complex evaluations such as Alter-European or Eurocritical.

Figure 4: EU polity evaluations (n=422)



6.2.5 Justifications for EU polity evaluations

As Figure 5 shows, the impact of the EU polity on democracy was the most frequently used justification for various EU polity evaluations within the debate on the Greek crisis. Almost 40 percent of the total number of evaluations that assessed the value of European integration were based on the perceived capacity of the EU to enhance or harm democratic standards at both national and EU levels. Delving into the linkages between different categories of EU polity evaluations and corresponding justifications (see Table 6.1), one should note that a large majority of those who referred to democracy as the main criterion of evaluation expressed mainly negative opinions on European integration. More than 50 percent of Eurosceptic evaluations contained references to democracy as a justification for the negative stance towards one or more dimensions of European integration. Following in popularity, the second most frequently invoked justification for a negative stance was “economic prosperity” which nevertheless, significantly lags behind “democracy”. A minor percentage of commentators based their EU arguments on “necessity” and “culture”

as criteria of evaluation, whereas the number of references to "safety" was negligible. However, the lack of references to these categories is foreseen since these debates focused on the Greek crisis, which involved economic and financial issues. Surprisingly, economic issues were not the most common argument used by participants. As already mentioned, most of them have expressed concern for the alleged undemocratic character of the EU and insufficient public involvement in the EU decision-making procedure. This finding confirms the already existing arguments in the literature on Euroscepticism (see Chapter 2) that sustain the idea of the decreasing explanatory power of economic/utilitarian calculations, which were a dominant hypothesis on the causes of popular Euroscepticism for years (e.g., Anderson and Reichert, 1995; Gabel, 1998). Some scholars underline the growing relevance of cultural issues which increasingly fuelled Eurosceptic attitudes (e.g., McLaren, 2002; Hobolt et al., 2009), whereas others suggested that political efficiency has a determining impact on the level of public Euroscepticism (McEvoy, 2016).

McEvoy (2016) finds that political efficacy is the key determinant of popular attitudes towards the EU and that citizens who feel represented and heard at the EU level tend to continue supporting the EU even if their personal or their country's economic conditions are exacerbated. Her analysis confirms some previous findings that the presence or absence of the public perception of being politically represented in the EU system shapes public attitudes towards European integration (Rohrschneider, 2002). In a nutshell, McEvoy's article expounds on the idea that people often do not assess the EU based on utilitarian calculations, but on the perception of the effective representation of their political interests. The findings of the present study are in line with this stream of literature on the public support for European integration and demonstrate the strong impact of perceiving fairness in the process of decision-making on the evaluation of the EU. The participants in the analysed online forums based their criticism of the EU on the argument that the EU system did not represent them and that their voices and interests were neglected by EU institutions. These institutions were commonly qualified as self-serving bodies or bodies that were only promoting the interest of financial institutions and businesses. In several instances, the public raged against the way the economic crisis was handled and a commonly reiterated idea that the EU did not save people,

but banks. For instance, I quote one elaborated view on the state of democracy in the EU that encompasses a number of recurrent ideas on the obscurity and unresponsiveness of the EU:

> Dear European Commission, we the EU citizens, we elected the deputies to the EU Parliament and that's all. After that, we have no view on what they are doing there, their alliances, their agreement with the member states to select the commissioners and the President, etc, we have no views on their relations with the lobbies who have their offices inside the EU parliament itself. This is clearly not a citizen democracy, but an oligarchic system "hidden in a democracy" people are now well aware about this, and it's the reason why Europe risk to collapse. This Union was good until 1992, and then it was betrayed by this Economic and Monetary Union, extended in the later treaties. and on that day, they sold the EU citizens to the Banksters who mounted this debt system, that our progeny in 2150 will still continue to pay as it is impossible to reimburse even only the interests of this debt ...(Facebook page of the Commission, 06/07/2015)

The EU was compared to different forms of undemocratic government: a dictatorship, an unelected autocracy, a tyranny, or a fascistic organisation. Moreover, "#ThisIsACoup" was a widely spread hashtag which interpreted the EU intervention into the Greek crisis as an attempt to topple the democratically elected government in Greece. Furthermore, many of those who characterized the EU as undemocratic referred to the dominance of Germany in the decision-making process, confirming the growing perception that Germany is an emerging "hegemon" in Europe. The EU is often described as "the German empire", "the Fourth Reich", or "a talking shop for Germans". The discussion was imbued with anti-German feelings, the arguments that the EU only promoted German interests and that Germans were those who *de facto* controlled the EU and reaped the benefits from it at the expense of its unequal partners.

A small number of commentators portrayed the EU as a perfectly democratic system endowed with various channels of representation of different interests:

> Majority of people on social media have no clue about what EU is & how it works, even though they are EU citizens. #EuropeanParliament is composed to elected members #MEPs elected from their cities regions representing them. #European Council is composed of members states ministers from their Federal Govts citizens elect in their General Elections. #EuropeanCommission is composed of technocrats they best of the best in their fields, experiences and expertise gained by working all around the globe. Commission only make proposals after detailed studies and verifications of future laws and regulations and Council &Parliament discuss those proposals before making them as law (Facebook page of the Commission, 06/07/2015).

As Table 6.1 shows, economic prosperity as an underlying justification for the evaluations of EU polity worth was rather uniformly distributed among various categories of evaluations. Those

commentators who took critical stance towards the impact of European integration on the economic prosperity of member states and its citizens put forward an array of arguments. The alleged incapacity of European integration to ensure economic convergence was attributed to three factors: the austerity measures and their disastrous effects on the living standard; direct transfers from citizens to private banks; and the harmful impact of the Euro that benefits only a few countries. The EU was often represented as a malefic project that solely produced recession, poverty, unemployment, and uncertainty for its citizens, where big member states took economic advantage of smaller ones, leading to the deterioration in the health of their economies. The following comment illustrates the idea that the EU is the main cause of the economic deprivation of some citizens, who live in fear of losing means for meeting basic needs:

> Never been so scared of the so called European Union. I am not wealthy so I will continue to be a victim of austerity in Ireland. I am right to be scared because we see clearly now that the EU will leave its citizens without money, food, water, shelter and medicines. This sort of thing isn't supposed to happen in this part of the world. When did you put Hitler back in charge. Are you going to herd the poor into concentration camps next?????? (Facebook page of the Parliament, 13/07/2015)

The commentators who positively evaluated the impact of European integration on the economic prosperity of its member states (or citizens) most commonly argued that prosperity had been one of the most important achievements of the European project. These commentators argued that the EU needed tightened economic integration and the introduction of a fiscal union in order to recover from the economic "malaise" and to continue delivering material wellbeing to its citizens.

Figure 5: Justification of EU polity worth

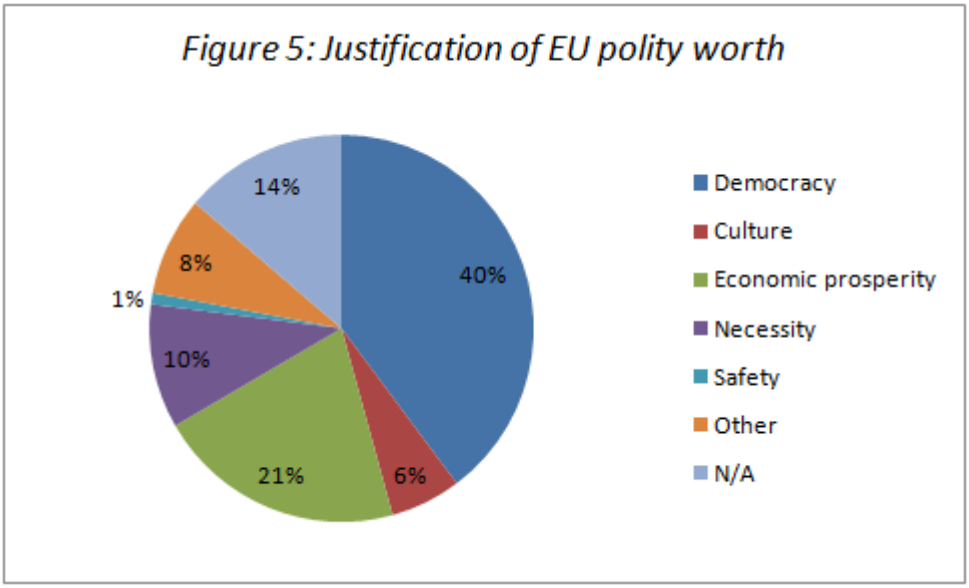


Table 6.1: EU polity contestation and justifications (Greek crisis)

Types of Evaluation						
Justifications of the EU's worth	Affirmative European	Alter-European	Anti-European	Eurocritical	Eurosceptic	Status Quo
Democracy	15%	44.5 %	32.5%	47.3%	51.1 %	11.8%
Culture	20%	0 %	7.5%	5.3%	1.3 %	17.6%
Economic prosperity	23.3%	22.2%	18.7%	21%	19.7%	29.4%
Necessity	21.7%	22.2%	18.7%	5.3%	5.2%	11.8%
Safety	1.7%	11.1%	0%	5.3%	0.4%	0%
Other	3.3%	0%	8.8%	10.5%	9.9%	5.9%
N/A	15%	0%	13.8%	5.3%	12.4%	23.5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

6.2.6 Greek crisis "anatomized": roots, mechanisms for the resolution and the EU's role

In order to understand the role of the EU in the Greek crisis and its resulting effect on integration in the context of social media, I conducted a content analysis of the selected online debates triggered by the critical situation in Greece during June and July 2015. Determining where the participants of the sampled transnational debates located the major cause of the crisis is the first crucial step for understanding it.

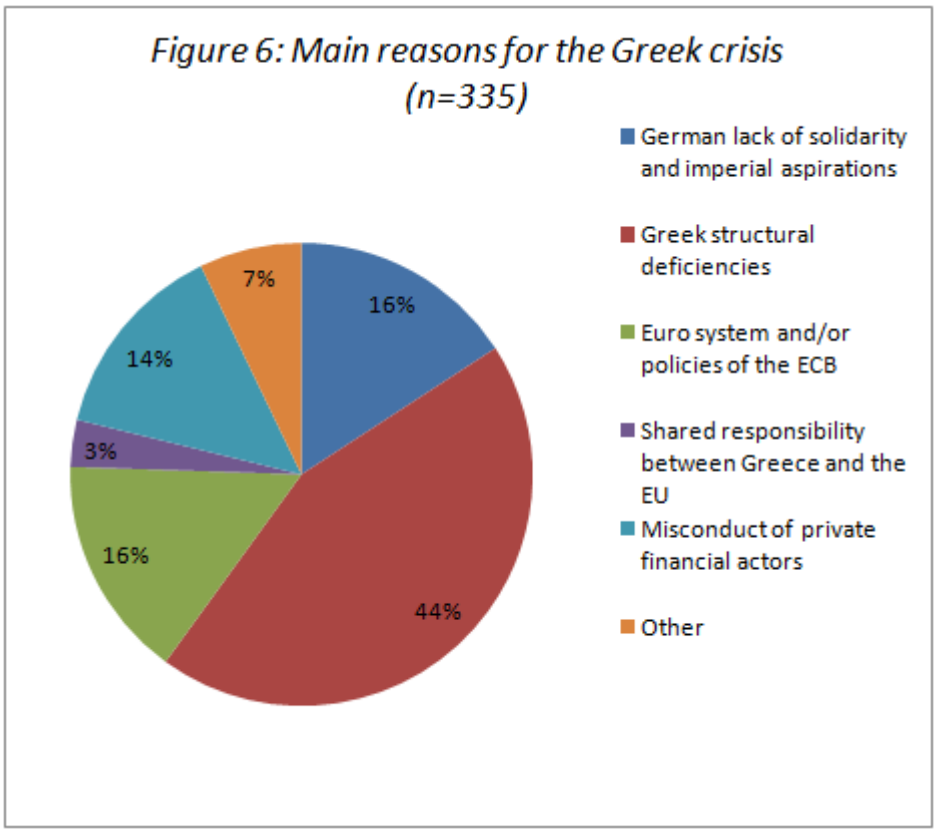
As Figure 6 shows, the largest portion of those who identified the main reason for the crisis in their online contributions held Greek structural deficiencies responsible for the country's massive sovereign debt and severe economic recession. The commentators supported their views by reiterating an array of flaws of the Greek economic and political system and a number of well-known stereotypes about the Greeks. The most recurrently cited economic deficiencies of Greece are disproportionately high wages and pensions compared to the country's productivity; tax evasion; excessive public spending financed by massive borrowing; a low retirement age; overabundant hiring of overpaid public servants; generous welfare without a backup of the real economy; fraudulent accession to the Euro; and the low productivity of the

Greek economy. However, political and societal weaknesses of the Greek system were attributed to a deeply imbedded, prolonged history of corrupted and incompetent political leadership, clientelism, nepotism, and deeply ingrained corruption in the society. Moreover, commentators frequently perpetuated embedded stereotypes of the Greeks as lazy, profligate, chronically indebted, and unwilling to reform their state. Facebook contributors often characterized the Greeks as hedonists who enjoy extravagant and lavish lifestyles, and eternal siestas instead of hard work.

The role of Germany was assessed as central to the outbreak of the Greek crisis by approximately 15 percent of commentators who identified the cause of the crisis in their contributions. The code "German lack of solidarity and imperial aspirations" is used in this study to capture a series of arguments that encompass the idea that Germany was the main culprit in the crisis in Greece (or in Southern European countries in general). Participants in the Facebook debates recurrently blamed Germany for controlling other member states and imposing on them decisions detrimental to majority interests, but beneficial for Germany. The most common arguments that addressed the role of Germany include: the German approach to the crisis was described as authoritarian and egoistic; Germany was accused of encouraging the corruption and indebtedness in Greece in order to make profit; German banks were viewed as the winners of the Greek economic turmoil; German management of the crisis was seen as the realisation of Hitler's dreams and the economic occupation of Europe, where the EU was only a German "puppet" in this venture.

The Euro system and/or the policies of the ECB were mentioned by roughly 15 percent of commentators as the main reason for the crisis. A number of online commentators presented the idea that the common currency was not a viable option for a group of such diverse economies and that only Germany benefited from the Euro; some also criticised the premature accession of Greece to the Eurozone or the inefficiency of the ECB. Furthermore, approximately the same number of commentators attributed the responsibility for the crisis escalation to private financial actors and their dishonest intentions, often calling them "banksters." Private banks were usually framed as the main beneficiaries of the crisis and those that knowingly financed unsustainable private and public debts. Finally, a small percentage of

contributors argued that the EU and Greece shared responsibility for the economic predicaments of the Greeks.



Another issue to address is the evaluation of the EU response to the Greek crisis by the mini-public gathered on Facebook. As shown by Figure 7, the largest portion of comments portrayed Greece as a victim of the EU's unfair approach. The EU was accused of "blackmailing", "bullying", "humiliating", "raping" or "enslaving" Greece, undermining its sovereignty and dignity. The bailout was repeatedly framed as a bailout of private banks, resulting in Greek citizens who were heavily encumbered by austerity measure received only a small percentage of the loan. On several occasions, the EU was not only framed for gross injustice and severity, but also for hypocrisy:

> State of the Union: Eurocrats, piling up unpaid bills, impose Greece to reduce its debt. Eurocrats, enjoying jobs-for-life, oblige Greece to liberalize its industries. Eurocrats, enjoying golden pensions (for 50% backed by European taxpayers), force Greece to cut its pensions. Eurocrats, dodging taxes, tell Greece to pay more taxes (Facebook page of the Commission, 13/07/2015).

More than a quarter of the commentators who evaluated the EU response to the Greek crisis criticized it as ineffective. The EU management of the crisis in Greece was coloured as a fiasco and it was

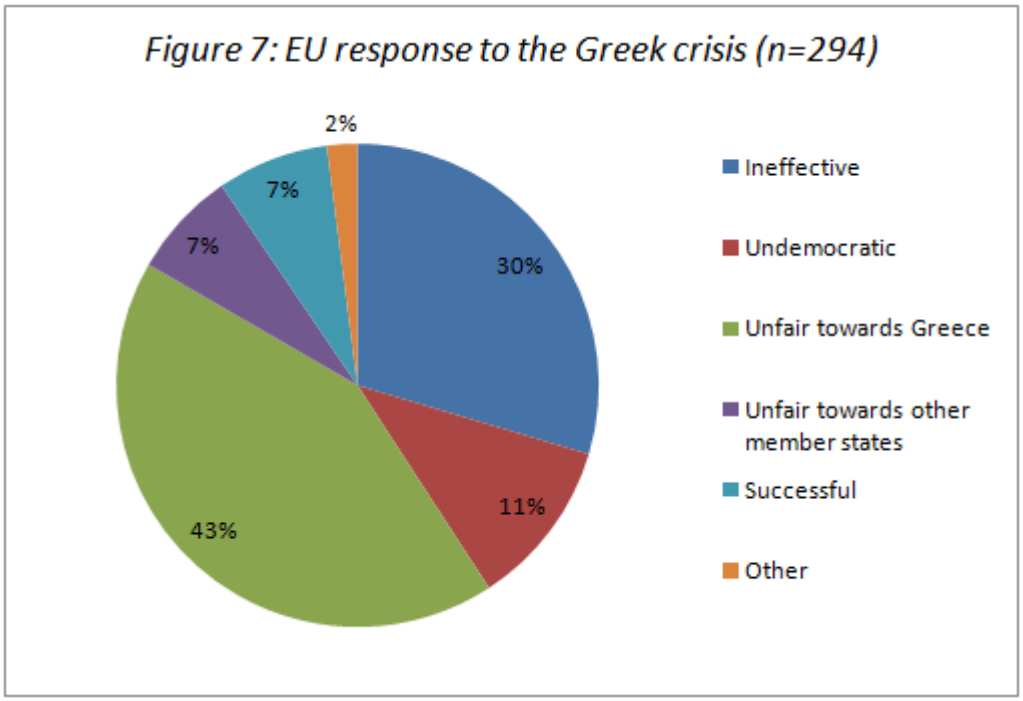
emphasised that the EU was failing to provide a workable and satisfactory solution since 2010 when the Greek turmoil started. The majority of the commentators who mentioned the ineffectiveness of the EU response to the crisis referred to the failed austerity measures, often pointing out to the prolonged recession and large-scale unemployment as their immediate results. The commentators claimed that the austerity measures stunted growth and that the debt was augmented multiple times instead of shrinking. Moreover, a number of contributors argued that the compounding pile of loans was not an effective remedy for the Greek problem and that indebtedness could not be solved by issuing a new debt.

Of the commentators, more than 10 percent who assessed the role of the EU in the Greek crisis characterized it as undemocratic. Frequent arguments included: 1) the will of the Greek people was blatantly ignored and the results of the referendum discarded; 2) the national sovereignty of Greece was violated by EU institutions; 3) Greece was framed as an ancient and genuine democracy which was undemocratically treated by the EU; 4) and it was the Franco-German tandem that *de facto* decided Greece's destiny. The following comment illustrates the way the democratic character of the EU approach towards Greece was challenged:

> A fundamental attack on any kind of democracy. Regardless of the problems and the needs for reform in Greece, the time limit of less than 3 days for Greece to pass and implement devastating legislation, and the demand that money from privatizations must be excluded from democratic control proves beyond any reasonable doubt that democracy means NOTHING to the EU-bureaucrats including the so-called 'parliamentarians'. The "A-greek-ment' (as Tusk with much malplaced humour) put it) will save the bureaucrats, save the Euopean bankers, who blindly posted money into the former and corrupt Socialdemocratic and Conservative administration in Greece and save the face of Merkel, Renzi and Hollande, but it condemns the ordinary Greek population to years of poverty and secures that Greece never will reach a sustainable and socially balanced growth. So - a kick to the Greek people and blow to any idea of democracy in the EU and thumbs up til bureaucrats and speculants. God - am I ashamed of being a citizen from a country that is a member of the EU. Luckily for my self-esteem Denmark fortunately is not a member of the euro-zone (Facebook page of the Parliament, 13/07/2015).

Only a small number of commentators evaluated the EU role as successful or unfair towards other member states. However, unlike the negative evaluations which were often very wordy and elaborated, the affirmative assessments were usually laconic and provided little information on the reasons the EU response was assessed as effective. Furthermore, those who argued that the EU approach to the Greek

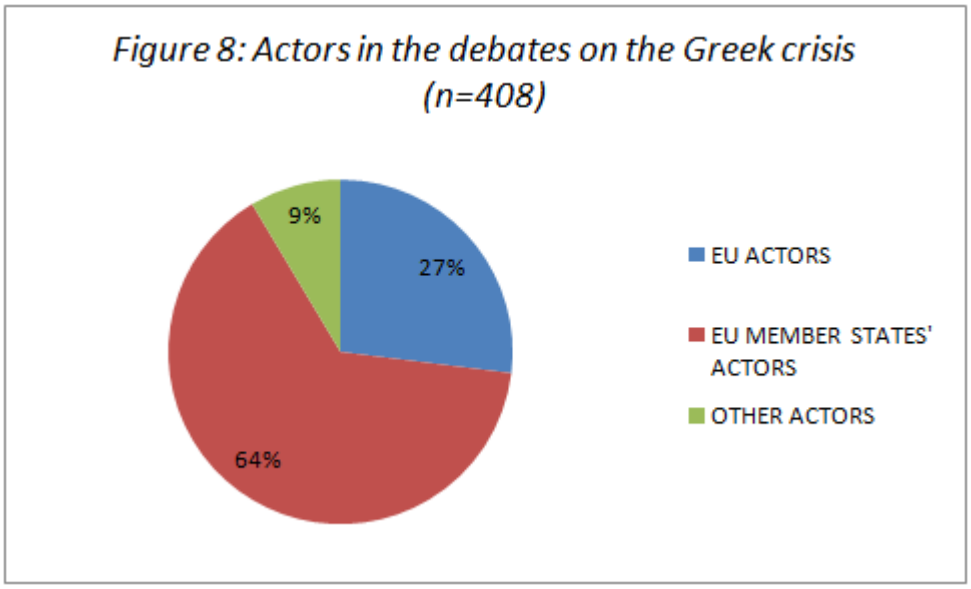
crisis was unfair towards other member states based their arguments on the premise that the EU supposedly forced poor countries such as Bulgaria, Romania, or Slovakia to pay for the allegedly higher-earning Greeks. On few occasions, it was argued that the reallocation of resources from EU member states to Greece was not fair or that Southern member states suffered harsh austerity and implemented reforms, but they received much less financial assistance than Greece.



As the Greek crisis might be compared to ancient Greek dramas, understanding the role of different actors is crucial for comprehending the plot and the moral of a drama. The Greek crisis involved an array of national political actors, EU actors, financial institutions' officials, and economic pundits. As previously explained in Chapter 4, in order to determine the frequency of these actors in said debates, I coded all the individual actors that were mentioned by the commentators, classifying them in three categories: EU actors, EU Member States' actors, and all the other actors who appertained to none of the two groups. As Figure 8 shows, EU Member States' actors represented a large majority of all mentioned actors. Consequently, one could notice that national actors still dominate debates on EU issues, even those unfolding on the social media pages of the two EU institutions. However, the two national leaders, Alexis Tsipras and Angela Merkel, outnumber by far the rest of state-level political actors. The number of

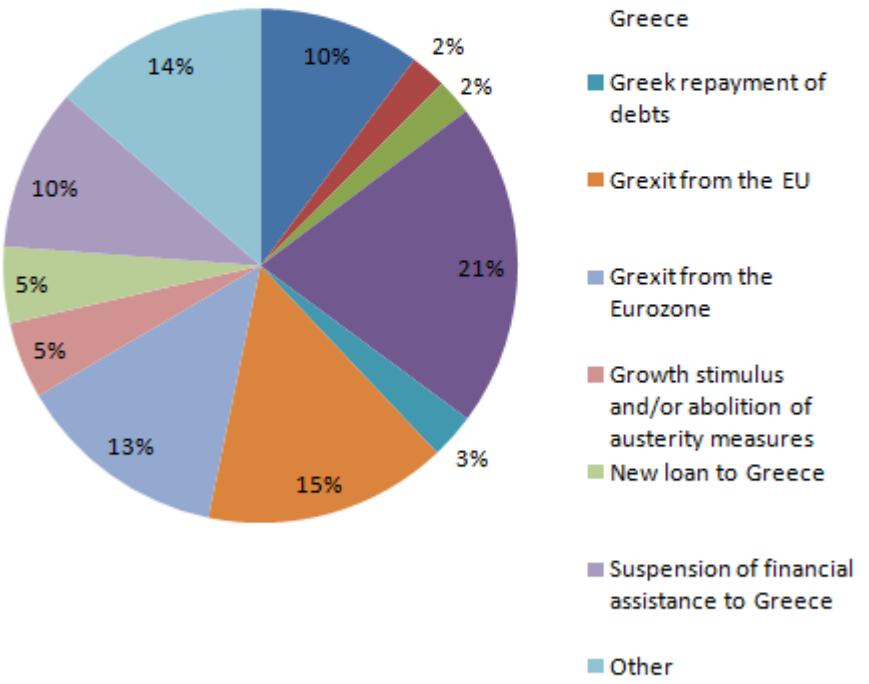
references to Greek Prime Minister Tsipras amounted to more than a half of the total number of references to member states' actors. However, Tsipras was dominantly portrayed in negative light. The negative evaluations of his role in the crisis made almost half of the comments that contained references to the Greek Premier, less than a fifth of comments that mentioned Tsipras were positive, while the rest were neutral. On the other hand, almost third of all references to EU member states' actors regard German Chancellor Merkel, who was represented negatively in almost 70 percent of the comments that referred to her role in the Greek crisis. Only a minor portion of comments evaluating the role of Merkel were affirmative, while the rest were neutral. Other national actors were mentioned quite sporadically; in addition to Tsipras and Merkel, the most recurrently named state-level actors were German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble; Yanis Varoufakis, Greek Finance Minister at the time of the crisis; French President François Hollande; and British Prime Minister David Cameron. All the other actors pertaining to this category were mentioned only on a few occasions.

The most commonly cited EU actor was the President of the Commission Jean-Claude Juncker, who was mentioned in approximately half of the comments. Yet, almost all of the comments contained negative evaluations of his role, either in the Greek crisis or in the EU in more general terms. Juncker's credibility was questioned by a large proportion of commentators due to his role in the so-called Luxembourg Leaks affair, which was uncovered by an international group of investigative journalists in November 2014. The tax avoidance scheme that was in place in Luxembourg, while Juncker was its Prime Minister, allowed massive tax dumping that generated high profits for multinational companies and eroded tax bases in member states with higher tax rates. Consequently, on many occasions, the commentators contested the credibility of Juncker to criticise tax evasion in Greece since he turned a blind eye to fiscal malversations that took place during his mandate as the Premier of Luxembourg. Finally, other frequently mentioned supranational actors were Guy Verhofstadt, the leader of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group and a member of the EP, and Martin Schulz, the President of the EP. The remaining actors included the managing director of the IMF Christine Lagarde, the former President of the US Barack Obama, Russian President Vladimir Putin, different historical figures, and pundits.



The solutions that the commentators suggested in their online contributions were quite varied, containing a wide array of diverse mechanisms for the resolution of the Greek crisis (see Figure 9). For instance, a fifth of the commentators, who expressed their views on the most appropriate way to tackle the crisis, proposed extensive reforms in Greece as the best solution for the Greek predicaments. Those who proposed the reforms as a remedy for the crisis usually identified Greek structural deficiencies as the main reason for the outbreak of the crisis. For example, the commentators who mentioned economic and/or political flaws of Greece also suggested specific or more general reforms that could alleviate the root problems such as corruption, clientelism, or low economic productivity. Furthermore, around 15 percent of the comments contain the idea that Greece should leave the EU, whereas 13 percent of the comments suggest that Greece should leave the Eurozone. The same number of the commentators advocated two completely opposite mechanisms: the relief or restructuring of the Greek debt, or the suspension of the financial assistance to Greece. However, the percentage of those who proposed a new loan as the most effective solution was unsubstantial, despite being the solution adopted in the end , in addition to a new set of reforms.

Figure 9: Mechanisms for the Greek crisis resolution (n=353)



6.3 Migration crisis in public discourse

As previously elaborated on, the migration crisis represented a critical moment in the process of European integration due to several reasons. It became another challenge for member states solidarity, which had been already called into question during the bailout negotiations when rescue funds had been strongly contested by certain member states. The main point of friction among member states during the migration

crisis was the system of quotas designed by the Commission to redistribute asylum seekers in a more equitable way. Hitherto, migrants' desired destinations had rarely been Southern and Eastern European countries, whose territories lay in closer geographic proximity, but Northern countries, such as Germany or Sweden. However, several Eastern and Central European governments refused the redistribution plan, justifying this decision by the argument that refugee admissions should be a sovereign national decision. The massive migration flow spurred xenophobic sentiments across the continent, stemming from an underlying three-fold cause. First, xenophobia was incited due to numerous terrorist attacks executed by radical Islamists which created fears that potential terrorists might infiltrate among—mainly Muslim—asylum seekers. Second, migrants were perceived by a part of the European public as a burden to national budgets, already facing reduction due to the economic crisis. Third, the arrival of Muslim refugees was framed by parts of media, political, and political discourses as an invasion of Islam that imperils European values, freedoms, and an "authentic" lifestyle.

Using this information to colour our context, the aim of this section is to understand how the EU was contested in these critical moments, when cultural, identitarian, security and economic concerns were intertwined. As concerns the organisation of the section, one can immediately find an easily-recognizable pattern when compared to the Greek crisis.

6.3.1 Principle of integration: the least contested aspect of European integration

The principle of integration was again the least addressed dimension of EU policy evaluation by the participants in Facebook debates on the migration crisis: the commentators expressed their opinion three times more often on the current EU set-up than on the principle of European integration. Those who addressed the principle of integration in their contributions were rather divided: roughly half of them claimed that their country or member states, in general, were better-off outside of any form of integration arrangement of European states, whereas the remaining portion of commentators assessed European integration as an a priori positive scenario for the European continent (see Figure 10).

The commentators who contested the EU in principle mainly denied the necessity for integrating and renouncing national sovereignty and called for the exit of their country from the EU. This kind of negative attitude towards *raison d'être* of the EU is often justified by the fear of losing national identity and security in the context of the increased migration. Parallel to the findings of the Greek crisis, most of the commentators appealed for the exit of the UK from the EU, but some nominated other countries such as Portugal, Czech Republic or Bulgaria. One illustrative example is quoted below.

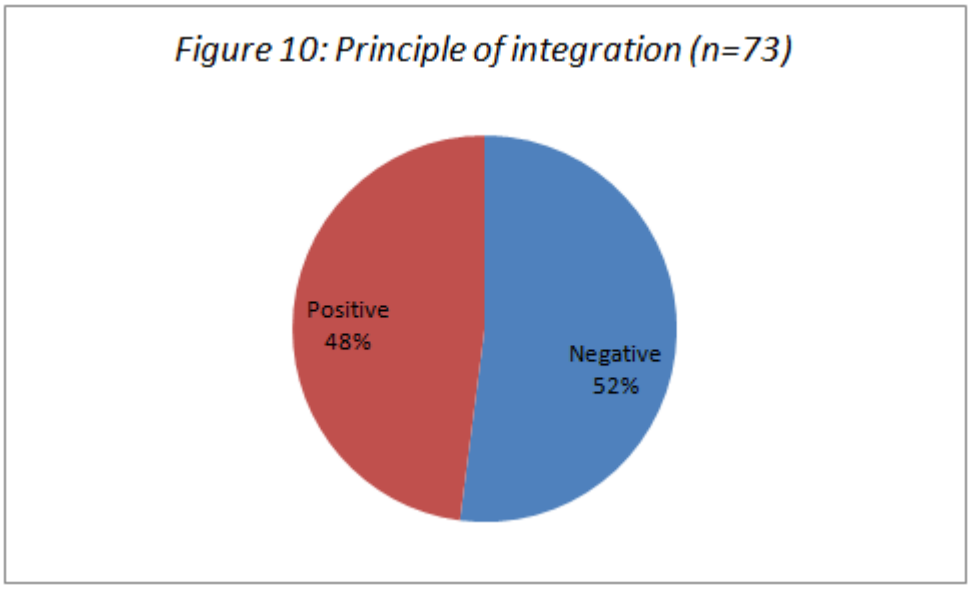
> The european union needs to be erased. It's undemocratic and works against the interests of every european country. The relocation scheme's agenda is to replace and permanently corrupt the ethnic identity of every european country. Say goodbye to your culture and history, people of europe. The Kebab has won (Facebook page of the Commission, 09/10/2015).

Even those commentators who appraised the idea of European integration in general terms often expressed dissatisfaction with the current state of the affairs in the Union. These critics most commonly castigated different aspects of the present EU structure such as EU political elites, national political leaders who shaped the process of European integration, or EU policies. The following comment serves to illustrate this type of "Alter-European" evaluations:

> Since 1951, this EU has failed in everything -CAP, Frontex, Euro, Ukraine,...- except regulating olive oil. All it is good at is handing out tax money. The EU restricts your freedom more than any government. Of course a union can solve this problem better than individual governments, only it won't be this union. Unfortunately. (Facebook page of the Commission, 14/09/2015)

However, there are some comments that are written in a very affirmative fashion and portray the EU as an indispensable framework for European states:

> If the EU fails, Europe will be doomed. Well not the rich and educated ones, they will leave, but the countries will become cheap labour paradises. I know you will disagree, but it would happen, 22 out of 28 countries would not be able to stay economically competitive in the world market, So a EU downfall is no option for us. (Facebook page of the Commission, 14/09/2015)



6.3.2 Simmering discontent with the current EU set-up

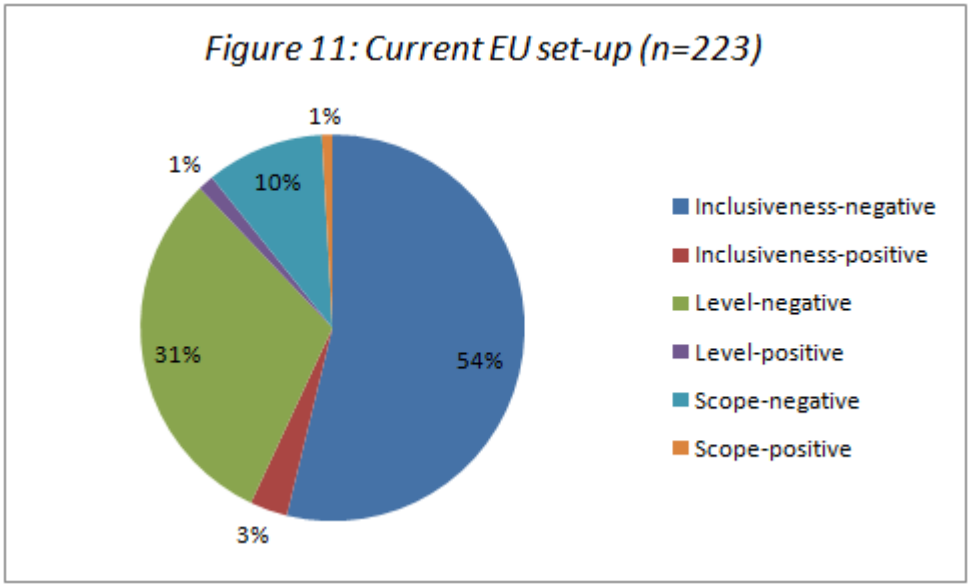
As Figure 11 shows, the current EU set-up was almost completely evaluated in negative terms in the examined discussions, as approximately 95 percent of evaluations were negative. As in the case of the Greek crisis, the current inclusiveness of the EU was the most criticized dimension of the EU's present construction. One of the most pervasive arguments is that the EU treated Europeans as "second-hand" citizens and discriminated them by protecting, hosting and creating opportunities for migrants/refugees. These statements were often justified by the argument that many Europeans were poor, homeless, unemployed; hence, the EU should have first tackled these issues and only then (possibly) took care of migrants. There were plenty of instances in the commentary where migrants or refugees were portrayed as invaders, whose mission is to Islamise Europe, decimating its values, laws, or cultural identity. These comments were often coupled with discontent with the EU's democratic quality and appeals for a referendum on migration policies and the system of quotas. One illustrative example is quoted below:

> When EC and EP will improve the life of the europeans? Till when we must pay high taxes and till when the native europeans will live in poverty and misery? Till when European Parliament and commision will provide the islamisation of the continent? We do not accept any illegal immigrants more! Europeans are homeless and have no work, you will accept more and more illegal immigrants! It's a real discrimination against europeans! (Facebook page of the Commission, 23/09/2015)

Only a few commentators expressed a positive opinion on the current level of inclusiveness of different categories of people in the process of European integration. They frequently referred to the

procedures of decision-making or/and representation channels within the EU that, according to them, effectively ensured the participation of EU citizens and the legitimacy of the system.

The EU's level of power was criticized by a substantial number of the commentators who evaluated the current EU set-up, as around 30 percent of them expressed discontent with the present redistribution of power within the EU. The most common accusation is that the EU forces Member States to agree on certain decisions such as quota systems. The power of the EU was characterized in this context as excessive, dictatorial, fascistic, or totalitarian. In contrast, some claimed that the EU possessed insufficient power to deal with the challenges of the migration crisis and compared the state of affairs in the EU during the peak moments of the crisis to anarchy. Finally, a part of the commentators referred to the lack of more equitable and fairer redistribution of powers among Member States and particularly the dominant role of Germany.



6.3.3 Future of integration: "leaving the boat"

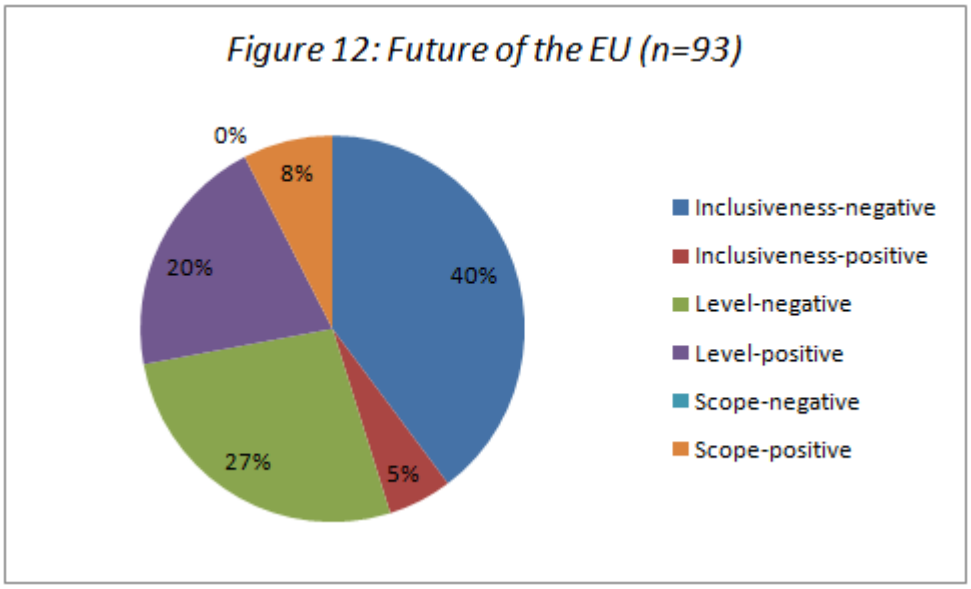
As Figure 12 shows, the largest proportion of the commentators that expressed views on the future of European integration—approximately 40 percent of them—assessed the future inclusiveness of the Union in negative terms. The majority of these comments contain appeals for leaving the Union, the projections of Brexit or exit of Eastern European Member States. The following example illustrates this category of comments:

> We - Bulgarians will start a petition and protests about our exit from the European Union! We want to leave that union which is not european and which discriminate europeans! We have a beautiful country, we have a great history, we have an ancient culture and traditions and we will not allow, anyone to defile and trample us! Including we will want resignation of the current government! This is the right way to save our identity! Our Bulgaria has no place among the Islamists! We can't to be a part from the islamisation of Europe! Yes. we are not the richest country in the world, but we have dignity and will protect it! (Facebook page of the Parliament, 23/09/2015)

Commentators rarely took an opposite stance and positively evaluated the future inclusiveness. Rather, they referred more generally to greater inclusion of people in EU decision-making procedures or the process of European integration.

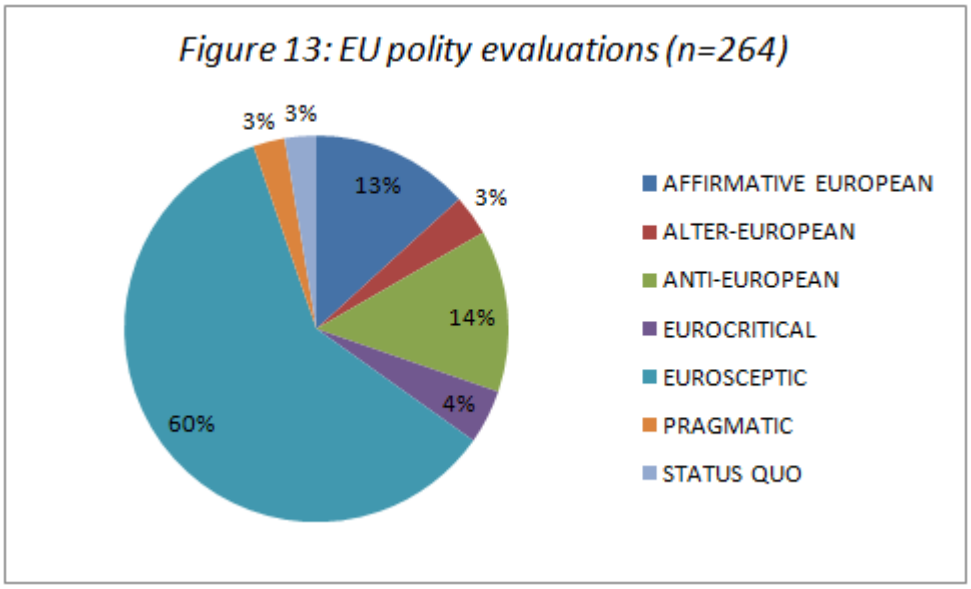
The future level of integration was assessed negatively by more than a quarter of those who commented on the future of integration. These commentators suggested that the EU should be "disbanded", "dismissed", "abolished", "erased"; or that it was "doomed", "on the brink of collapse", and about to "vanish". Although the apocalyptic scenarios of the future of European integration were common place in both debates, Europtimistic projections were identified as well. One-fifth of pro-EU power commentators were advocates for positive integration. These commentators appeal for a stronger and more integrated Union, for a European federation of states with a unique EU government, or even call for the abolishment of national states. The necessity for more united and integrated European states was mostly justified by the argument that a more unified group of states possess a better capacity for tackling predicaments such as a massive migration influx.

Completely absent from the debate was negative evaluations regarding the future scope of European integration. Yet, a small number of commentators suggested further amplification of EU scope, the majority of them proposing the establishment of a European defence force, which would provide the EU with more effective means to cope with migratory and security challenges.



6.3.4 Persistent diffuse Euroscepticism

Interestingly, the proportion of different EU polity evaluations that were coded in the debate on the migration crisis is similar to the redistribution of the same evaluations in the debate on the Greek crisis. The largest share of evaluations, almost 60 percent, pertain to the category of Eurosceptic evaluations, which contain the least specific or actionable content. Two diametrically opposite categories of EU polity evaluations, Affirmative and Anti-European, shared similar frequency. The remaining four categories of EU polity evaluations were much less recurrent than the leading three categories. These findings run parallel to the Greek crisis and confirm the tendency of the monitored public to either categorically support or categorically oppose the EU, or even contest European integration in an insufficiently specific way, by addressing only the current set-up of the EU, the future prospects of integration, or both of them.



6.3.5 Democracy still the major concern

The commentators whose contributions contained an evaluation of EU polity mainly referred to democracy in the EU, as a criterion for a positive or negative evaluation they expressed. Commentators commonly justified their negative evaluations by citing the lack of democratic credentials. Looking closely at the linkages between different categories of EU polity evaluations and corresponding justifications (see Table 6.2), one could notice that a large majority of those who referred to democracy as the main criterion of evaluation expressed mainly negative opinions on European integration. They accused the EU of being unaccountable to its citizens, disconnected from them, unresponsive, dictatorial, or autocratic. Many complained about the supremacy of Germany over the other member states and argued that Germany imposed the receptions of migrants to the other member states against their will. The issue of German dominance was often framed as the absence of consensual decision-making and negligence of some member states whose nationals perceived themselves as "second-hand" EU citizens. An illustrative example of this trend is quoted below.

> It is obvious the EU and each states governments are going where I believe a majority of it's citizens do not want. At least the informed citizens. I think it is time for a new referendum regarding the EU with all the information laid out on the table. As a Spanish citizen I am tired of Merkel's influence on European policy and my government. I do not vote for Merkel, I don't see why she has to influence anything. As well, the EU needs an overhaul. We have too many totalitarian fascist in parliament and running the EU pushing policy no citizen has voted on. (Facebook page of the Commission, 14/09/2015)

As Figure 14 shows, culture, economic prosperity and necessity as underlying justifications of EU polity worth occurred approximately the same number of times in the debate (approximately 15%). The commentators who referenced the consequences on culture portrayed the EU as detrimental to European and national identities, particularly due to its lax and excessively benevolent stance on migration and the promotion of multiculturalism. In the context of the migration crisis and as a result of a large number of migrants adhering to Islam, a big portion of the comments that addressed the impact of European integration on European and national cultures were Islamophobic. These commentators accused the EU of converting Europe to Islam and conducting annihilation of European culture and values. The following comment portrays this tendency in the examined public discourse:

> I have never seen a governing body being more concerned with the well-being of others rather than thinking about the cultural and spiritual survival of their own people! What good a soul would be when you become responsible for the degradation and complete destruction of your own social order? Go to North London and tell me if you feel European, if your soul is at peace when you walk a street where all signs are in Arabic and no people speak English! Is that what you want to turn Europe into? Europe needs firm hand and real leadership that puts Europeans first, not gibberish about soul-searching and hypocrisy from those who put the Union in this position with their spineless behaviour and blind following of the destructive American policy! (Facebook page of the Commission, 17/09/2015)

The commentators, who justified their evaluations on the impact of European integration on the prosperity of EU citizens, argued that many Europeans were unemployed, living in poverty, or paying high taxes to the EU. Such arguments were frequently accompanied by the expressions of dissatisfaction with EU funding for facilities and humanitarian assistance to migrants. Moreover, some commentators complained about the subordinated position of Eastern European member states and their second-order status in the EU with respect to older member states. Still others argued that European integration encouraged “social dumping” that generated economic benefits solely for this group of states and to the detriment of its more affluent partners, which guaranteed higher minimal wages for their workers.

Those commentators who justified their EU polity evaluations by invoking “necessity” arguments predominantly characterized the EU as “useless” or as an entity that inflicted only damage to member states and their citizens. The commentators frequently denied any positive effects of European integration or its present set-up, particularly underlying the futility of EU institutions, their utter inefficiency,

bureaucratic character, or corruptness. Nevertheless, some contributors portrayed the EU as an indispensable framework of cooperation of European states: “We need more Europe - not less. Europe only can try to act with a chance of success. Members States - even bigger ones - are just helpless.” (Facebook page of the Commission, 27/08/2015)

Only a miniscule number of commentators based their evaluations of European integration on safety issues. Most of them argued that the EU was too weak to provide security to its citizens and that it was incapable of securing its own borders. Some claimed the EU should have reinforced security measures in order to prevent potential terrorist and warriors of the Islamic State from infiltrating into its territory as asylum seekers. Finally, there are those who were in favour of tighter integration and the establishment of a European army which would combat the Islamic State and put an end to the Syrian conflict.

Figure 14: Justifications of EU polity worth (n=258)

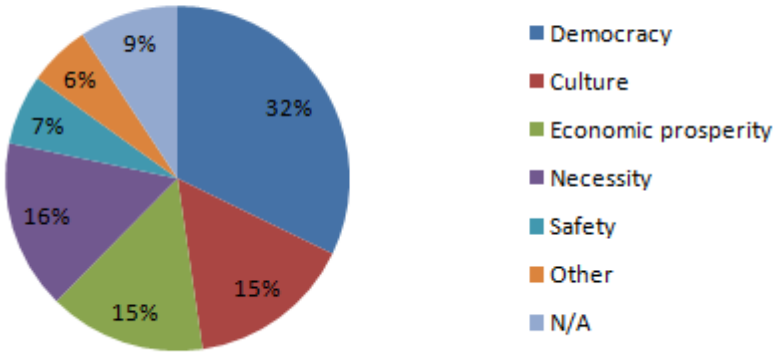


Table 6.2: EU polity contestation and justifications (Migration crisis)

Types of Evaluation						
Justifications of the EU's worth	Affirmative European	Alter-European	Anti-European	Eurocritical	Eurosceptic	Status Quo
Democracy	8.6	11.2	19.4	16.7	40.5	57.1
Culture	8.6	22.2	8.3	16.7	17.7	14.3
Economic prosperity	8.6	11.2	16.7	8.3	17.7	0
Necessity	37.1	22.2	33.3	25	7	0
Safety	11.4	11.2	8.3	0	7	0
Other	2.8	22	8.5	33.3	5.7	14.3
N/A	22.9	0	5.5	0	4.4	14.3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

6.3.6 Migration crisis "anatomized": the EU's role, roots, and mechanisms for the resolution

The migration crisis in the examined debate was frequently framed as the uncontrolled Islamic invasion disguised as a refugee crisis. As Figure 15 shows, the role of the EU in this crisis was dominantly assessed as negative, whereas unsubstantial portion of the commentators who evaluated the role of the EU in the migration crisis, qualified it as successful and efficient. The highest proportion of debaters (nearly 40%) evaluated the EU's response to the crisis as ineffective. The EU leadership was blamed for being incompetent and unable to control EU borders and provide protection to its citizens, while EU counter-crisis measures were portrayed as "superficial", "sluggish", "belated", or as a "failure". According to some commentators, the EU's approach to the migration crisis was fragmented and succumbed to national divisions, whereas, according to others, the EU's response was completely controlled by the German government. The alleged ineffectiveness of the EU is illustrated by the following example.

> It has failed in everything. It has failed in the crisis, it has failed to protect citizens from bank scam, it has failed in migration control, it has failed in child poverty, it has failed in unemployment, it has failed to protect our industries, it has failed in the welfare and security of it's citizen. It has failed in foreign policy, it has failed in trade policy. It has failed in forming a good strong union. (Facebook page of the Parliament, 14/09/2015)

Furthermore, nearly 30 percent of the commentators assessed the EU's response as unfair towards EU citizens; in their view, the EU was focused solely on helping migrants, grossly neglecting the problems of EU citizens such as poverty or unemployment. Some complained about putative

social benefits intended for migrants, underlying the fact that many EU citizens suffered harsh austerity, and that the EU should take care of Europeans first. In addition, the reception of migrants was framed as a danger for European security in the context of increasing terrorist attacks.

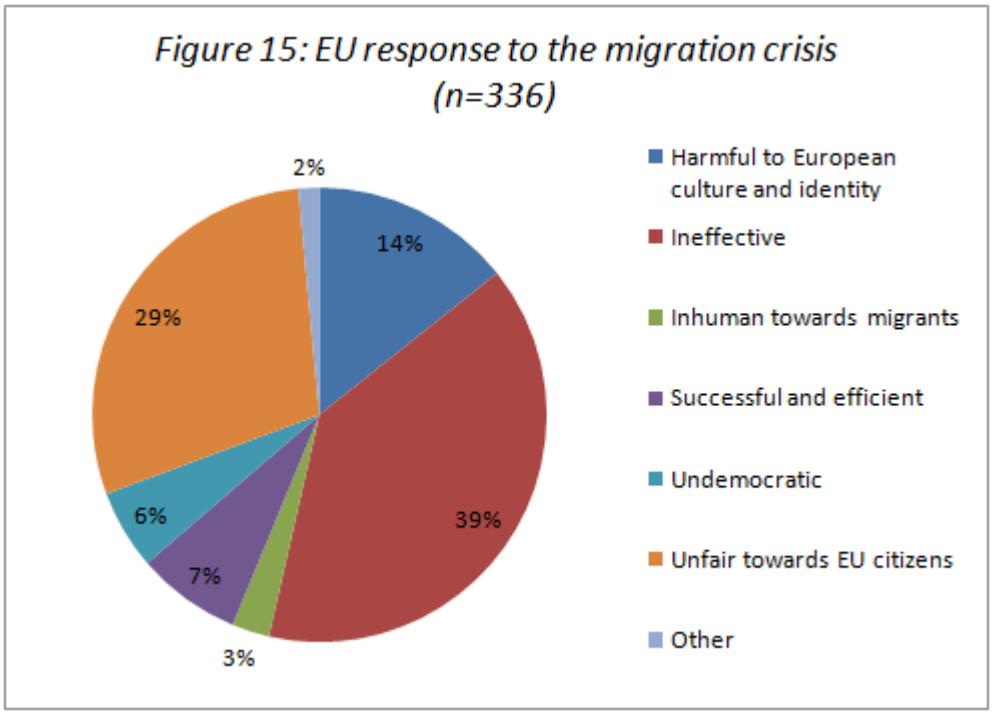
Cultural and identity-related arguments were prominent in the debates on migration, as predicted. As previously explained, EU institutions, particularly the Commission, had an important role in the crisis and promoted a common EU approach to this problem keeping a pro-refugee attitude. Thus, the EU's response was often perceived as encouragement of the reception of incoming asylum seekers, who were often seen as a danger for European values and liberties, since most of them were Muslim and hence, perceived as starkly different from dominantly Christian Europeans. Through this worldview, EU migration policies were seen as an attempt to Islamize the European continent with migrants continuing the mission of the Ottomans in aspiring to conquer Europe. Thus, EU institutions were accused of "treason" since the EU was welcoming migrants, who were paradoxically equated with the Ottomans. According to a large portion of the commentators, European history, culture and civilization were threatened by "theocracy", "destruction", or "annihilation" and this process was unfolding under the auspices of EU institutions. As one of the commentators stated: "The EU is stabbing European civilization in the back". The migration influx was illustrated by using military terms and riddled with terms like an "invasion" or "Islamic hordes". One typical example is quoted below.

> Stop attempting to force eastern EU nations to accept Islamic hordes they NEVER asked for. And yes, it is an invasion. These "migrants" are NOT welcome by the vast majority of Europeans. They were NOT invited except by a loony German leader and some grey old Eurocrats in Brussels hoping to destroy the demographic integrity of Europeans. You do NOT represent the genuine opinions of Europeans. Viktor Orban does. Marine Le Pen does. Nigel Farage does. (Facebook page of the Commission, 26/10/2015)

A small portion of the commentators who assessed the EU's response to the migration crisis evaluated it as undemocratic. They mostly claimed that the EU had ignored citizens' voice with regards migration and that citizens should have been consulted via a referendum in order to provide democratic legitimacy for migration-related decisions. Moreover, on a few occasions, the

system of quotas was labelled as undemocratic because it had been adopted by a qualified majority and against the will of some member states.

Those who characterized the EU's role in the migration crisis as inhuman towards migrants were few. They held EU institutions responsible for the deaths of refugees and accused them of a lack of engagement in rescuing people from drowning, starvation, or other lethal dangers.



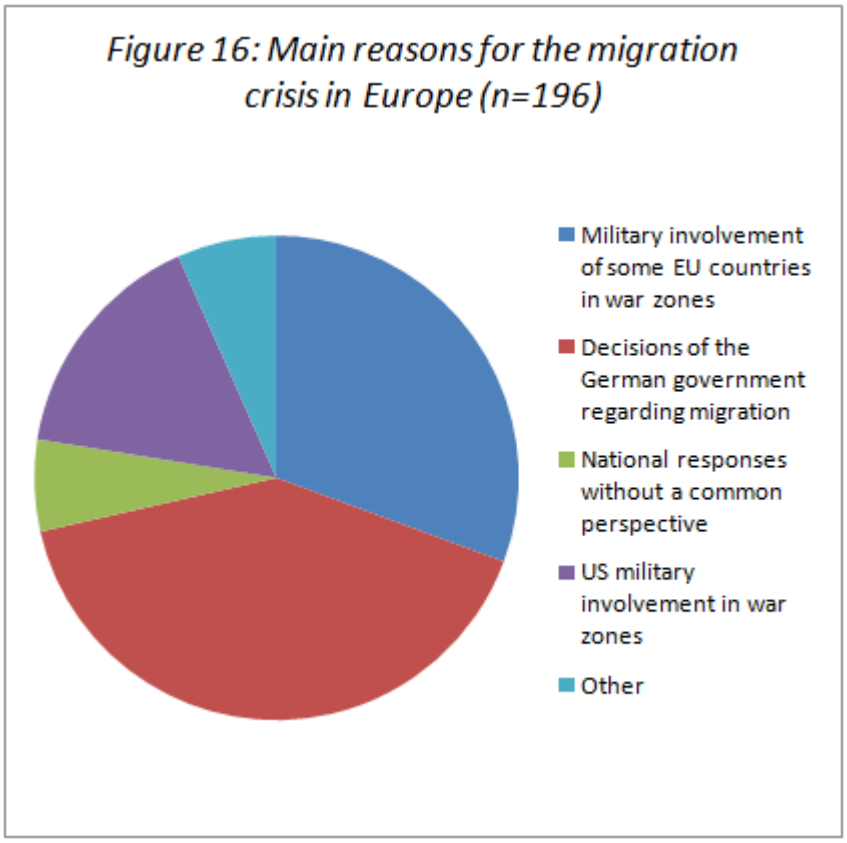
For the majority of the commentators (40%) assigning a root cause to the migration crisis was attributed to the decisions of the German government, particularly of Chancellor Merkel, responsible for the escalation of the crisis and its expansion from the Middle East to the European continent. The façade of welcoming incoming migrants was often seen as a rouse for Germany to boost its economy via cheap labour. The foremost argument invoked by commentators was that Chancellor Merkel "invited" migrants to come to Germany and consequently, created problems for entirety of Europe by the aforementioned German decision to unilaterally to stop applying Schengen rules, notably the provision on the "country of first entrance". As a result of this so-called German open-door policy, other European countries were constrained to bear the consequences of the German government's decisions. Similarly to the Greek crisis, the decisions of the German government during the peak moments of the migration crisis were interpreted

by “recycling” historical concepts that seemed buried in the past, such as the Fourth Reich and German aspirations to conquer Europe.

The second most popular attribution for the migration crisis in Europe was the military involvement of certain EU countries in war zones (approximately 30% of comments). A substantial number of commentators argued that the military interventions of NATO countries in North Africa and the Middle East had caused conflicts that refugees were fleeing from. Some commentators maintained that toppling of leaders in the zones of conflicts—which according to some provoked instability, insurrections and, consequently, armed conflicts—was backed by certain EU member states, which often followed the US in their military ventures around the globe. According to a large proportion of commentators, many European countries had traditionally had a destabilising role in the Middle East and Africa, due to their political, economic, and military interventions, such as bombing, looting their natural resources or making a profit by selling them weapons.

US military involvement in war zones was identified as the main reason for the crisis by around 15 percent of the commentators who expressed their view on this issue. These commentators dominantly argued that by accepting refugees, the EU paid the consequences of US interventions in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, or Libya, and henceforth, the US should have borne humanitarian costs of their foreign policies, instead of the EU taking over such a big share of the migration burden.

A minority of commentators contended that disunity of national governments over the migration issue caused the crisis. According to them, nationally focused and self-concerned responses, deprived of a common EU perspective and interest, were unable to provide an effective solution for the increased migration flows into Europe.



In regards to resolution mechanisms for the migration crisis, the suggestions of the commentators covered a wide array of possible remedies for the massive influx of people heading to the European soil (see Figure 17). A quarter of the commentators proposed a solution that the EU should have denied EU entry to migrants and even expelled those who had already entered. The most recurrent appeal that the commentators directed to EU institutions was "Close the borders!" Conveying the same message but using other expressions, some commentators also asked EU authorities to build a fence, send boats back, or repatriate those that had already arrived. These comments were frequently characterized by strong Islamophobia and expressed in an offensive language when referring to migrants and/or EU institutions. The comments were teaming with intense emotions, such as rage, hostility, or even hatred, towards migrants who were portrayed as invaders:

> Protect us and respect our right not to accept on our territories people with such a barbaric ideology (no human rights, no freedom of speech, rape, pedophilia and fanatism)! Send them back! We are the EU citizens and how dare you use the money from our taxes to welcome invaders even without documents! Shame on you! (Facebook page of the Parliament, 25/09/2015)

This anti-immigration rhetoric was directed towards EU actions aimed at helping refugees: “Somehow I feel that the Parliament is not hearing the true voice of EU citizens: "Build walls not camps"!” Finally, the most reoccurring argument in these debates was that refugees were actually economic migrants and hence, EU and national authorities were not legally obliged to offer them any form of protection or assistance.

In contrast to these dominantly hostile comments on migrants, an opposing force of refugee advocates and benevolent commentators spoke up. Those commentators demanded from EU institutions to protect incoming migrants/refugees and provide them with a shelter, food, or other types of support. However, the commentators used different arguments in order to corroborate these appeals: a human duty to help a fellow man in need; aging European population and the potential of immigration to rejuvenate it; the legal obligation of European states to grant asylum to those fleeing from persecution; European history of migration to Americas or fleeing from totalitarian communist regimes to Western European countries during the Cold War; the necessity to demonstrate adherence to the proclaimed values in practice by protecting those in need; and migrants’ skills and education as a boost to European economies. A comment which exemplifies these pro-refugee (migrant) attitudes is quoted below.

> We have to be brave, we have to be European, we have to welcome them and share our values of Liberty and democracy. Remember that : WE WERE ALL REFUGEES years ago... me, you, our grandparents... Somebody welcome them in 1936 or 1954 or more recently. We have to do the same because we live on the same planet. Come on, stop being short minded. (Facebook page of the Commission, 17/10/2015)

Nevertheless, many commentators emphasized the necessity to protect exclusively “real” refugees, after thorough screenings and security checks, or the protection for only women and children.

A portion of the commentators argued that the migration crisis should have been resolved by the redistribution of refugees to extra-European countries. Most of them put forward the idea that the so-called Gulf countries (e.g. Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia) should host the largest share of refugees, underlining cultural and religious commonalities between refugees and the citizens of these

countries and the affluence of the latter. Other commentators argued that the problem of refugees and migration was not solely a European, but a global issue that required a UN response. Correspondingly, others reiterated the responsibility of other continents to share the burden of migration with Europe, most notably the US as it was frequently held responsible for the armed conflicts that caused a mass exodus of refugees.

Furthermore, around 10% of the commentators, who suggested the best mechanism for the migration crisis resolution in their contributions, argued that EU military, peacekeeping or humanitarian actions in war zones would have been the most appropriate remedy. Most of the comments highlight the necessity for the EU to engage in Middle Eastern conflicts and stop the hostilities, notably the Syrian one. Some comments pinpointed the need to outfight the Islamic State or the Assad regime. In addition to the suggested military actions, some commentators were in favour of a humanitarian approach to the issue, such as sending experts or supplies. However, a general fear from migration was demonstrated by a dominant view that refugees should be helped, but on the spot by creating safe zones and, in this way, prevented from seeking asylum in Europe.

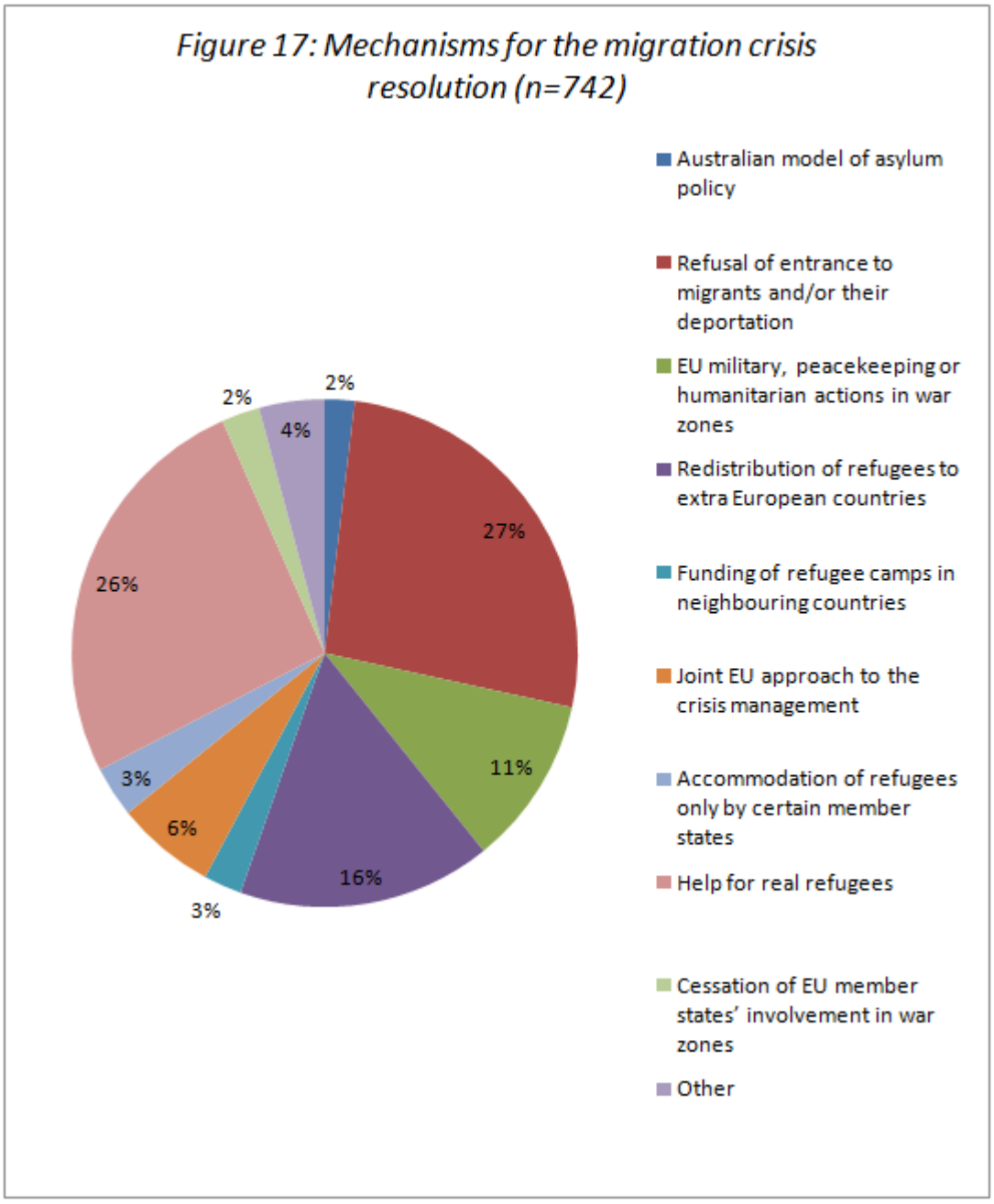
Nevertheless, commentators frequently attributed competences that could be considered national to the EU and consequently, held it responsible for the inaction in areas that are beyond its powers. For instance, it seems that many of them were not acquainted with the fact that the EU did not have an army and hence, it was not able to give a unique military response to the war in Syria or other arm conflicts. An example of this kind of lack of knowledge on EU competences is cited below.

> When reading the comments I think EP should provide educational advertisement about the rights of refugees and EU citizens for EU citizens because many believe that they have a disadvantage compared to refugees. EP should help the refugees and do their best to integrate them into European society (language courses, culture courses, meetings of locals and refugees). EP should also do something for the peace in Siria so that not more people have to flee. (Facebook page of the Parliament, 26/09/2015)

Furthermore, a small portion of the commentators advocated a joint EU approach to the crisis management as an effective way of handling massive inflows of migrants. Their arguments followed the

same line of reasoning with slight variations: the EU needs a common European asylum policy; all member states should act in partnership in order to effectively manage the crisis; member states should revisit the existing agreements on migration; refugees should be redistributed among member states; a permanent mechanism of allocation of asylum seekers should be introduced; or member states should be integrated more tightly in order to handle the crisis.

Additional, less frequently used arguments made in the debates were: only certain member states—notably those that "invited" refugees or were involved in the Middle Eastern conflicts— should accommodate them; that the EU should fund refugee camps in neighbouring countries and, thus, prevent refugees from setting out on the journey to Europe; and that certain EU member states' should cease their involvement in war zones.



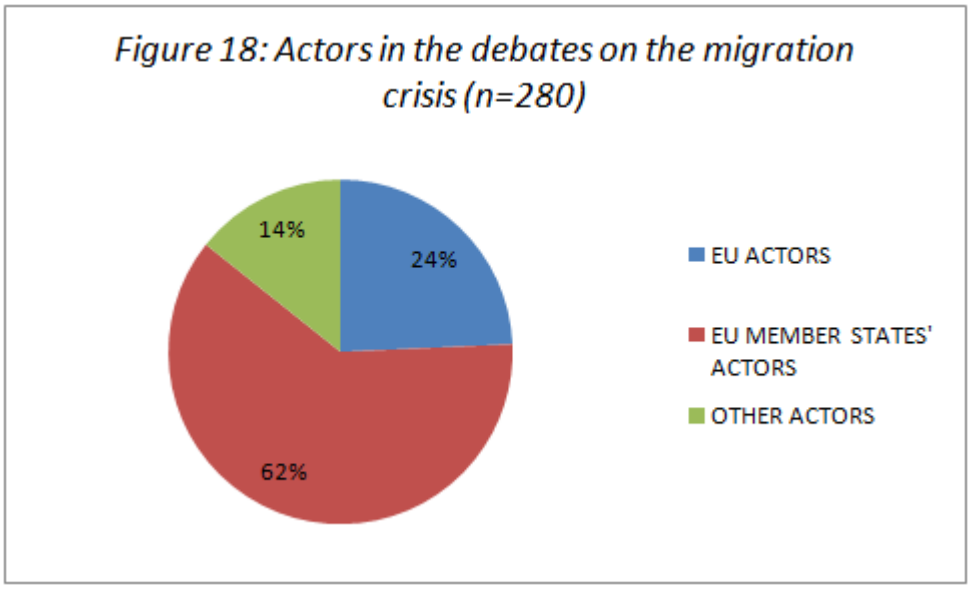
In regards to the portrayal of characters, Figure 18 shows a large prevalence of national actors, with EU Member States actors representing more than 60 percent of all mentioned actors. Almost 80 percent of them contained references to German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who was evaluated mostly negatively (more than 80%).This fact manifests a strong negative perception of Germany and its leader in these debates, who is represented as a dictator and the main responsible for the crisis due to her alleged invitation to refugees to come to Europe. In addition to Merkel, the only national actor who received more substantial attention in commentary was Viktor Orbán, the Hungarian Prime Minister. Unlike Chancellor

Merkel, Orbán was portrayed in positive terms and characterised as the real leader who manages the crisis in a sensible way:

> What to do ?! European Parliament, listen carefully to Mr. Victor Orban and follow his advises and instructions! He is our real European LEADER ! He has huge support and respect from all ordinary Europeans. Mr.Orban is thinking about the future of Europe, to keep and save our national culture, customs, traditions! Europe is for people, who understand and accept 100% of our costumes, traditions, government rules! Refugees are welcome to settle and WORK in any European country, not only Germany, or Sweden - that's very important ! Also, all economic migrants - around 70%, should be deported back to their countries in Africa and Middle East. (Facebook page of the Parliament, 21/09/2015)

Regarding EU actors, 65 percent of comments mentioning actors active in the supranational institutions referred to Jean-Claude Juncker, the president of the Commission. Most of the commentators expressed rather unspecified criticism towards Juncker and pleaded for his resignation, while the others negatively evaluated his role in the migration crisis. Although lagging far behind Juncker, the second most visible EU actor in these debates was Martin Schulz, the President of the European Parliament, who was mentioned several times, albeit in a dominantly negative context. The third most visible EU actor was Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission, whose role in the migration was evaluated negatively due to her alleged pro-Islam and pro-Russian attitudes.

Other actors, who belong neither to member states' nor to the EU's level, were far less prominent in the debate content. The actors who received slightly more attention included Tayyip Erdoğan, Barack Obama, and Vladimir Putin.



6.4 Conclusion

The analysis presented in this chapter provided thought-provoking insights into the attitudes of Facebook users towards the European Union. The bottom-up approach employed in this study paints a more informed and detailed picture how the EU is contested among ordinary citizens in the context of the two crises that are considered existential for the Union. Unlike the conventional wisdom present in the literature on public Euroscepticism, which is based on statistical data and highlights utilitarian and cultural factors as main determinants of public hostility towards European integration, the findings of the present analysis show that the most recurrent justification for negative evaluations of different dimensions of the EU polity, in the view of the examined transnational public, is its lack of democratic credentials.

The argument that democracy is strongly attached to the state and tailored for its needs and cannot be replicated at the EU level no longer holds. The findings of this study and the previous studies that examined the public discourse (Hurrelmann et al., 2013; De Wilde et al., 2013) have shown that ordinary citizens are highly concerned with the democratic legitimacy of the EU. Furthermore, this analysis shows that the series of different crises have aggravated the legitimation problem and that citizens feel excluded and unrepresented in the EU system, and consequently, prone to be hostile towards the EU since they bear immediate consequences of decisions originating from Brussels, such as austerity or increased migration.

Moreover, the participants of the examined debates showed a tendency to characterize the EU as undemocratic, but without suggesting how to rectify the indicated flaw, except for occasionally requests for a referendum on some EU decisions and policies. Yet, the unsubstantiated criticisms of the EU offer poor insight into potential avenues for a democratic reformation.

The problem of eroded EU legitimacy has been recognised by EU and national political elites, who have been engaged for many years in the process of enhancing the EU's democratic quality by reforming its institutions, decision-making procedures, and developing a wide array of participatory tools (see Kohler-Koch and Quittkat, 2013; Greenwood, 2012). Nevertheless, despite an extensive number of reforms and innovative democratic tools of influencing on decision-making in Brussels, a large proportion of the mini-transnational public, addressed in this study, feels deprived of voice and power as EU citizens and views the EU as highly undemocratic. This poses the question if citizens truly lack the knowledge necessary to influence the EU through different channels such as voting at EP elections, taking part in various consultative forums, and citizens' initiatives or they judge this array of democratic tools inadequate and wish different mechanisms of public inclusion in EU decision-making. Scholarly contributions show that even the European Citizens' Initiative, a great participatory promise, has not been materialised through a larger civic participation (e.g. De Clerck-Sachsse, 2012). Still, participation is essential for any democratic system since it reduces a sense of distance from political authority, stimulates concern for collective problems and solutions, and encourages citizens to be active and knowledgeable about politics.

Another conclusion that stems from this study is a general dissatisfaction with the current EU set-up in the period of both crises, which far outnumbered the evaluations of the principle of integration and the future of the European project. The lack of outright opposition to the *raison d'être* of the Union of European states may be interpreted as a positive for the project itself as its existence was not challenged by a large number of this transnational sample of citizens. On the other hand, conspicuous discontent with the current state of affairs is worrisome and demonstrates the necessity that the EU improves its performance. In regards the output legitimacy of the EU, the largest proportion of commentators assessed the response of the EU to both crises as ineffective. Furthermore, the role of Germany and notably Chancellor Merkel

received a lot of negative attention from the participants in the debates on both the Greek and migration crisis. Germany was framed as an emerging hegemon in Europe as its role was assessed as dictatorial and self-interested. Despite these debates unfolding on the Facebook pages of the two EU institutions, the Commission and the Parliament, member states actors received a notable quantity of references. This tendency demonstrates that the EU is still seen through an intergovernmental perspective and that EU actors still have little visibility.

The two debates have some parallel elements such as the most commonly invoked justification for Eurosceptic evaluations was the alleged democratic deficit. Moreover, the commentators mostly addressed the EU's current set-up and to a much lesser extent the principle of integration and the future of European integration. Thus, it appears that the Facebook public was concerned of the state of affairs at the moment of commenting, which is also understandable having in mind the crises with which the EU and its Members States were struggling. More high-level reflections on the utility of European integration and the future avenues of the process of integration surfaced less frequently. Regarding the aspects of integration that were addressed, the Facebook commenters mainly assessed the level of inclusiveness, particularly bemoaning the lack of inclusiveness of "ordinary" people in EU decision making. Following the democratic deficiencies, the second most addressed aspect of EU polity was its level of power and the unequal redistribution of powers among EU institutions and inside of them. On the other hand, a small number of online contributions referred to the scope of integration; this implies a weak tendency of commenting on concrete policies but debating more in terms of power and access to power.

The causal dimension of these crises was prominent in the Facebook debates; people active in the examined social media platforms sought to share their interpretation of these crises, point at the main culprits and, consequently, suggest solutions. Some of the common patterns inside of the Facebook comment threads were strong views, emotionally charged opinions, and the identification of problems or breakages in the system. Although the role of the EU in the two crises was mainly negatively depicted, the reasons for both crises were placed in national realms rather than the EU. In the case of the Greek crisis, the largest proportion of commentators identified Greek structural deficiencies as the main cause of the

crisis instead of the Euro. On the other hand, the decisions of the German government regarding migration and military interventions of some EU member states in the war zones were singled out as the main reasons for the migration crisis in Europe. Although the EU was not identified as responsible for the emergence of the crises, the way it responded to their consequences was highly contested and deemed ineffective. In addition to the critique of being ineffective, the EU was also blamed of being unfair, in the case of the Greek crisis towards Greece, and towards EU citizens in the case of the migration crisis. Both debates contained strong victimization of either Greek people or EU citizens, who were portrayed as "casualties" of EU decisions and policies. Interestingly, the range of proposed mechanisms for the crisis resolution was much more diversified than the scope of root causes. However, the existence of a limited number of frames for both crisis interpretation and crisis resolution demonstrates that Europeans have rather common views on the general issues and debate them in similar manners invoking common arguments and propositions. One of the most important conclusions manifested in this study is that these arguments present some uniformity despite the differing country of origin for their advocates. This homogeneity of frames used to discuss the origins of both crises, the mechanisms for their resolution and the role of the EU in this context brings us to the conclusion that a Europeanised public debate exists, although in a limited number of forums.

What emerges in the Facebook debates on the migration crisis is a cultural understanding of Europe as "the Occident" with a portrayal of the EU as infringing "European" norms and values (MacMillan, 2018). In both debates, the concept of "othering" was used by the commentators in the building of a self-understanding of the EU and Europe, by juxtaposing them to Islam or US liberalism. Moreover, the analysis revealed a frequent occurrence of the concept "we, Europeans" or "we, people", which erases inter-member states animosities and conflicts and contrasts "the people" to elites. Yet, these "Europeans" often opposed the EU as their supranational government, blaming it for harming the (European) public good. This, however, is not necessarily negative for the process of European integration, as it is a clear sign of politicization of the EU, a phenomenon that is here to stay, and which brings the EU closer to the national political setups where political opposition is a key component of a healthy democratic political system.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

7.1 Online Euroscepticism in times of crisis

The EU is no longer viewed as an uninteresting success story in the public's perception. Due to increased politicization and the rise in the number of EU-related referenda, the public has become a relevant stakeholder, threatening the primacy of national and EU elites as political power hubs. The unfinished character of the EU stimulates the formation of diverse opinions on the principle of European integration, EU competences, and EU membership. The public contestation on these different aspects of EU governance brings a new perspective into the literature on EU politics, which mostly focuses on the conflicts between institutions, national governments, or political parties (De Wilde et al., 2013:1-2). It is not pretentious to claim that Euroscepticism has evolved into a key element of contemporary European politics. The upsurge in party and popular Euroscepticism did not happen overnight, but it did happen relatively quickly due to the mélange of several concurrent and mutually reinforcing factors, such as the series of overlapping crises, the rise of populism, the increase in EU powers and competences, and an overall sense of "democratic malaise".

This study takes a bottom-up approach to online Euroscepticism in times of crisis by asking: how was the EU contested in the popular discourse which was unfolding in social media during the peak moments of the Greek crisis and the migration crisis? In order to answer this question, this study presented an analysis of a sampled corpus of the Facebook commentary published on the two Facebook pages administered by the European Parliament and the European Commission during the two critical periods for the process of European integration. Since this study aims at capturing the dynamics of EU-related discourse beyond the linguistic and geographical spheres of particular countries, it focused on these two

Facebook pages due to their highly transnational character. This transnational public was debating EU issues on the platforms administered by EU institutions, frequently questioning effectiveness, efficacy, democratic quality, and moral legitimacy of both the EU and its counter-crisis measures. Negligence of democratic principles and unwillingness to decide on EU issue in a plebiscite were repeatedly lamented by the commentators. As a result, the efforts of the social media teams of the Commission and the Parliament were mainly aimed at rebutting the bemoaned lack of the EU's democratic legitimacy and accountability. Moreover, the commentary was imbued with indignation at national, EU and financial elites and the victimization of "ordinary people", who the commentators claimed to represent. The "people" active on the two Facebook pages framed themselves as the "losers" of their material well-being coupled with the national cohesiveness of their countries, frequently blaming European integration for the deterioration of their economic security and for jeopardizing the distinctive identities of their national states.

The present analysis finds that EU legitimacy contestations during the Greek and migration crises mainly concerned the current institutional EU set-up, whereas the evaluations regarding the principle of integration and the future project of integration were much less salient. As shown in Chapter 6, the content analysis of the Facebook commentary revealed the preponderance of negative comments on the EU, particularly those containing "diffuse Euroscepticism". This finding speaks to the argument of Michailidou (2015:332) that the common characteristic of the EU online public spheres is "a generalized, underspecified dissatisfaction or even disaffection with the EU polity." However, the majority of the contributors to the two debates did not contest the principle of integration, thus confirming a tacit consensus over the necessity for collaboration of European states given their economic, political and cultural linkages. The salience of the opposition *within* the system and *not against* it suggests that the EU was viewed as a desideratum by the commentators, despite the predominant negative framing of different aspects of European integration. However, notwithstanding the general agreement over the necessity of maintaining the nexus of inter-European relations located in Brussels, the lack of visions for the future of project signals an integration gridlock. The lack of propositions concerning a possible EU transformation curtails the potential of this kind of discussion fora to act as reform idea incubators or engines of political innovation.

Moreover, it implies a tendency of the public to criticize the current state of EU affairs without suggesting a remedy or preferences concerning future (dis)integrative steps.

In both debates, democracy was the most frequently invoked justification for all types of EU polity evaluations, from the entirely positive to the entirely negative ones. The defence of representative democracy was one of the most recurrent frames used by citizens when commenting on EU affairs in the forums. The EU democratic deficit, which used to be mainly a concern of political scientists and sociologist studying European integration, has become a prominent theme in informal Facebook forums. Although there were differences in conceptions in the nature of the crisis, cultural, and historical references, similarities could nevertheless be observed in a position of soft Euroscepticism, framing the EU as a neo-liberal enterprise lacking "real democracy", but nevertheless capable of transformation into "another", better Europe. This "social media movement" that is looking for a different Europe, may be seen as a part of other "offline" social movements—which have emerged as a response to the current state of European democracies—either right-wing or left wing. Moreover, this study shows that the transnational Facebook public debating EU issues on the institutional pages is deeply concerned with the issues of democracy and popular representation and motivate their criticism towards the Brussels elite by using legitimacy-related arguments. Thus, one should be careful not to discredit and dismiss their legitimate concerns by simplistically labelling Eurosceptics as nationalists, racists or neo-communists, since motivations for Eurosceptic attitudes seem to be multiple and context-dependent.

Moreover, the mapping of crisis-related arguments presented in these debates present showed a relatively restricted number of the types of recurrent arguments concerning the causes of and the solutions to the two crises. Tallying the arguments by their frequency demonstrates that the members of this highly transnational Facebook public interpret the crises using the same frames. This study revealed a complex picture of conflicts and axes of divisions within the monitored transnational public, which did not necessarily coincide with national lines of confrontations, such as debtor vs. creditor countries or shielded vs. external border migration countries. Moreover, while the role of the EU in the two crises was mainly negatively depicted, the reasons for both crises were placed in national realms rather than the EU.

Although the EU was not identified as responsible for the emergence of the crises, the way it responded to their consequences was deemed ineffective by a large portion of contributors. Furthermore, the solutions proposed by the transnational Facebook public were rather numerous and variegated, demonstrating their reflectiveness and care for the common affairs.

In regards the visibility of actors, the findings showed a preponderance of national actors despite the fact the EU-focused debates unfolded on pages administered by EU institutions the and the topics of discussions were EU affairs. One could see the transnational public attributed the power of crisis-related decisions to member states actors, while the role of EU leaders was tacitly classified as secondary, giving less them prominence than their national counterparts. Moreover, the EU actors were dominantly framed in negative terms. Nevertheless, the opposition towards the actions or the personality of high EU officials was not necessarily negative for the process of European integration but might be a sign of the public consciousness on the responsibilities and powers EU officials, whose actions are judged and evaluated as those of national authorities.

Another component of the reviewed Eurosceptic evaluations was anti-Germanism. Both crises were imbued with strong anti-Germanism, justified by the concerns that the powerful member states, notably Germany, imposed their favoured policies on weaker states without deference to public opinion. Moreover, these anti-German sentiments were directed towards the German political leadership and particular Chancellor Merkel. The German leadership was equated with Hitler, Nazism, or the Third Reich and accused of cruelty and imperial aspirations. This blame-game directed towards certain actors and the personalisation of the crisis contributed little to the resolution of problems and the finding of "truth". Moreover, Michailidou (2016) finds in her study on anti-Germanism and Euroscepticism in the Greek public opinion that the focus of the critic of the Greeks was on individual actors and that such tendency impeded the system of taking advantage of the crisis as an important learning opportunity in terms of reform paths or future crisis prevention. Furthermore, the resurrection of the two bloodiest arm conflicts in the recent history, the First and the Second World War, shows that certain historical episodes can easily emerge in the public discourse if a crisis arises and the responsibility can be attributed to a nation or a group of nations.

However, the stigmatisation of certain groups as inherently "evil", as in the case of Germans, revives stereotypes and nationalism without a real questioning of the causes and responsibilities.

The conclusions of this study speak to the insights of previous parallel studies addressing Euroscepticism online: the contemporary agoras facilitated by the Internet are dominated by Eurosceptics, while the supporters of European integration play a secondary role. Media debates on EU legitimacy are usually monopolised by those disgruntled and dissatisfied with the current state of affairs (De Wilde et al.2010). It seems that online discussion forums amplify discontent with European integration since negative comments prevail over affirmative ones. This tendency may be explained by the fact that those who are critical or discontented have more incentives to voice their dissatisfaction than those who are supportive of European integration. The findings reported in this study confirm the findings of a number of previous studies that Eurosceptic arguments tend to be much more prominent in online media than the comments of appreciation (De Wilde et al.2010; De Wilde et al. 2013). The study conducted by De Wilde et al. (2013), which this study draws on, examined online Euroscepticism, addressing online news media and political blogs which tackled EU-related topics during the 2009 European Parliament election campaign. Although it looked at a different time period, the present study confirmed several findings generated by the research of De Wilde and his colleagues: first, the predominance of negative online contributions; second, the focus of online contributions on the current EU set-up; third, democracy as the most invoked justification for EU polity evaluations, particularly for the negative ones; fourth, the convergence of the contents of comments across different member states. The congruence of the findings of this study with the findings of akin studies may suggest the existence of a pattern in EU polity contestation in online media.

In order to present a top-down perspective on online Euroscepticism in times of crises, this study used rhetorical analysis of Facebook posts of the two institutions and semi-structured interviews with the members of the two social media teams. The findings laid out in Chapter 5 show that EU civil servants, who communicate on daily basis with European citizens, engage primarily in self-legitimation, seeking to construct legitimacy of the EU, its institutions and decisions by providing mainly factual data and logos-based arguments. Since an overarching frame of the two debates was a lack of democratic criteria of the

supranational governance, the social media teams of the two institutions frequently addressed the "democratic deficit" arguments by underlining the principles of representative and participatory democracy evidenced in the system of EU governance. Throughout the interviews, the correspondents agreed that social media amplifies Euroscepticism and gives voice to the noisiest part of the public. However, they also confirmed the existence of an inquiring and polite silent majority. Moreover, EU communication officers, both from the Parliament and the Commission, agreed that Brexit has spurred a wave of EU-enthusiasm and those praising the EU have become more vocal and active in Facebook debates.

Although EU communicators mainly demonstrated a "technocratic resilience" in their communication efforts, on a few occasions they used a more colloquial language, humor or irony. However, the interviews reveal that EU communication officers are aware of the need to step out from the language of neo-functionalism, encumbered with bureaucratic jargon, and adapt it to the sensibility of ordinary citizens. Nevertheless, according to their statements, the hierarchical organization of EU institutions hinders the implementation of novelties and perpetuates deep-rooted communication modus operandi.

Comparing the findings obtained by applying both top-down and bottom-up approaches on discursive Facebook interactions shows the clash of an emotionally-fuelled language of the transnational Facebook public, on the one side, and a "dry", technocratic language of EU communicators, on the other. Consequently, the principles of "pathos" and "logos" often collide in these interactions, maintaining the bemoaned gap between citizens and the EU.

7.2 Populism and Euroscepticism: loyal allies

Euroscepticism and populism often go hand in hand since the EU is an easy target for populists due to its technocratic and bureaucratic character, remoteness from its citizens, and the alleged lack of democratic control. Euroscepticism is closely connected to a more generalized scepticism about modern politics since the European Union is par excellence the business of government (Mair, 2009:16). How did "us" [European citizens] oppose "them" [EU elites] in the context of the two crises? This question goes beyond a mere opposition to and criticism of single politicians and EU officials but looks at public reactions that target a

broader category of EU elites. Overall, the loss of trust in national and European representatives and the dissatisfaction with a representational are distinctive features of both debates.

The findings of this study suggest that the rise of populism that one can observe at the party level is also evident in the public discourse. The discourse of populist leaders has been the focus of the majority of scholars addressing this phenomenon (e.g. Wodak, 2015; Kesting et al., 2018). However, this study provides a bottom-up perspective on populism, by shedding light on the grievances underpinning the demand side of the populist turn. In the literature, there are three conceptions of "the people": political (the people as sovereign), cultural(the people as a nation) and economic (the people as a class) (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). Based on this division, the populist claims may be categorized along the left-right political spectrum or connected to a specific idea of democracy (Kriesi 2014). While the left-wing understanding of "people", as a working class opposed to EU elites, was salient in the Greek crisis debate, the right-wing understanding of "people" as a "nation", was prominent in the migration crisis debate. However, the understanding of "people" as "sovereign" is common in both debates and is wedded to the democratic deficit argument. The Facebook commentators more frequently used the pronoun "we" implying "ordinary people" or "Europeans" than "we, Greeks", "we, Germans" or "we, Italians". Yet, this emerging European digital demos is different from the types of demos desired by Europhiles, since it is based on the hostility towards the EU elites, who putatively neglect the European "people" by protecting the interests of either financial institutions or third country nationals.

The two crises represent two contrasting political challenges. The Greek crisis and the Eurozone crisis, concern financial and economic mismanagement, whereas the migration crisis concerns the attitude towards immigration linked to the basic aspect of national sovereignty and the acceptance of a more multicultural society. The overwhelming feeling prominent in most sampled debates was *fear*– either economic fear induced by the debt crisis or the fear of foreign infiltration induced by the massive migration. Populists capitalise exactly on these fears: fears of the loss of control, identity, social status or security. The present study has shown that populist and Eurosceptic sentiments feed on the failures of national and EU elites to find solutions to economic and migratory problems. Populist narratives resonate

with electorates both dissatisfied with their country's social and economic settlement, and the efforts of centrist political actors to respond to their grievances. The simplistic solutions proposed by populists find appeal with those whose concerns have too long fallen outside of political discourse.

An analysis of these debates manifested an antagonism between cosmopolitans and communitarians (Zurn and De Wilde, 2016) The cosmopolitan bias of non-majoritarian institutions is perceived as hostile by those attached to their nations or communities. Since non-majoritarian institutions increasingly govern the contested issues in modern democracies, communitarians lose political influence and control. Communitarians feel that they have no say in the political deliberations and in the public discourse, perceiving themselves as subjugated or repressed by cosmopolitan experts controlling non-majoritarian institutions.

The migration crisis debate illuminated the existence of the "the online uncivil society", characterised by nativism, xenophobia, and exclusionary views (see Krzyżanowski and Ledin, 2017; Ruzza, 2009). This "us" versus "them" discourse has been the epitome of right-wing populist politics in Europe and overseas. The open and liberal societies, proposed by cosmopolitans, have been under siege of groups advocating discrimination, anti-pluralism, and protectionism. This rather extremist rhetoric has become part of mainstream politics, moving to the verge of socially accepted.

7.3 European digital public sphere

Many scholars have engaged in the investigation of the correlation between the democratic qualities of the EU and the absence of a European demos and/or a European public sphere (Koopmans and Statham, 2010; Risse, 2010, 2014; Salvatore et al., 2013; Statham and Trenz, 2013, 2015; Trenz and Eder, 2004; Wessler et al., 2008). This study contributes to the mentioned strand of literature by demonstrating that social media represents a favourable environment for the emergence of the European public sphere. In the monitored Facebook fora, one could observe a synchronization of political debates across national spheres, a convergence in meaning structures, the circulation of ideas between speakers in different countries, and to some extent, an emerging European identity. Contrary to certain prejudgments of social media being

"toxic" places where hate speech and trolls dominate, this study argues that social media are arenas for constructing politically relevant discourses. Moreover, EU-related political engagement on social media is gradually becoming a building block of the European(ised) public sphere, not only an occasional practice. According to Risse (2010:120), "public spheres emerge in the process during which people debate controversial issues …the more we debate issues, the more we leave the position of neutral observers — thereby creating and/or reifying political communities in the process." Thus, the two crises, as particularly polarizing and controversial periods for European integration, have spawned the process of formation of transnationalised public spheres and traces of a united European identity.

Due to the proliferation of the Internet and social media, the traditional public sphere has been transformed into a net of intertwining public spheres which allow the diffusion of political debates across national borders, publics, and platforms (Bruns and Highfield, 2016: 68). Political issues are not only "Europeanised" in their contents (Statham and Trenz, 2013) but one could also observe a nascent, very limited European public sphere emerging on social media platforms. As this and previous studies (de Wilde et al., 2014; Michailidou et al., 2014) show, conflicts may foster the emergence of a European public sphere, as they link and integrate fragmented national spheres into a European public space.

In examining the debates, one could detect elements of "discursive integration" which refers to increased levels of transboundary communication and a combination of "attention to political developments in other countries" and "the circulation of ideas between speakers in various countries" (Wessler et al., 2008:12). One could also notice a trans-nationalization evidenced by collective identification that occurred when speakers simply acknowledged a transnational collectivity, declaring a sense of belonging to that collectivity by "including themselves in a collective "we"' or by 'pointing to (or inventing) historical or cultural commonalities or by setting it apart from other communities which are often devalued in the process" (Wessler et al., 2008:12). We could call these emerging demos "the European digital demos". Claiming that social media can resolved the "no demos" conundrum of the EU (Weiler, 1999) would be an overstatement, but the findings of this study suggest that social media allows citizens to form

new transnational publics who seek to export their views beyond home borders and influence supranational authorities.

While national discussions often perpetuate national stereotypes and the national culture of debating, transnational discussions may ideally lead to a convergence of distinctive national perspectives. As long as a citizen receives information solely from national media and exchanges views only with their co-nationals, the capability of understanding a different point of view is limited, particularly in the situation of a crisis which involves blocks of countries with opposing interests. However, if ordinary Greeks and Germans are able to interact, they might reconsider some convictions and decrease the gap between their views on the issues of common interest, such as the Greek bailout.

7.4 Anti-EU Europeanism and defensive nationalism

As this study demonstrates, the Eurozone crisis and the migration crisis represent shared European experiences that construed in a similar way among the members of the monitor Facebook public despite their diverse personal and national interests and the exposure to different national media. Moreover, a large portion of commentators positioned themselves against EU elites, forming an "ad hoc" European demos, albeit different from the one EU enthusiasts longed for. This emerging European demos was predominantly disapproved of different aspects of the European project, frequently assessing them as detrimental to public economic and cultural interests. In the context of the economic crisis, the commentators opposed EU elites denouncing them as protectors of financial markets and corporate interests. In the context of the migration crisis, the Facebook public blamed EU elites for prioritising migrants over them "true" Europeans, often defining itself in the fashion of nativism, evincing xenophobia, racism, and Islamophobia. These dominantly negative interpretations of the EU and its role in the two crises conflict with the EU narrative of mutually-supportive and internationally solidarian community.

However, in addition to digital Europeanism that emerged in the commentary, the presence of nationalist arguments in the monitored fora needs to be acknowledged. The Facebook comments did contain values of nationalism, cultural cohesion of nation states, and economic protectionism, as opposed

to liberal values promoted by the European project. Contrary to "end of history" predictions (Fukuyama, 1992), the economic and migration crises have put post-national politics on trial and evoked national narratives, allowing an emergence of illiberal nationalistic democracies in Europe. Moreover, the securitisation of migration issues and the porosity of national economies in relation to financial interdependence and the greater global economic landscape have facilitated the emergence of populist parties advocating for the repatriation of national powers from Brussels and the erection of physical or figurative walls to address an emerging need for social protection.

The nationalism that emerged in the monitored online fora is different than the primordial nationalism that was born in the 19th century; while in the past nationalists used to venerate the national state and its leaders, nowadays national political elites are often severely criticized by those typically classified as nationalists. In the past, the state used to be considered as an embodiment of the nation and strong affective ties characterized popular attitudes towards their country. Nowadays national elites are considered corrupted and self-interested; thus, the national interest is to dismiss these cliques and form new governments, which would serve the nation and its people. Nationalisms of the 19th and most of the 20th centuries were expansive nationalisms which aspired towards expanding territories and gaining power. The nationalism identified by this research, but also contemporary nationalism in Europe in general, is defensive: instead of advocating for expansion and ambitious conquests, today's nationalists are closing in national borders for protection from migrants, market forces or other unwanted foreign influences.

7.5 Incorporating popular preferences into the future of European integration

President Donald Tusk, in his speech at the event marking the 40th anniversary of European People Party, said:

> Obsessed with the idea of instant and total integration, we failed to notice that ordinary people, the citizens of Europe do not share our Euro-enthusiasm. Disillusioned with the great visions of

> the future, they demand that we cope with the present reality better than we have been doing until now.[26]

Indeed, the aforementioned gap between disillusioned, disempowered ordinary people and EU elites has been evidenced by the present study. By moving decision-making one level higher, "the architects of the European construction have been able to leave democratic procedures behind" (Mair, 2013: 135). This study manifested that the idea of an EU democratic deficit transcends the borders of particular national settings traditionally attached to democratic postulates or scholarly discussions, inundating transnational online debates. However, despite denouncing EU democratic qualities, the commentators suggested few propositions regarding the democratisation of the EU system. A referendum was the most frequently proposed solutions for the lack of EU legitimacy. However, more EU referenda would not be an optimal solution, since complex and controversial issues are rarely resolved by binary outcomes. Moreover, accessing popular sovereignty directly via referenda, by voting on a ballot question, is a contentious instrument in both national and EU settings. The capacity of referendums to foster democracy within the EU system is contentious due to several reasons. First, giving a say to one or few national constituencies increases their power vis-à-vis the constituencies of other member states, which are deprived of the possibility to decide on the issues that will affect them. Second, governments may strategically utilize referenda or the threat of referenda in order to negotiate additional benefits for their states. Furthermore, Ireland, for instance, has a constitutionally embedded obligation to hold a referendum on EU Treaties' ratification, which increases its bargaining power vis-à-vis other member states. At the same time, the German constitution envisages only two types of a mandatory binding referendum – in changing the constitution and in changing the state territories. Thus, the increase of sporadic referendums held by a few member states could deepen the inequality in influence between national constituencies, exacerbating the EU democratic deficit (see Cheneval and Ferrín, 2018).

The way forward for the EU is to create new channels for public grievances. The EU is widely perceived as rigidly imposing a set of values from above, particularly openness to immigration at all costs,

[26] Source: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/05/30/pec-speech-epp/ (Accessed: 29/09/2018)

or a set of economic solutions such as austerity. Forums such as citizen consultations or digital policy platforms can give voice to those who feel left behind, but the creation of new mechanisms to gather inputs from below and carefully scrutinise them is necessary. In order to connect more effectively with the European demographic and to try materializing the democratic promise of social media, the EU institutions need to tailor communication to the sensibility of the wider European citizenry. If EU online communication is to alleviate the alarming gap between "the people" and "the elites", it needs to overcome its deep-rooted elitism and exclusiveness. Indeed, the EU could integrate certain populist elements such as responsiveness to popular, everyday concerns.

However, as mentioned throughout the dissertation, hitherto numerous elements of representative and participatory democracy have been built in the EU system. Regardless of these efforts, the democratic deficit conundrum has not been solved yet. Thus, in addition to further democratisation attempts, the EU could foster the performance of its policies, alleviating popular resentment fuelled by the lack of both input and output legitimacy. The EU could devise more effective European policies on cross-border issues like migration, climate change, and trade. Although the EU has little power over income distribution and precarious employment, it could use tax, trade, and competition policies to foster economic well-being of EU citizens. Instead of insisting on mandatory relocations system for asylum seekers, which proved to be inefficient and an easy target for populists, the EU can help strengthen external border controls, provide more support to first arrival countries, and run a voluntary relocation program.

The combination of the European model of the welfare state, values of liberal democracies and the EU framework have in principle yielded positive results. The areas where the results have not been satisfactory will need reforms. In this age of popular anger, mainstream parties need to restore voters' trust by considering their fears seriously, without embracing xenophobic policies. However, many centrist politicians, out of fear, replicate nationalist and xenophobic policies of populists. As Franklin D. Roosevelt said in his inaugural speech: "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

People's concerns about a globalised and increasingly complex world merit an answer that contrasts from the solutions advocated for by populists. If the EU is to combat populist forces, it needs to be recognised by its citizens as "a Europe that protects", characterised by the high performance of its policies and commitment to its fundamental values, inter alia democracy. In regard to a new narrative on the European identity, national and EU leaders could package Europe as an attractive brand with strong values with a cooperative model of governance, which differs from the alternatives: Trump's America, Putin's Russia, or even Brexit Britain.

The impact of Brexit on Britain will have important consequences for both populism and Euroscepticism. If the UK becomes more isolated, poorer and divided, populist and Eurosceptic political forces may lose popular support. The potentially devastating consequences of Brexit might show that the repatriation of sovereign powers means a loss in the ability for the state to provide its citizens with prosperity and security. Nowadays, the traditional idea of national sovereignty could be re-conceptualised and complemented with European sovereignty which would protect the interests of national states by fostering their prosperity and security as well as shielding them from the side-effects of globalisation.

During the history of European integration, proponents and vociferous advocates of European integration have often been labelled as progressivists, while those who expressed criticism and scepticism have been condemned as reactionaries. However, Euroscepticism is not necessarily negative for the process of European integration. In practice the critics have significantly shaped and developed the European project, whereas its passionate supporters have often risked destroying it by their actions (Gilbert, 2014:187-188). Thus, national and EU elites should embrace critical arguments which may plant a seed of a new consensus.

Annex 1

List of interviewees

Interviewee 1: Social media coordinator at the European Parliament, 29/09/2017, Brussels

Interviewee 2: Social Media Officer of the European Parliament, 05/10/2017, Brussels

Interviewee 3: Social Media Officer at the European Commission, 05/02/2018, Brussels

Interviewee 4: Communications Advisor at the European Commission, 7/02/2018, Brussels

Interviewee 5: Corporate Communication Manager at the European Commission, 7/02/2018, Brussels

Interviewee 6: Digital Communication Manager at the European Parliament, 14/02/2018, Brussels

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