PUBLIC OPINION AND THE FUTURE OF EUROPE:
TRENDS AND THESES

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We analyze trends and sources of support for European unification on the basis of Eurobarometer data gathered from individuals in member-states of the European Union over the past two decades. Results indicate that unification of Europe generally receives overwhelming support. However, further analysis reveals important country differences in levels of support. Citizens of most countries of Europe favor unification: Support for the EU has over the years been relatively high in most countries and only in a minority of countries (Great Britain, Denmark, and Norway) citizens reveal substantial anti-European sentiments.

Beyond the country differences, in addition, there are socio-demographic and political influences on popular support, but these do not account for country differences. In other words, it is the identification of citizens with estimated advantages or disadvantages of united Europe for their own country which determines their respective sentiments on the EU.

Therefore, in the absence of a developed European identity, the people of Europe remain first and foremost nationals. This may have crucial and paradoxical consequences for the future of Europe. Because both favorable as well as unfavorable attitudes towards the European Union emanate from national concerns, united Europe is not secured, not only because anti-European citizens do not support unification, but also because pro-Europeans do so only because of various nationalist concerns. A cosmopolitan "Euro-citizenship," uniting people across national borders, at present remains but an illusion.
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With the recent ratification of the Maastricht Treaty, the states of the newly created European Union (EU) have taken an important step towards reshaping their collective existence. Despite various turmoils and occasional mishaps, Europe's politicians finally seem to have found common ground on which to build their common future. But unification requires more than the treaties and policies negotiated by the members of the EU councils, administrative units, and national representatives. The success of united Europe will also -and to no small extent- depend on the support it receives from the citizens of the various states in the Union.

Relying on an analysis of Eurobarometer data gathered from individuals in member-states of the European Union between the mid-1970s and 1992, unification of Europe generally receives overwhelming popular support. Fairly constant, about 80% of respondents are in favor of efforts made to unify Europe while a clear majority view their respective country's membership in the EU as favorable.

However, further analysis reveals important country differences in levels of support. Citizens of most countries of Europe favor unification: Support for the EU has over the years been relatively high in most countries (for example, in Belgium, the Netherlands, France,

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This paper is a much shortened version of our previously published paper on popular support and European unification (Deflem and Pampel 1996). In it, we analyzed Eurobarometers conducted in the years 1983, 1986, 1989, and 1992. At the meeting, data from a cumulative Eurobarometer file, covering the years from 1975 to 1992, will be used (see the enclosed appendices)
and Germany) while unification is even more highly favored by citizens from some smaller
countries, such as Ireland, Italy, Greece, and Portugal. On the other hand, in Great Britain,
Denmark, and Norway, citizens reveal substantial anti-European sentiments.

Beyond these country differences, in addition, there are some socio-demographic and
political influences. Specifically, higher educated and richer Europeans show more, and blue-
collar workers less, support for unification. Age and gender only minimally affected opinions
on Europe (older citizens and males tend to support European unification somewhat more).
In terms of political affiliation, more left-wing oriented citizens tend to be more against
unification.

Most importantly, however, these political and socio-demographic factors do not account for
country differences. In other words, it is the identification of citizens with estimated
advantages or disadvantages of united Europe for their own country which determines their
respective sentiments on the EU. Indeed, country differences explain both pro-European as
well as anti-European attitudes. Citizens of Great Britain, for example, view the EU
negatively because they assume it will threaten British sovereignty. Like attitudes are
prevalent in Norway and Denmark because the EU is thought to possibly interfere with
established welfare policies.

But citizens of the pro-European countries, too, are oriented towards their own
national well-being. In Spain, Greece, and Italy, for instance, citizens highly favor the EU
because of the economic benefits they hope it will bring to their national economies. Citizens
from Germany and France are pro-European because they favor securing for their countries a
strong leadership position within Europe.
Thus, in the absence of a developed European identity, the people of Europe remain first and foremost nationals. This may have crucial and paradoxical consequences for the future of Europe. Because both favorable as well as unfavorable attitudes towards the European Union emanate from national concerns, united Europe is not secured, not only because anti-European citizens do not support unification, but also because pro-Europeans do so only because of various nationalist concerns. A cosmopolitan "Euro-citizenship," uniting people across national borders, at present remains but an illusion.

Source:

Note on Tables in Appendix:
Two variables are used as measures of popular support for European unification. First, European Unification is based on the question "In general, are you for or against efforts being made to unify western Europe?". Answer categories range from 'very much for' to 'very much against'. Second, EC Membership is a three-category variable based on the question "Generally speaking, do you think that (your country's) membership in the European Community (common market) is a good thing, neither good nor bad, or a bad thing?". The tables represent the evolution from year to year for all countries combined, and percentages for the 'good' and 'bad' categories of EC Membership per country for selected years (1979, 1981, 1983, 1986, 1989, and 1992). Tables of regression analyses for selected years can be found in Deflem and Pampel (1996).
EUROPEAN UNIFICATION

App. 1

EC MEMBERSHIP

[Graphs depicting trends over time]