Chapter 4

Polarization in Europe:
Public Opinion and EU Foreign Policy

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Is the EU Facing a Populist Threat?

The past few years have seen public opinion play an unprecedented role in shaping, constraining and conflicting politics at the level of the European Union (EU). Decades of permissive consensus, whereby the Euro-elite and national decision-makers jointly governed an expanding area of policy, have been threatened by the rise of Euroskeptic populist parties, probably to a point of no return: with the British vote to the leave the EU in 2016, complacency over the irreversible path of integration— the notion of ever-closer union—came to an end.

This polarization of public opinion and its eruption into EU affairs manifested itself in three issues in particular. The most prominent was immigration, with the near collapse of intra-EU solidarity during the political crisis following the influx of refugees in 2015–2016. Second, the eurozone nearly broke up during years of muddling through the impact of the financial crisis. Third, the consensus on trade vacillated once new generation trade deals reached important turning points.

These cleavages are underscored by another horizontal and generalized trend: the loss of belief in the project of European integration and lack of trust in EU institutions.

To understand how public opinion may influence EU decision-making, one needs to look more closely at these two levels of analysis. Alongside growing anti-globalization sentiments, political parties—mostly, but not all, populist in nature—have mobilized against EU trade agreements, not necessarily because they are anti-trade, but because they do not believe the EU should be conducting them. In other words, understanding the influence of public opinion on decision-making on international issues in the European Union begins with understanding the relationship between domestic attitudes towards foreign policy *and* attitudes towards the EU.

In addition, polarization in much of Europe (unlike in the United States) is not noticeable among traditional political parties. Quite the contrary—mainstream political parties have arguably become too similar. By the time the Cold War ended, the traditional cleavage between capitalist and socialist-inspired parties that had dominated Europe's post-World War Two decades lost out to broad acceptance of the inevitability of globalization and the possibility of a "third way."[1] In recent years this broad convergence has penalized most mainstream parties electorally, with few exceptions. In Europe, protest voices against the mainstream have converged in several and quite diverse populist parties, mostly to the right of the political spectrum, embracing nativist and often xenophobe narratives, but also to the left, with widespread anti-globalization and/or anti-neoliberal sentiments.

However, it is not quite right to claim, as the dominant narrative has it, that Europe has been under a populist siege, which was ameliorated in 2017 by winning centrist and pro-European political leaders in Paris and Berlin. States are undergoing a transformation of representative democracy in which political parties, among others, are one ring of a complex chain. Technology, globalization, Europeanization, are altering traditional relationships between citizens and institutions, and citizens are losing confidence that their elected leaders can address their challenges and fears. Political parties no longer play the role of intermediaries between citizens and power. Not many citizens trust them: in nine EU countries surveyed by the Pew Research Center, only five of forty-two parties received a positive rating.[2]

How has populism been successful in generating the impression that mainstream politics have become the nail under its hammer? A full answer to this puzzle can only come from understanding a number of its jigsaw pieces, beginning with an examination of how established parties relate and respond to the sentiments that animate populism and the leaders who manipulate them. This will inform the degree to which public opinion is

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[1] Anthony Gidden's *The Third Way. The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), was inspirational to many center-left leaders who dominated European governments towards the end of the 1990s (during Bill Clinton's Presidency in the United States). It accepted capitalism, albeit with a social face, and was optimistic about the benefits of globalization and open societies.

[2] Bruce Stokes, Richard Wike and Dorothy Manevich, "Post-Brexit, Europeans More Favorable Toward EU," Pew Research Center, June 2017.

influencing choices that reach the level of the EU, or to what extent officials have used public opinion as a scapegoat for government stagnation.

After a brief overview of what the public opinion space in the EU may be, which is necessary due to the multi-national and the multi-level governance existing on the continent, this chapter delves into understanding public opinion cleavages in EU countries that are of relevance to foreign policy. I compare public opinion on specific issues with indicators of trust in the EU in general as a way to distinguish between a citizen's position on a certain issue and/or his/her preference as to whether that issue would best be addressed at the national or supranational level. I then look at how public opinion informs decision-making, by examining patterns of influence that have been evident in the EU during the past few crisis-driven years. Here too, the level of governance and influence is important, showing complex patterns between domestic and external policies that are not appropriately reflected in the rivers of ink recently written about populism. Finally, the chapter highlights some issues that may help to frame a better understanding of domestic determinants of foreign policy choices.

The Space for EU Public Opinion

There is little consensus on whether public opinion influences foreign policy or whether governing elites are able to "manufacture consent."[3] This is due to the historically low salience of foreign policy issues compared to domestic politics, relatively little knowledge of international issues, and the volatility of public opinion itself. Even when additional complexities, such as domestic institutional and policy-making structures, are included in the analysis, the evidence capturing the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy shows such different pictures, with variations across countries and issues, that a single interpretative framework is hard to define.[4]

The EU adds further complicating factors. With twenty-eight member states, there is no pan-EU public sphere. As shared public space for debate has never emerged in this multinational and multilingual community, despite policies attempting to create media and cultural spaces. Discussion

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[3] Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, *Manufacturing Consent* (New York: Pantheon, 1988).
[4] Thomas Risse-Kappen, "Public Opinion, Domestic Structure, and Foreign Policy in Liberal Democracies," *World Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 4, July 1991, pp. 479-512.

of EU-related topics occurs almost exclusively through a national lens, and policy issues are analyzed with respect to the national interest.

The EU also has a unique ambiguity in the sense that individual member state foreign policies include EU policies and attitudes to European integration, *and* that the Europeanization process makes European cooperation a domestic issue. The EU itself straddles the foreign-domestic divide. Stretching somewhat the academic concept of "Europeanization,"[5] the relationship between member states and the EU is a two-way process whereby states are influenced by policy preferences shaped in Brussels, but those policy preferences are themselves negotiated on the basis of national positions. This hybrid policy-making process between foreign and domestic policy can mean that patterns of accountability and interactions between national government and representative institutions, EU institutions, and public opinion are not always clear to citizens.

The influence public opinion may have on EU decision-making on international issues is even harder to capture. The EU's decision-making system is part intergovernmental, part supranational; foreign and security policy remains an area in which member states retain great sovereign discretion, even when they cooperate among each other. National representatives (foreign ministers, but increasingly heads of state and government) are the main decision-makers, with other EU institutions and bodies contributing to shaping and executing. The European Parliament has a consultative role, but it can be influential thanks to its powers over the EU budget. Conversely, other policies which are controversial in public opinion are governed differently: trade policy is led by the Commission, and migration is a mixed competence, with member states retaining many powers and reluctant to share with EU diplomacy. The logic of diversity, which still governs EU foreign policy-making,[6] contrasts with consistent

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[5] "Europeanization" refers to how rules, norms, decisions, and generally 'ways of doing things' are shaped in the EU and incorporated into national decision-making processes. See Claudio M. Radaelli, "The Europeanization of Public Policy," in Kevin Featherstone and Claudio M. Radaelli, eds., *The Politics of Europeanization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 27-56, quote on p. 30). On how member states promote their interests in Brussels, see Tanja A. Börzel, "Member State Responses to Europeanization," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40:2 (2002), pp. 193-214.

[6] S. Hoffman, "Towards a Common Foreign and Security Policy?" *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (2000), pp. 189-198. Years later, German Chancellor Angela Merkel asserted that the biggest European challenge was to forge a more coherent foreign policy. See Esther King, "Angela Merkel: Europe needs coherent foreign policy," *Politico*, September 10, 2017, http://www.politico.eu/article/angela-merkel-europe-needs-coherent-foreign-policy.

evidence that public opinion supports a greater European role in international affairs.

In light of these complex decision-making processes, the channels through which public opinion can be influential on international issues remain largely national. One question, therefore, is how national debates and trends affect key decision-makers who convene in Brussels. National contexts, cultures, and traditions of foreign policy shape collective foreign policy-making. The public salience of foreign and security policy thus needs to be filtered through national contexts.

There is limited available data on attitudes to foreign policy with pan-European reach that ask the same question across borders and over time. This makes it hard to profile European attitudes to specific EU-relevant issues. Eurobarometer has carried out polling across all EU member states since the 1970s, but has barely focused on international issues and, when it has done so, superficially. The European Social Survey across 36 European countries, the Pew Research Institute, *Transatlantic Trends* and other sources used in this chapter focus on differing selections of countries. This chapter focuses on domestic public opinion, how it affects national government preferences and how these, in turn, shape collective decisions at the EU level. The chapter does not address opinions of non-EU Europeans.

EU Views and Cleavages on Foreign Policy

Until recently, EU foreign and security policy has received very limited attention in pan-European opinion polls. Eurobarometer's standard question was whether a stronger international role for the EU was agreeable—and the standard answer was affirmative by far. Now that more pertinent questions are being asked, the answers confirm that large majorities of Europeans do indeed support more EU-level foreign and security policy: 70 percent want it to protect the external border, 73 percent to promote democracy and peace in the world, 68 percent favour a EU-level security and defense policy, and 57 percent favor a EU-level foreign policy.[7]

This is corroborated by a growing support for EU global leadership (73 percent in 2014, 71 percent in 2013), with roughly half wanting their

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[7] European Parliament Research Service, *Two Years until the 2019 European elections*. Special Eurobarometer of the European Parliament (Brussels: April 2017).

country to take a more independent approach from the United States.[8] Indeed, even before the election of President Donald Trump, who continues to be unpopular in Europe, *Transatlantic Trends* mapped losses in favorability towards the United States.

EU Europeans are split, however, on whether Europeans should work together on global issues. 44 percent of those surveyed in 2014 wanted their country to work with China alone, whereas 42 percent preferred an EU approach. 41 percent preferred national approaches to the Middle East, versus 44 percent opting for EU-level policies.[9] On other policies where the EU has a longer history of cooperation there is a higher degree of convergence in public opinion. EU humanitarian aid enjoys very high approval rates and support for continued funding; EU development aid policy is also seen favorably.[10] NATO, too, is seen as essential in Europe (with the notable exception of Greece), but a majority sees it as dedicated to the territorial defense of Europe; there is little support for out-of-area operations. Indeed, military interventionism is one area where *Transatlantic Trends* noted a divergence between U.S. and European public opinion, with the latter far less inclined to military engagement.[11]

Widespread support for stronger EU global leadership does not collate with other polling findings, which indicate preferences for a return of competences from the EU and do not want further integration. Such support also stands in contrast with the policy preferences of EU member state governments, which remain committed to strong sovereignty on most foreign and security policy matters. Even if member states seem to be inching closer to each other in the wake of the Brexit vote and the change in the U.S. Administration, foreign and security policy remains one of the least integrated policy fields. The salience of international issues, however, has grown, with citizens worried about issues, such as immigration and terror-

[8] German Marshall Fund of the United States, *Transatlantic Trends. Key Findings 2014*, and German Marshall Fund of the United States, *Transatlantic Trends. Key findings 2013*, both available at http://trends.gmfus.org/. Transatlantic Trends 2013 investigates public opinion in 11 EU member states (France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, UK, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Romania, Sweden); the 2014 edition looked at 10 EU member states (France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, UK, Portugal, Spain, Sweden).

[9] *Transatlantic Trends* (2014), op. cit.

[10] European Commission Special Eurobarometer Report 455, "EU Citizen's views on development, cooperation and aid," Brussels, 2017), https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/special-eurobarometer-report-eu-citizens-views-development-cooperation-and-aid_en.

[11] *Transatlantic Trends* (2013), op. cit.

ism, that cut across domestic and foreign policy fields. Until 2014–2015, domestic concerns were consistently predominant.

How Europeans see key international issues, the type of global leadership needed to handle them, and the degree to which EU member states should cooperate with each other and with the United States are questions that merit being asked again since the election of Donald Trump and since a majority of EU member states agreed, in November 2017, to strengthen cooperation in defense.

Even if classic questions of transatlantic leadership on international issues have not (yet) been further examined in light of political changes, the rise of populist parties, many of which have adamant nationalist, anti-immigration, anti-globalization and anti-elite positions—or a combination of some of these views—has prodded deeper investigation into what Europeans believe on more cross-cutting issues. The findings, however, do not always give clear-cut answers. Immigration has clearly emerged as a divisive issue in Europe. Its salience increased dramatically to become the top pre-occupation of EU citizens during the past couple of years, ahead of terrorism and concerns about the economic situation.[12] 58 percent of those polled in 2016 viewed extra-EU immigration negatively; 34 percent held a positive view.[13]

What is striking is that, according to Eurobarometer polling, these figures overall did not peak during the refugee influx and have been stable since 2014, despite the important increase in its salience vis-à-vis other concerns. The European Social Survey also shows considerable continuity in attitudes towards migration which, if anything, have become slightly more positive since 2002.[14] A deeper analysis of attitudes and questions on migration also paints a far more nuanced picture than the commonly held belief that Europeans have turned against migration.[15]

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[12] European Commission, *Reflection Paper on the Future of European Defence*, COM(2017)315 (Brussels: June 7, 2107. Opinion poll evidence is drawn from Eurobarometer.

[13] European Parliament Research Service, *Major changes in European public opinion regarding the European Union* (Brussels: November, 2016).

[14] European Social Survey, "Attitudes towards Immigration and their Antecedents: Topline Results from Round 7 of the European Social Survey," *ESS Topline Results Series*, Issue 7, November 2016.

[15] See the recently launched Observatory on Public Opinion on Migration, http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/observatory-of-public-attitudes-to-migration, which includes a wealth of public opinion data from Eurobarometer, European Social Surveys and IPSOS.

It is significant, however, that opinion varies considerably among the member states: in ten member states, between 70 and 86 percent of those polled held negative views of immigration, and in only four did over half of respondents hold a positive view.[16] Immigration is thus not just dividing some societies, it is a polarizing factor *among* EU member states, which are subject to quite diverse sets of domestic pressures. This has been one pathway towards collective EU policy in which the outcome has been restrictive.

Opinion polls show that globalization is also a polarizing factor in many societies, with 45 percent of EU citizens seeing it as a threat and 55 percent as an opportunity.[17] In this case the significant and enlightening divide is the gap between elite and public perceptions. Elites tend to be more liberal, more favorable to globalization, see that they have benefited from EU integration and are committed to both deepening (even if no common idea of the way forward emerges) and enlarging the EU. The broader public, on the other hand, tends to feel it has not benefited from the EU, and overall is far less liberal in its cultural and identity values, especially vis-à-vis immigration and religious diversity. 48 percent would like to see powers return to the member states. Polls have revealed rises in Islamophobia and anti-Semitism in several countries. The divide within the public between liberal and authoritarian views is deep, and is unconnected from other values related to economic and social status. For this reason, it is likely to persist.[18]

On both migration and globalization-related issues, the divide is not just between attitudes, but also between those who see the EU fit to govern these matters and those who want national governments to play a larger role. The demand for renationalization of powers is extremely strong, including in unexpected corners. Two thirds of Europeans want their governments to control migration and half want trade powers to return to

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[16] The countries most hostile to extra-European immigration are Slovakia, Latvia, Hungary, Estonia, Czech Republic, Malta, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Lithuania, Poland; the four countries with the most positive attitudes remains Sweden (despite being the country which took the largest per capita number of refugees), Luxembourg, Ireland and Spain. European Parliament Research Service, November 2016, op. cit.

[17] European Commission, *Reflection Paper on Harnessing Globalisation*, COM(2017) 240 final, Brussels, May 10, 2017. Sources referred to are Eurobarometer and Bertelsmann Stiftung (without further referencing).

[18] Thomas Raines, Matthew Goodwin and David Cutts, *The Future of Europe. Comparing Public and Elite Attitudes* (London: Chatham House, 2017). The opinion poll sources are the European Social Survey.

capitals. In export-driven, pro-European Germany, 60 percent is against the EU handling trade.[19]

A strong correlation between anti-EU sentiment and populist votes is usually assumed.[20] But skepticism towards Brussels runs deeper. It seems to be more about lack of trust in EU institutions and less about the coexistence of a national and European identity. Trust in the EU has been falling consistently since 2010, peaking in 2013, when 60 percent of those polled said they did not trust the EU. In 2016 a plurality of respondents indicated that they did not trust the EU (45 percent); only 35 percent placed trust in the EU.[21]

There are other divides as well. Younger people trust the EU more than older and less educated people. This stands in contrast to the widely held view that the older generation is more aware of the EU's achievements as a peace project.[22] Nonetheless, 70 percent of Europeans continue to feel there is more that unites them than divides them, with democratic values being the binding feature.[23]

After the British vote to leave the EU, opinion polls found new majorities in favor of remaining, which contradicted the theory that the Brexit domino was but the first to fall, with other member states to follow. Nonetheless, demands to hold referendums remain high.[24]

The low trust in the EU needs to be qualified: trust in national governments has also plummeted in recent years, in fact the decline has been more rapid than the fall in support for the EU. 2016 recorded the lowest levels of trust ever: only 27 percent of Europeans trusted their national government. Trust levels increased to reach a still meager 40 percent by spring 2017, compared to 47 percent trusting the EU.[25]

This data may seem to contradict polls indicating that there is a strong desire to renationalize EU powers. The discrepancy can be explained by important different perceptions among member states; a few countries still show high levels of trust in national institutions as well as in the EU. While questions asked are broken down into several components (e.g., trust in

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[19] Pew Research Center 2017, op. cit.
[20] CEPR 2017, op. cit.
[21] European Parliament Research Service 2016, op. cit.
[22] Raines, Goodwin and Cutts, op. cit.
[23] European Parliament Research Service 2016, op. cit.
[24] Pew Research Institute 2017, op. cit.
[25] European Parliament Research Service 2016, op. cit.

government, trust in individual institutions), overall some patterns can be discerned. Over 60 percent of respondents in the Netherlands, Sweden, Luxembourg, Finland, Germany and Austria trust their national governments. Respondents in Netherlands, Finland, and Luxembourg trust both their national governments and the EU (albeit to a lesser degree), while those in Sweden, Germany and Austria have clearer preferences for their governments Some of those who trust their governments the least also do not trust the EU either (Greece, Slovenia, Spain, France). Only Maltese and Latvians trust the EU considerably more than their national government.[26]

Patterns Influencing Public Opinion in the EU

The most serious challenge to the EU's standing, internally and internationally, came in 2015–2016, when debates erupted over Greek membership in the eurozone, major refugee inflows, EU approaches to several trade-related issues, and the British vote to leave the EU. At these moments of crises, national elites meeting at the EU level justified their decisions (or lack thereof) by referring to public opinion. European elites had until recently treated Euroskepticism as a sleeping dog. Now that it has been awakened, it has become a common reference as elites seek to address national and EU foreign policy challenges. How did this occur?

Correlation or causality between public opinion swings and changing policy preferences is still to be established, notwithstanding justifications employed by decision-makers. Patterns of influence on decision-making elites, especially on international issues, are not direct; they are filtered through political parties. The rise of populist parties has widely been identified as a threat to the establishment and an impediment to different policy and governance choices. Populism is "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups—the 'pure people' versus the corrupt elite—and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people."[27] By definition, populism is exclusive; the "other" can variously be "the elite," "foreigners," "Eurocrats," "the establishment," or "immi-

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[26] European Commission, Special Eurobarometer 461. Designing Europe's Future, Brussels: June, 2017, http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/2173.

[27] Cas Mudde, "The populist *Zeitgeist*," in *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (2004), pp. 542–563.

grants." The populist view of democracy is majoritarian, illiberal, and anti-pluralist, which is a necessary corollary of representing "the people."

International issues did not feature highly on the populist agenda until recently. It was through interdependence and European integration that the domestic-foreign nexus became far more intertwined. Populists have shown a remarkable skill in capturing the dissatisfaction of large sectors of the population, rather than demonstrating any particular interest in foreign policy. The rising salience of international issues—whether European integration, immigration, trade, or terrorism—has provided platforms upon which populists have seized their moment. In doing so, they entered a territory uncharted to the parties themselves, new to international politics, novel to traditional political parties and government representatives used to managing foreign policy with little scrutiny from the public, and also foreign to the community of scholars and observers, who have largely been unprepared to understand the arrival of such new actors in international affairs.

Ideologically, populism is thin and can transcend the left-right political spectrum, though right-wing populism poses the greatest challenges to the status quo in Europe and in the United States. The left-wing populist challenge to austerity and the governance of the eurozone, which came from new parties such as the Spain's Podemos and Greece's Syriza, never succeeded in changing the policies of either national governments or the EU, even when in government, as in the case of Greece. Right-wing populism, conversely, has been more successful in influencing government choices by allying with mainstream center-right parties, many of which have either taken on populist agendas or platforms or, in some cases, formed coalitions with them. Populist governments in Poland and Hungary, which until recently had concentrated their efforts on curtailing liberal democracy at home, have started to make choices that affect their foreign policy, mostly over migration issues and on supranational governance in Europe.

The key to unlocking the causality in the influence of populism on policy is to be found in the response governments and mainstream parties have devised to the populist challenge. In the recent past, when populist parties have been in coalition governments (Italy, Denmark, Belgium, Austria, Netherlands), they have a track record of influencing policy in limited areas of key concern, most of which have revolved around migration policy. But mainstream parties in government have also shifted towards the positions of populist parties. From the 2000s onwards, past coalitions

of the right and far right have been behind a more general overall shift to the right on immigration, law and order, austerity, and national security.

The shift could reflect changes in public opinion that influenced government policy, but it could equally reflect a preference by mainstream parties to use the existence of populist parties as a fig leaf to justify policy choices. Correlation is evident; causality is less clear. In other words, there are two possible pathways of influence between mainstream and populist views. Populists may react to a changing political context, putting the mainstream under pressure to take up their agenda, or they can act as enablers of decisions which, essentially, are a policy preference of the mainstream government.[28]

The successive European crises of 2015–2016 saw plenty of examples of political leaders from traditional party families mimicking populist style and rhetoric, and governments taking on populist agendas, especially during election campaign periods. In Slovakia, Social Democratic Prime Minister Robert Fico adopted a populist anti-immigration stance to ensure his re-election, and then formed a government with the far right. France's political mainstream right (Nicolas Sarkozy during the contest for presidential candidates within *Les Republicans* and then Francois Fillon, presidential candidate for the same party) made plenty of attempts adopt policy points from Marine Le Pen in their effort to compete with the *Front National*. In 2017 elections in the Netherlands and in Austria, the two majority center-right parties willingly embraced the right-wing positions of their populist challengers. In the Netherlands, a coalition agreement kept the Party for Freedom (PVV), led by Geert Wilders, one of the oldest populist parties in Europe, out of the government. In Austria, the conservatives of the People's Party invited the Austrian Freedom Party to start coalition talks.

Public opinion is often invoked to explain political choices, as if decision-makers were limited in their range of options because of public backlash. Yet that correlation is unproven. The EU-Turkey deal, sealed in spring 2016 following the mediation of two supposedly mainstream European governments (Germany and the Netherlands) with the aim to stem the flow of refugees fleeing Syria and Afghanistan via Turkey and Greece towards Europe, was justified on the grounds that it prevented the collapse of the German government and the EU, each of which had been shaken

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[28] The pathways of influence are based on Rosa Balfour, et al., *The Troublemakers. The Populist Challenge to Foreign Policy* (Brussels: European Policy Center, March 2016).

by negative public opinion regarding the inflows. While polls made it clear that immigration and terrorism were important preoccupations of European publics, it was less clear that the EU-Turkey deal resulted in any noticeable change in attitudes towards immigration. Rather than respond to public opinion pressure, EU decision-makers responded to the vociferous anti-immigration sentiment that had been instrumentalized successfully by some populist parties.

The deal, however, is of consequence to the EU's international policy. Relations between the EU and Turkey have rapidly deteriorated. The EU's leverage with the Turkish government has dwindled because it relies on Ankara to deliver on refugee cooperation, and the EU's image as a supporter of civil society in Turkey has been tarnished as dissent is forcefully repressed. Moreover, the EU is less able to pursue its foreign policy goals in and around Turkey and the Middle East. European development aid is gradually being redirected to contain migration flows and fight terrorism abroad, and decision-makers justify such activities by the need to address public opinion fears.

The spring 2016 consultative referendum held in the Netherlands on the EU's Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with Ukraine, in which 61 percent voted against the deal, was sufficient to persuade the Dutch government and its EU partners to dilute the language offering Ukraine a prospect of getting closer to the EU, even though only 32 percent of Dutch citizens turned up to vote. Why? Because the largely symbolic referendum was held less for reasons related to Ukraine or to trade, and more for reasons related to skepticism about the EU. In this case, populist forces successfully manipulated a specific international issue to prove a point about Euroskepticism. Had there not been longstanding ambiguity in the EU as to whether Ukraine should be offered a prospect of joining the club, however, it is unlikely that the populist positions would have been successful. The repercussions for EU credibility were significant. Ukraine is far from being in a position to seek EU membership, but having been invaded by Russia, Kyiv is in constant need of reassurance. In this case, the Dutch and the EU only exacerbated Ukrainian insecurities.

In other trade-related cases, anti-globalization sentiments (which are embraced by some populist parties) were ignored by policy-makers. Anti-trade groups, from left and right, have been gaining ground, reflecting public opinion splits on the impact of trade and on globalization. Their critique has been shared beyond the fringes, and has included sectors of mainstream parties. In other words, the anti-globalization narrative is not

confined to populist parties. One challenge to the EU's role in dealing with trade came, for instance, from the Socialist Party in Wallonia (Belgium), which threatened to block the EU-Canada Comprehensive and Economic Trade Agreement (CETA).

This collection of opinion, however, has thus far only had a modest impact on actual policy decisions. In fact the EU is energetically seeking to strike a range of trade deals with even more countries around the world, especially since the EU and the Trump Administration agreed to put the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) into the deep freeze. In short, in practice public opinion has had uneven influence on the EU's international policy agenda: when it comes to trade, decision-makers have shown a commitment to sticking to their course of action, whereas their varying approaches to migration issues have been far more reflective of their perceptions of the public mood.

The British referendum on whether to leave the EU would appear to be a clear instance in which public opinion shaped an epochal choice of tremendous consequence for the international standing of both the UK and the EU. At first glance, Brexit appeared to be caused by a mainstream party caving into a populist surge. But the anti-EU UK Independence Party (UKIP), with only one Member of Parliament, was only the trigger, not the reason, for the decision to hold the referendum. Had the Conservative and Labour parties not been deeply divided over EU membership, UKIP's demand would have fallen on deaf ears. The Brexit referendum underscores that the nature of mainstream party and government responses to populism can be decisive when it comes to influencing outcomes.

These cases underscore that perceptions of public opinion do not really have a direct influence on government choices. Outcomes seem rather to reflect far more mutual manipulation, among governments and populists (whether they be in coalition, in opposition, or outside parliament), of what public preferences actually mean for policy choices. If one wants to ascertain where both responsibility and accountability lies for particular political choices, one must better understand the relationship between government choices and populists' ability to amplify discontent. Public opinion, or projections of public moods, are also used as alibis for policy preferences that divert from a previously agreed path – for instance by using "domestic backlash" as justification for denying or limiting international protection to refugees or migrants.

Populist pressures have also led governments to choose to defend "There Is No Alternative" politics, in which they point to the existence of populist parties as a reason for voters to support the mainstream. On migration in particular, even the left has adopted positions that have been far more restrictive than its more liberal ideological grounding would suppose. The result has been a narrowing of the range of policy responses to such issues as the eurozone crisis or the migration influx, and a *de facto* strengthening of the preference towards policies of austerity and containment of numbers of refugees entering the EU.[29] In short, if the center advocates "There Is No Alternative" politics, it contributes to shrinking the space for critique and for devising alternative policies.

Public opinion has thus been variously used as a justification, an alibi or as an enabler of policy preferences. There are plenty of instances in which it was barely influential—the most notorious being the 2003 war in Iraq, which met the opposition of millions of mobilized Europeans. Now, EU institutions are using public opinion support for a strong EU global role to drum up commitment to strengthening EU action on foreign and security matters. National governments have continued to be lukewarm in responding to demands specifically on foreign and security policy. Conversely, on issues such as migration policy, political leaders frequently invoke public opinion as an explanation for the restrictive policy choices they have adopted, or for failure to implement decisions made, such as the relocation and resettlement of refugees. Whereas foreign and security policy remains elite-driven, migration policy, including the external dimension, has been influenced far more by public opinion. Growing contestation of globalization and trade is also showing signs of influencing some political parties and member states, but the concrete impact so far in Europe has been contained by Donald Trump's kiss of death to the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership.

Conclusions: Rethinking the Domestic-Foreign Policy Nexus

Foreign policy issues have become more important to European public opinion over the past few years, as evidenced by polls. There is, however, a mismatch between such salience and European responses. This suggests that pathways of influence are far from linear, but also that our ability to interpret public moods is poor. As migration leapt up the hierarchy of

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[29] Balfour et. al 2016, op. cit.

public preoccupations, for instance, governments reacted by devising quick-fix, symbolic restrictive responses that would contain numbers of arrivals of refugees and immigrants. Yet a closer inspection of public opinion shows that there was not dramatic change in perceptions of immigration; negative sentiments existed before the 2015–2016 crisis that challenged European solidarity. Where data spoke more clearly was in the dissatisfaction with the ways in which the influx was handled, which led to stronger public demands for the renationalization of certain powers.

Conversely, whereas public opinion has consistently shown support for a greater European role in foreign and security, national governments have scarcely responded, preferring to avoid engaging in public debates about matters that continue to be viewed through the lens of national sovereignty. Since this is an under-explored area of Eurobarometer and other pan-European public opinion surveys, it is hard to generalize further. One factor that underscores most findings is that there is a correlation between nationalism, anti-immigration, anti-trade, anti-globalization and Euroskepticism. Interpreting how public opinion can influence European policies needs to begin with understanding the degree to which the public believes that a particular foreign policy issue should be addressed at EU-level or by member state governments.

Understanding the impact of public opinion in Europe also needs to take into account that the diverse constituencies within the EU have different demarcation lines, which do not overlap. Since member states play a dominant role in foreign policy, national divergences can lead to blocking minorities and political choices outside the prevailing consensus.

In the European context, the absence of a shared public space and the complexity of decision-making at the EU and national levels have not facilitated a more direct relationship between public opinion and European foreign policy making. In general, that fact that the EU is an elite-driven process means that European politicians have tended to ignore public opinion. Permissive consensus has dominated. In addition, politicians have manipulated the EU to their own ends by blaming Brussels for decisions actually taken collectively.

The warning signs about dwindling support for European integration were ignored: the wafer-thin approval in France of the 1992 Maastricht Treaty; the opt-outs negotiated by the UK and Denmark that were treated as national peculiarities; the failure of the Constitutional Treaty in the referendums held in the Netherlands and France in 2005; and the acrobatics

the ensuing Lisbon Treaty went through to accommodate Ireland. More recently, unfounded interpretations of public moods have been used to justify specific policy choices, which ultimately gave legitimacy to the demands of minorities, which have become vociferous with the rise of populism, especially of the right-wing variant.

Populism has exploited this context and the complacency of mainstream politics, it has not created them. Underlying public attitudes have shown signs of continuity rather than change; what has changed is a loss of trust in European and national institutions to address major public preoccupations. Those preoccupations, in turn, derive increasingly from the broader EU and international environment, and not just from domestic contexts. In addition, the younger generation does appear to be more open to the international and European arenas at a time when policy is becoming more restrictive on many counts—and thus not reflective of public opinion preferences.

The public opinion evidence surveyed here raises more questions than it solves. Apart from calling for greater investigation into public attitudes and values, one set of questions emerges related the nexus between domestic and foreign policy. Can a return to the permissive consensus be possible if the salience of international issues is reduced? Or is the nature of the foreign policy-domestic nexus such that public opinion will need to be taken into account far more than it has been so far in debates about international issues and foreign and security policy choices? Evidence and politics suggest that rethinking the European public space to better accommodate the demand for more public debate about international issues could provide solutions to the traps in which traditional politics has fallen during the crisis years of the EU. Along with Europeanizing foreign policy, elites should engage in democratizing it by promoting a more inclusive debate on Europe's international choices in the age of globalization.