



**UNIVERSITÀ  
DEGLI STUDI  
DI PADOVA**

**SIMONE FAGGIANI**

**Matriculation No: 2013021**

**Department SPGI**

**European and Global Studies**

**Academic Year: 2021-2022**

**Supervisor: Ekaterina Domorenok**

***Exploring the Linkage Between  
Euro-scepticism and Redistributive  
Policies in the EU;***

**Insights from the Case of Italy**

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Chapter I: Euroscepticism: political development and the academic debate</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1.1</b> The foundations and seminal studies on Euroscepticism	14
<b>1.2</b> Recent developments and assumptions	18
<b>1.3</b> Overall findings and the main theoretical propositions	21
<b>Chapter II: Cohesion policy in the context of Euroscepticism</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>2.1</b> EU enlargements and cohesion policy: the main issues	23
<b>2.2</b> The turning point with the EU's Eastern Enlargement	27
<b>2.3</b> Current challenges	31
<b>2.4</b> Tracing of the linkage between cohesion policy and Euroscepticism	33
<b>Chapter III: Regional distribution and Euroscepticism:                   cementing the link</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>3.1</b> Solidifying the connection between cohesion policy and Euroscepticism	36
<b>3.2</b> Are citizens aware of the EU's efforts to reduce social and economic disparities across countries and regions?	38
<b>3.3</b> Euroscepticism in territories that greatly benefited from the EU structural funds	45
<b>3.4</b> Other factors to consider	49
<b>3.5</b> Does the continuous rise in Euroscepticism mean that cohesion policy has failed?	52

<b>Chapter IV: Insights from the case of Italy</b>	<b>56</b>
4.1    Euroscepticism in Italy: a growing trend?	57
4.2    The long-term divide between Centre-North and South	61
4.3    Euroscepticism in the areas targeted by EU structural funds	65
4.4    Programming Period (2021-2027) and the EU Recovery Fund	71
4.5    Can cohesion policy prevent Euroscepticism?	76
<b>Chapter V: Linking the Italian case to the investigation</b>	<b>82</b>
5.1    EU cohesion policy as a tool of enhancing public support for European integration	82
5.2    Why is money not enough?	85
5.3    Cohesion policy and Euroscepticism are not definitively linked	91
<b>Overall Assessment and Findings</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>98</b>

## **Abstract**

The European Union (EU) has been built with the purpose of fostering harmonious economic and social growth across its Member States. Initially emerging as an economic union, treaties in the 1990s laid down the foundation for a more ambitious integration process, notably manifested through the implementation of a common cohesion policy. Currently accounting for one third of the EU's budget, regional redistribution of funding aims to provide support to disadvantaged areas in the short-term, in order to see through long-term homogenous growth across all of the regions of the Member States. While the economic effort made by the EU toward achieving its objectives is hard to deny, its political foundations are currently experiencing unprecedented levels of mistrust and skepticism across almost the entirety of its territory. Somewhat surprisingly, a high degree of Euroscepticism derives from areas that have significantly benefited from EU regional and local development policies. This appears to be an inconsistency. Italy represents a very promising case for understanding this paradox. As a founding Member State of the EU, the country has transformed from being a strong supporter of the integration process to one of its most prominent skeptics, which clearly reflected in the outcomes of the latest national elections. This is in spite of the large amount of regional funds allocated to Italy, due to the long-term divide existing between North and South, with the latter lagging behind in terms of GDP and the level of employment when compared to the rest of the EU. Thus, the question to be answered is the strength and the nature of the connection between EU redistributive policies and Euroscepticism, with Italy being an important case study that can provide useful insights.

## Introduction

Since its creation, the EU has implemented significant measures aimed at promoting homogeneous social and economic development, especially in view of its progressive enlargements which made its territory very diverse. One of the most visible ways through which the organization has worked toward achieving this goal has been through the distribution of the European structural and investment funds (ESIFs). These have played a pivotal role in fostering economic convergence since 1975, especially among Europe's poorer regions.<sup>1</sup> Having determined this, the decade of the 1990s is unquestionably an impactful one as it can be said that in this period the EU definitely moved toward becoming a tighter union and ceased being an almost exclusively economic organization. While the structural funds under cohesion policy initially comprised the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Social Fund (ESF), the 1993 Treaty of Maastricht also introduced the Cohesion Fund (CF). This was also put into place in the context of pressure applied by Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Greece, who threatened to veto the Treaty would it not include a financial instrument aimed at aiding poorer regions.<sup>2</sup> This highlights how both existing and acceding Member States of the EU placed emphasis on taking measures toward reducing inequalities through redistributive policies. Regional distribution of funding has without doubt constituted an essential part of the EU in the past and currently occupies a sizeable portion of the overall budget at the organization's disposition, while also being one of the most visible policies.

From its early conception therefore, cohesion policy can undeniably be seen as an integral part to the creation of unity within the EU. However, in recent times, the organization has come under a great degree of criticism, which has undermined many of the efforts made toward improving regional cohesion. There is in fact a general consensus across academic figures that the EU is currently experiencing a period where it is in the greatest need of support, while simultaneously coming under unprecedented fire. This is a point argued at length by Hobolt and De Vries (2016), who maintain that the future of Europe hinges on a high degree of support for the integration project.<sup>3</sup> Most of this criticism can be identified through the phenomenon of Euroscepticism, which has rapidly emerged from being a marginal sentiment

---

<sup>1</sup> N. Charron, Ed. S. Piattoni & L. Polverari, *Handbook on Cohesion Policy in the EU*, (2016), p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> M. Brunazzo, Ed. Piattoni & Polverari, *Handbook on Cohesion Policy in the EU*, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> S. B. Hobolt & C. E. De Vries, *Annual Review of Political Science, Volume 19*. "Public Support for European Integration", (2016), p. 414, <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev-polisci-042214-044157>.

to occupying the political agendas of major parties across the entirety of the European continent.<sup>4</sup> Most notably, Brexit represented the first time that feelings of discontent with the EU translated to a Member State successfully completing the process of leaving the union. Taking aside this isolated case, dissatisfaction with the EU is prevalent across the board, albeit to varying degrees, and the long-term future of the organization has been brought into question. Euroscepticism is a widespread and concrete threat and one of the most pressing issues of concern being addressed by the EU. While not directly created as a tool to improve the EU's image, it can be said that cohesion policy has the weight to positively or negatively sway Eurosceptic thoughts. Although it is unlikely to be able to draw a direct correlation between the two, it can be accepted that cohesion policy has generally operated in ways that should mitigate and not trigger Euroscepticism.

Despite the amount of criticism that the EU has received in recent decades, it cannot be denied that active measures have been taken toward fostering even development, with one of the aims being the increase in public support. As mentioned before, the 1990s represented a shift toward an even tighter union, with existing and new measures focusing on building harmony. Arguably the most notable of these was cohesion policy, something the EU continues to use as an instrument when it comes to reducing regional disparities across the entirety of its Member States and regions. The distribution of funding is based on the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS), which determine the allocation of the structural funds to different regions.<sup>5</sup> Categorizing regions based on levels of wealth and potential allows for cohesion policy to bridge gaps between different regions and allow for homogenous long-term growth. This importantly highlights how the EU seeks to reduce social and economic disparities between countries and regions. It can be argued however that cohesion policy may have fallen short in its long-term objective of promoting harmonious development due to the prevalence of inequalities and gaps in GDP between countries as well as individual regions within Member States. It can also be said that cohesion policy has failed in its less direct purpose of creating public support for the EU as a whole. Mainly, it can be noted that certain areas that have received a significant amount of funding from the EU, have in turn been outspoken Eurosceptics. This presents a clear inconsistency, with the connection between Euroscepticism

---

<sup>4</sup> A. Szczerbiak & P. Taggart, Ed. B. Leruth, N. Startin & S. Usherwood, *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*, (2018), p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> European Commission, "Statistical Regions in the European Union and Partner Countries: NUTS and Statistical Regions 2021", (2020), p. 4, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3859598/10967554/KS-GQ-20-092-EN-N.pdf/9d57ae79-3ee7-3c14-da3e-34726da385cf?t=1591285035000>.

and cohesion policy being something that is worth examining and that has also become a topic of debate among contemporary political scientists. In particular, a 2020 article by Dijkstra and Rodríguez-Pose brings to light why this is such a pressing concern for the EU as a whole.<sup>6</sup> This is the starting point of the thesis, which aims to account for this paradox and later develop the relationship between cohesion policy and Euroscepticism.

In terms of the overall breakdown of the thesis, the first two Chapters will serve to explore the two most significant terms in the context of the investigation, to provide a starting point of absolute clarity. The opening Chapter will comprise a literature review centering exclusively around the academic debate of Euroscepticism. Although varying critiques of the EU can be traced as far back as the period of its initial creation, the notion of Euroscepticism as a term is a relatively new one within the academic space. A majority of sources point toward a 1998 article published by Taggart as the first time the term was coined academically, proving highly influential for later reports on the topic.<sup>7</sup> Acknowledging the initial work of Taggart, as well as the later studies that followed, will be pivotal in determining the origins of the term being used within academic debate and account for whether it falls in line with the general rise in Euroscepticism that has been manifested across the entirety of Europe. This part will strictly deal with secondary sources, which comprehensively cover a variety of issues centering around the greater Euroscepticism debate, validating why it is such a pressing issue being faced by the EU. The second Chapter will instead focus on the other main aspect of the thesis, which is cohesion policy. Not really narrowing in on the technical aspect of the policy, it will instead mainly examine the historical significance of EU regional distribution of funds and highlight some of the challenges that it has faced. This will have the scope of introducing the role that regional funding plays in the context of Euroscepticism. In particular, the analysis of difficulties faced by cohesion policy will account for why the EU as a whole has come under significant criticism. The Chapter will describe why cohesion policy can be important when it comes to fostering support for the EU but also highlight the fact that when it is not visible or, appears ineffective, it can present a significant challenge for the EU's current goal of maintaining its influence through the gathering of support.

---

<sup>6</sup> L. Dijkstra & A. Rodríguez-Pose, *Regional Studies, Volume 55, Issue 2*, "Does Cohesion Policy Reduce EU Discontent and Euroscepticism?", (2020), pp. 1-24.

<sup>7</sup> P. Taggart, *European Journal of Political Research, Vol. 33, Issue. 3*. "A Touchstone of Dissent: Euroscepticism in Contemporary Western European Party Systems", (1998), pp. 363-388.

Having thoroughly analyzed the literature on Euroscepticism and provided an overview on cohesion policy, the next two Chapters will adopt a different method of research as they will be largely empirical in nature, whilst still maintaining an analytical view when examining secondary sources. Chapter III will build upon the initial link drawn between cohesion policy and Euroscepticism and work toward solidifying it. Central to this section of the paper will be the use of the Eurobarometer, which is a highly respected tool when it comes to gathering of opinions shared across the EU. Whilst recognizing certain limitations of the Eurobarometer, such as its often-biased accounts of EU support, it remains an important resource when drawing the connection between Euroscepticism and EU regional distribution.<sup>8</sup> Through the use of empirical evidence as well as consultation of the literature available, this Chapter will begin to answer the question of whether or not these two elements of the EU can be linked. Most significantly, it must be noted that while individual cases were considered throughout the investigation, the first three Chapters maintain a broad outlook that focuses on the EU as a whole. For this reason, it will be essential to dedicate an entire Chapter to an individual case study, with Chapter IV delving into the individual case of Italy. It must be immediately ascertained that the selection of Italy is not a random one. In terms of the relationship the country has with the EU, Italy is not only one of the six founding members, but also a country that has maintained a generally pro-European outlook. In recent decades however, there has been a clear shift in public perception of the EU, rendering the country amongst the most Eurosceptic. The country is also intrinsically linked to cohesion policy, being both a net contributor and recipient of the structural funds. It is fully expected therefore that the Italian case will prove essential toward answering the important question of the strength of the relationship between EU redistribution policies and the prevalent rise of Euroscepticism. This is also in light of the general elections that took place on September 25<sup>th</sup> of this year, highlighting the prevalence of Euroscepticism across the parties that garnered the most public support at the voting polls. Italy is definitely an important case study for the thesis, especially in the present context. A final Chapter will serve to relate the importance of Italy back to the entire scope of the investigation, with the overall findings being reported in the conclusion.

The starting point of the thesis is the identification of the fact that Euroscepticism is often present in areas that have been beneficiaries of EU redistribution policies. This presents a clear paradox, as cohesion policy is generally acknowledged as something that should

---

<sup>8</sup> C. E. De Vries, & I. Hoffman, *Eupinions*, “The Eurobarometer Controversy: EU Popularity, Response Rates and One Journalist’s Critique”, (2020), <https://eupinions.eu/de/blog/the-eurobarometer-controversy>.



increase public support rather than diminish it. While the structural funds look to promote homogenous growth, they also indirectly seek to raise support from citizens, but are arguably falling short due to the persistence of inequalities. This is a debate that has emerged in recent academic literature, particularly in the aforementioned 2020 article published by Dijkstra and Rodríguez-Pose.<sup>9</sup> As it is a rapidly growing discussion, it must be recognized from the offset that the thesis does not break new ground, but rather builds upon existing studies, making use of available data to cement claims. The main question that the thesis sets out to answer is whether or not cohesion policy plays a significant role in influencing Euroscepticism. In order to answer this question, the EU as a whole will be examined, narrowing down on why redistributive policies have been unable to promote pro-EU sentiments in an effective way. In particular, factors such as enlargement will be considered, as well as the prevalent question of whether policy visibility and public awareness are high enough. From the start, Italy has been identified as a valuable case study that can add great value to the investigation as a whole. The final two Chapters will analyze the most recent figures on cohesion policy and the Italian case study. The aim of this will be to determine how representative recent figures are of the clearly identified shift in Italian opinion and predicting whether similar trends will continue in the future.

---

<sup>9</sup> Dijkstra & Rodríguez-Pose, “Does Cohesion Policy Reduce EU Discontent and Euroscepticism?”, pp. 1-24.

## Chapter I – Euroscepticism: political development and the academic debate

Although European integration has been a prominent political process that has taken place since the 1950s, the phenomenon of “Euroscepticism” is traceable to more recent decades. It must immediately be noted that, although there was considerable support for the EU in the early decades of its creation, sentiments of opposition were always present. Despite this, it can be substantially claimed that early studies focused at large on the support displayed for the EU. The main arguments tended to narrow in on the benefits of integration presenting opinions that were generally in favor of the steps being taken. Conversely, the last few decades have seen the attention shift more toward opposing thoughts, coming from individuals, groups or political parties, that all display varying degrees of mistrust toward the EU.<sup>10</sup> It is therefore meaningful to delve into the literature written on the topic of Euroscepticism, and a clear timeframe can be identified where negative portrayals of the EU began to emerge within academic texts. In fact, many political scientists trace the first use of the term to a 1985 article, where “Euro-sceptic” was used to express British dissatisfaction with the EU at the time.<sup>11</sup> Published a little over a decade later, a seminal work in the realm is considered to be an article written by Taggart (1998), who has now become widely cited as the first author to coin the term.<sup>12</sup> Whilst being present for decades, the origins of Euroscepticism within the academic space can definitely be traced back to the 1980s and 1990s.

Since the late 1990s however, there has been a definite increase in Eurosceptic attitudes, particularly over the last few years, which can be attributed to a number of factors. Enlargement, economic difficulties and the migratory crisis have all in fact posed significant challenges to the maintenance of a positive image for the EU. This is subsequently reflected in the parallel increase in literature written with a particular focus on the topic. Once more, it must be noted that the feelings of discontent with Europe stretch far back. Naturally, when the European Economic Community (EEC) was created in the 1950s, not all parties were completely supportive. In later decades, the EU experienced instances of turbulence, which naturally translated into feelings of dissatisfaction. Passing from De Gaulle’s sentiments of anti-supranationalism to Margaret Thatcher’s renowned Bruges speech, the path to integration has

---

<sup>10</sup> C. E. De Vries, *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>11</sup> Ed. R. Harsen & M. Spiering, *Euroscepticism: Party Politics, National Identity and European Integration*, (2004), p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> Taggart, “A Touchstone of Dissent: Euroscepticism in Contemporary Western European Party Systems”, pp. 363-388.

been far from a universally accepted one.<sup>13</sup> Taking an historic glance at historic parliamentary groups in the European Parliament, Fitzgibbon, Leruth & Startin (2017) note how there was a presence of “soft” Euroscepticism that peaked in the late 1970s and 1980s.<sup>14</sup> The distinction between the different types of Euroscepticism will be covered in later Chapters. While glancing back at instances of discontent with the EU, it therefore needs to be specified that Euroscepticism is an element of socio-political thought that has existed for as long as the organization itself. While there are several important contributing factors to its increase in influence, the roots of discontent within Europe run much deeper and their emergence in recent times are not a consequence of recent developments.<sup>15</sup> Recent events can be said to undoubtedly have accelerated the rise of Euroscepticism, but in no way are they responsible for its creation.

Before examining this topic to a greater extent, one common misconception surrounding the debate on Euroscepticism, must be addressed. This is that Euroscepticism is a mainly British phenomenon, rendered even more prominent with Brexit. This is entirely false, and the thesis will cover case studies taking place across the entirety of the continent. According to Back and Startin (2015), the connection between Britain and Euroscepticism can principally be attributed to the long-term strained relationship between the UK and EU, especially in regard to pushing for further integration.<sup>16</sup> As stated by Vampa (2021), this was strengthened with the success of separatist party UKIP in this period, with the country as a whole eventually completing the process of leaving the EU.<sup>17</sup> Whilst the prevalence of the phenomenon within the UK is undeniable, Euroscepticism is something that manifests itself across a majority of the European continent, especially in the present day. De Vries (2018) has identified that while the British public has generally proved skeptical of the EU, election votes are indicative of a rise in Euroscepticism across the continent, with 2014 seeing the largest ever shares of Eurosceptic parties in the European Parliament.<sup>18</sup> Harmsen and Spearing (2004), while recognizing that discrepancies toward the EU were in the past a largely British phenomenon, identify the early 1990s as a moment where it began manifesting itself in greater prominence across the European

---

<sup>13</sup> P. Hainsworth, C. O’Brien & P. Mitchell. Ed. Harsen & Spiering, *Euroscepticism: Party Politics, National Identity and European Integration*, pp. 45-46.

<sup>14</sup> Ed. J. Fitzgibbon, B. Leruth & N. Startin, *Euroscepticism as a Transnational and Pan-European Phenomenon: the Emergence of a New Sphere of Opposition*, (2017), p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> C. E. De Vries, *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration*, (2018) introduction.

<sup>16</sup> N. Brack, & N. Startin, *International Political Science Review 2015, Volume 36, Issue 3*, “Introduction: Euroscepticism, from the Margins to the Mainstream”, (2015), p. 240, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/reader/10.1177/0192512115577231>.

<sup>17</sup> D. Vampa Ed. D. Albertazzi & D. Vampa, *Populism and New Patterns of Political Competition in Western Europe*, (2021), p 215.

<sup>18</sup> De Vries, *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration*, p. 4.

continent.<sup>19</sup> While the thesis will use Italy as a case study in later Chapters, the claim that Euroscepticism is a continental phenomenon is one that needs to be clarified from the beginning.

As identified thus far, it is widely agreed upon that the 1990s were the period when Euroscepticism truly began manifesting itself across Europe. This is subsequently reflected in the relative literature and this decade can therefore be considered as the starting point of the thesis. However, it must be stated that investigating the origins of Euroscepticism is quite limited as there simply are not many academic texts written directly about Euroscepticism in this period. The term was already present in the 1980s to a limited extent but only widely popularized academically through the writings of Taggart in 1998. For this reason, the most valuable articles and publications surrounding this topic were published at the turn of the century. At the same time however, revisionist literature can be appreciated due to venturing suggestions as to why Euroscepticism became more prominent in the 1990s. One of the main arguments made is that the accelerated process of integration that took place between 1992 and 1998 greatly destabilized Europe and fell short of one of its overall objectives of creating greater unity. As stated by De Vries (2018), the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 marked a turning point in the “study of public opinion towards European integration” due to its pivotal significance in shifting the EU away from being a strictly economic union.<sup>20</sup> It is also worth highlighting how the increase in the efforts toward fostering territorial integration in this decade contributed to discontent. This is because cohesion policy was also pushed to the forefront of the EU agenda in this period, leading to unprecedented changes for the existing Member States. To back up this claim, Bijsmans (2021), underlines how the Maastricht Treaty is generally regarded “as the key turning point in terms of the advance of a more critical public engagement with the EU”.<sup>21</sup>

An immediate glance at the literature available points toward the conclusion that revisionist publications account for 1992 as being a key moment in the rise of Euroscepticism. This is an essential point to bear in mind as cohesion policy was also pushed to the forefront of the EU agenda in this period. The view of Euroscepticism beginning to gain traction as a phenomenon in the 1990s is also shared by Serricchio, Tsakatika & Quaglia (2012), who

---

<sup>19</sup> Ed. Harsen & Spiering, *Euroscepticism: Party Politics, National Identity and European Integration*, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> De Vries, *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>21</sup> P. Bijsmans, *Journal of European Integration, Volume 33, Issue 3*, “The Eurozone Crisis and Euroscepticism in the European Press”, (2020), p. 331,  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/07036337.2020.1740698?needAccess=true>.

highlight how it reached its initial apex between the 1992-1998 period as a consequence of questions surrounding integration.<sup>22</sup> This peak was later surpassed following the economic crisis in 2008, as can be seen in Figure 1, which chronicles the variations in the level of Euroscepticism from the Maastricht Treaty to the immediate post-Eurozone Crisis period. The researchers use Euroscepticism as the dependent variable, asking the question of whether membership is a positive or negative thing and recording this respectively into a binary “0” and “1”. Independent variables such as economic expectations, education and confidence in national institutions are also considered.

Figure 1: The Evolution of Euroscepticism Since the TEU



Source: Eurobarometer.

23

The graph is indicative of the impact that external factors can have on Euroscepticism and the rise and fall in its levels across time coincides to important events that shaped the EU as a whole as well as its individual Member States. From a cursory glance at the literature on Euroscepticism, it can be said that it cannot be considered to be a recent phenomenon that has

<sup>22</sup> F. Serricchio, M. Tsakatika & L. Quaglia, *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, Volume 51, Issue 1, “Euroscepticism and the Global Financial Crisis”, (2012), p. 56.

<sup>23</sup> Serricchio, Tsakatika & Quaglia, “Euroscepticism and the Global Financial Crisis”, pp. 55-57.

arisen in the past decade, as critics of European integration have existed for as long as the EU. The term itself is slightly more contemporary and can be observed across academic literature published at the turn of the century. Taggart is considered influential in first presenting it in 1998, and up to that point the literature can be considered to be quite limited in terms of simply not having been written with this term mentioned explicitly. In the past five years, Euroscepticism has undoubtedly reached its apex, most notably seen through the UK's decision to leave, which was the first time that murmurs of discontent toward the EU were translated into concrete action, in the form of Brexit. Furthermore, parties with prominent Eurosceptic ideologies have gained significant seats across EU Member States' Parliaments, notably in the Mediterranean. This rise in Eurosceptic thought is prominently featured within the literature, and it is therefore justifiable to examine the evolution of the debate across time. The purpose of this Chapter is to analyze how the literature reflects Euroscepticism's shift from being a relatively insignificant phenomenon to an important one.

### **1.1 The foundation and seminal studies on Euroscepticism**

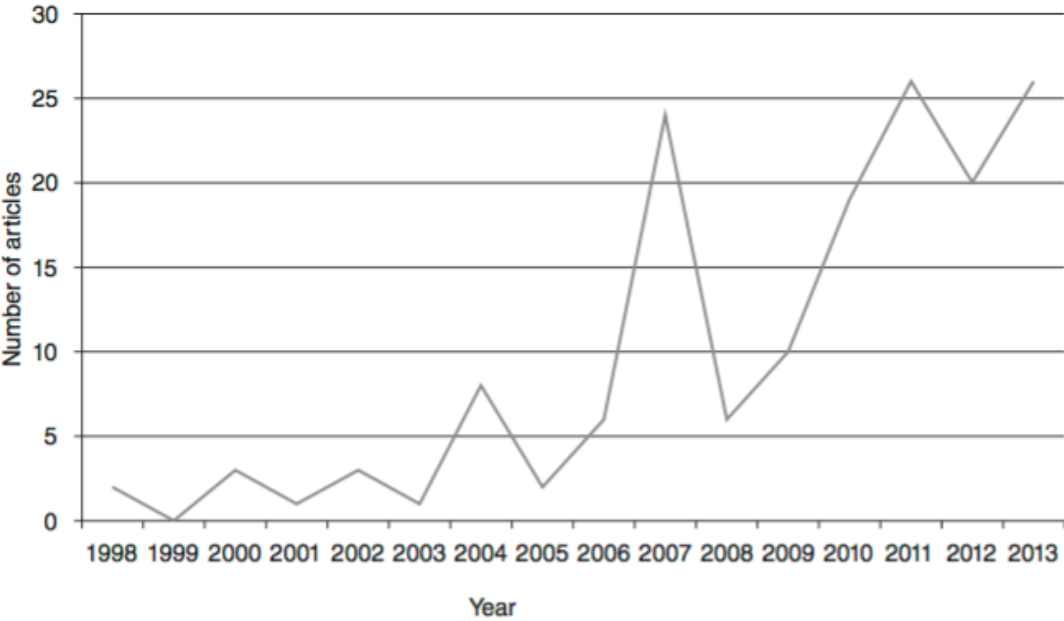
While the opening part of the Chapter examined the origins of the term "Euroscepticism", acknowledging the low amount of literature published in the 1990s, a clear shift can be identified at the turn of the century. This saw Euroscepticism become more a staple of the academic debate surrounding Europe and more visible within news outlets. Bijmans (2021) notes how it became "mainstream" in this period and began to also feature in newspapers instead of being confined solely to academic discourse.<sup>24</sup> There is therefore great value that can be derived from sources published in the aftermath of the work of Taggart. An immediate change in the debate surrounding Euroscepticism can be identified through the undeniable increase of the number of articles written on the topic. It can be in fact said that while Euroscepticism bubbled as a phenomenon throughout the 1990s, once it was unequivocally recognized, there was a definitive increase in its academic weight. The analysis of the literature provided in this period is fundamental to the investigation and portrays how the discussion on Euroscepticism truly came to light. In line with the claim that Euroscepticism became more prominent post-1998, Taggart and Szczerbiak (2018) note this reflection across academic literature and quantify all of the available articles on the direct topic. These are collected in

---

<sup>24</sup> Bijmans, "The Eurozone Crisis and Euroscepticism in the European Press", p. 335.

Figure 2, which serves to illustrate the increase in articles written following 1998, as well as to highlight a stark surge around 2008. As already identified in the analysis of the previous graph, this can be attributed to external factors such as the Eurozone crisis and Eastern Enlargement, among others.

Figure 2: Number of Articles Written About Euroscepticism Since Taggart (1998) 25



It can certainly be claimed that following 1998, Euroscepticism moved from being an underground phenomenon to one widely recognized across academic literature. Furthermore, Leruth, Startin & Usherwood (2018), comment on how Euroscepticism moved from being a broad concept to a specific field of study.<sup>26</sup> This is indicative not only of the rise in the amount of publications focusing on the topic but also a deepening in the specific details of the debate. Significantly, the term itself became more well-defined, with the important distinction being made between “hard” and “soft” Euroscepticism. Conti and Memoli (2016) point to the “notorious ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ partition provided by Taggart and Sczerbiak” in 2002 as one of the earlier distinctions between types of Euroscepticism.<sup>27</sup> This, in its most basic form, differentiates between opposition toward existing EU policies, particularly of integration, and opposition to membership, respectively. Building upon this foundation, Fitzgibbon (2013) also

---

<sup>25</sup> A. Szczerbiak & P. Taggart, Ed. Leruth, Startin & Usherwood, *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*, p. 12.  
<sup>26</sup> Ed. Leruth, Startin & Usherwood, *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*, pp. 3-12.  
<sup>27</sup> N. Conti & V. Memoli, *Citizens, Europe and the Media: Have New Media Made Citizens More Eurosceptical?* (2016), p. 20.

introduced the term “Euroalternativism”, which proves critical of certain EU policies but remains in favor of the general objective of integration.<sup>28</sup> De Vries (2018) goes as far as stating that “there is no such thing as Euroscepticism” as a single entity, but rather different individuals and groups with varying priorities, coming from distinct socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>29</sup> It is clear that Euroscepticism is a prevalent phenomenon, but it must also be seen as something that is varied and differs greatly across Member States. The literature presented post-Taggart is therefore significant in highlighting the importance of categorizing Euroscepticism, rather than placing all forms of criticism toward the EU under the same umbrella.

In line with the generally negative connotation that surrounds the word “Euroscepticism”, political scientists have observed how certain parties have adopted determined terminologies to voice discontent with the EU. Leruth (2017), points toward David Cameron’s formation of the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) in 2009 as an example of Eurorealism, replacing soft right-wing Euroscepticism in favor of progression.<sup>30</sup> This can further be attributed to the nationalistic label that has generally characterized Eurosceptic parties, and something that will be discussed when glancing at specific cases. Fitzgibbon (2017) notes the dissatisfaction of left-wing parties with the nationalist label, highlighting how it is generally shunned by political parties.<sup>31</sup> Following Taggart’s use of the term “Euroscepticism”, it can therefore be claimed that it became subsequently categorized in a more extensive way, most notably through the distinction that exists between “hard” and “soft”, as previously discussed. This can be attributed both to the negative connotation associated with Euroscepticism, but also the popularity of the phenomenon. Becoming something widely recognized in the mainstream, its subsequent subdivision was inevitable. The literature available this century can be considered invaluable in breaking down the term, and whilst an exact definition has yet to be agreed upon and probably never will be, several forms of Euroscepticism have been identified.

When analyzing the texts that have been written after 1998, it can be said that one of the main purposes has been accounting for the rise of Euroscepticism. One of the central

---

<sup>28</sup> Bijsmans, “The Eurozone Crisis and Euroscepticism in the European Press”, p. 336.

<sup>29</sup> De Vries, *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration*, p. 184.

<sup>30</sup> B. Leruth, Ed. Fitzgibbon, Leruth & Startin, *Euroscepticism as a Transnational and Pan-European Phenomenon: the Emergence of a New Sphere of Opposition*, p. 59.

<sup>31</sup> J. Fitzgibbon, Ed. Fitzgibbon, Leruth & Startin, *Euroscepticism as a Transnational and Pan-European Phenomenon: the Emergence of a New Sphere of Opposition*, p. 123.



objectives of the EU since its inception has been enlargement, which has been pivotal in adding credibility to the organization as well as strengthening its core. Moreover, it has also had the main objective of reducing disparities within the union as it expanded, something that will be addressed in the next Chapter as cohesion policy is discussed at length. Little can be said of the enthusiasm displayed by acceding states as well, with nine of the ten countries joining the EU holding referendums in 2003, resulting in overwhelming support, although it must be noted that there were low turnouts.<sup>32</sup> From this aspect it can be said that new Member States have genuinely proved enthusiastic at the prospect of joining the EU, anticipating many of the long-term benefits, particularly economic, that membership would bring them. Post-2007 however, there was an undeniable increase in Euroscepticism, with Serricchio, Tsakatika & Quaglia (2012) noting how the rise in Euroscepticism was on average more significant in newly acceded Member States.<sup>33</sup> This is reflected in the literature written in this timeframe, which clearly highlights the augmentation in Euroscepticism that started following the 2007-2008 period. Enlargement has undoubtedly created problems, and continues to prove to be a significant issue, heavily feeding sentiments of discontent within the Member States. Conti and Memoli (2016) identify enlargement as a key contributor to the acceleration of Euroscepticism, particularly from an economic point of view, assessing that the Eastern Enlargement meant that certain countries would move from being net recipients of EU funding to instead being net contributors.<sup>34</sup> This is a phenomenon that can understandably raise some sort of concern among citizens and it can be said that there is a correlation between future enlargement and subsequent discontent within the already established Member States. Enlargement can therefore definitely be seen as a strong contributor to shifts in public opinion and rises in Euroscepticism. While there are many arguments in favor of extending EU membership outward, the literature written around the period of the Eastern Enlargement points toward increases in Euroscepticism.

Another factor that has heavily influenced Eurosceptic thoughts has been the advent of economic troubles that have strongly led to general discontent as well as mistrust toward the way the EU has dealt with economic difficulties. Batory (2011) identifies the economic problems of 2007-2008, coupled with the migratory crisis, as something that strongly “undermined confidence in the EU’s effectiveness in tackling problems” at a pivotal moment.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> A. Batory, Ed. Leruth, Startin & Usherwood, *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*, p. 256.

<sup>33</sup> Serricchio, Tsakatika & Quaglia, “Euroscepticism and the Global Financial Crisis”, p. 56.

<sup>34</sup> Conti & Memoli, *Citizens, Europe and the Media: Have New Media Made Citizens More Eurosceptical?* p. 28.

<sup>35</sup> A. Batory, Ed. Leruth, Startin & Usherwood, *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*, p. 256.

It can be in fact said that the circumstances of this period led to a clear schism in what had can previously be noted as vast support for the institution. While not directly utilizing the term, Fligstein (2008) has heavily hinted at Euroscepticism increasing in the context of the economic crisis. He in fact claims that Euroscepticism is felt among poorer classes who have not reaped the benefits of European integration and fueled in the thoughts of citizens who feel better off with “their nation-states to protect them from the vagaries of the economy”.<sup>36</sup> The nation in fact is often viewed as an entity that is able to correct major problems in the economy at national level, while the EU has presented several shortcomings when dealing with this issue. Carrying out a survey on membership, Serricchio, Tsakatika & Quaglia (2012) concluded that positive evaluations of the economy coincided with low Euroscepticism, with the converse effect being manifested in the opposite case.<sup>37</sup> Seminal studies following the work of Taggart have been significant in identifying a number of factors that are influential in shaping Euroscepticism.

## 1.2 Recent developments and assumptions

Despite its increase during the second half of the 2000s, it can be claimed that Euroscepticism has gained even further traction in the past decade or so. The post-1998 period was important in highlighting the scholarly debate around Euroscepticism, but it can be said that in recent years the value of academic commentary surrounding Euroscepticism has reached its peak. Fitzgibbon, Leruth & Startin (2017) consider the Eurozone crisis as the second major event to shape Euroscepticism across the continent, after the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht.<sup>38</sup> As previously discussed, the long-lasting effects of the 2008 Eurozone crisis, concerns with security, manifested through attacks in Brussels and Paris, and an ongoing refugee crisis have all been contributing factors to a general rise in discontent. It is therefore essential to glance at literature from this period, as it heavily portrays the furthering of the debate post-2008. Leruth, Startin and Usherwood (2018) go as far as stating that “there has never been a more salient moment” to delve into the topic of Euroscepticism and given the circumstances it is hard to counter this position.<sup>39</sup> While the aforementioned events are significant, the advent of Brexit is one that is particularly strong when citing “shocks” faced by the EU. As claimed by De Vries

---

<sup>36</sup> N. Fligstein, *Euro-Clash: The EU, European Identity and the Future of Europe*, (2008), p. 245.

<sup>37</sup> Serricchio, Tsakatika & Quaglia, “Euroscepticism and the Global Financial Crisis”, p. 56.

<sup>38</sup> Ed. Fitzgibbon, Leruth & Startin, *Euroscepticism as a Transnational and Pan-European Phenomenon: the Emergence of a New Sphere of Opposition*, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> Ed. Leruth, Startin & Usherwood, *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*, p. 3.

(2016), the “outcome of the Brexit referendum in Great Britain provided a first glimpse of what may [lie] ahead when Eurosceptic sentiment hardens”.<sup>40</sup> It in fact proved for the first time that with the true mobilization of public discontent, a decision could be made that would not fall in line with conventional political and economic models, and for the first time a Member State would officially be able to leave the organization some years later. For these reasons, it can be stated that contemporary literature is of most value when rounding up the analysis of the academic debate on Euroscepticism.

One significant point that has emerged in recent literature surrounding Euroscepticism is the fact that it has progressively been used as a medium to gather political support. Crescenzi, Di Cataldo and Giua (2020) draw a comparison between the EU and national governments, attributing a rise in Euroscepticism to their inability to provide concrete answers to questions posed by rising economic problems.<sup>41</sup> This has led to a shift away from traditional parties, which have often been supportive of the EU, with greater attention instead being placed on populist or Eurosceptic parties. While Brexit is the obvious example, the presence of Eurosceptic thought within emerging parties, on both sides of the political spectrum, has been steadily increasing across the continent. Manifested mainly through populism, influential political parties have become openly Eurosceptic, citing a desire to reform or in certain cases halt the process of integration in their party manifestos. Writing from an Italian perspective, this view is shared by Albertazzi and Vampa (2021), who discuss how in recent times Euroscepticism can be seen as a “vote-winner” and is used profusely by political parties to reach office.<sup>42</sup> It can be claimed that the EU is currently facing the most significant threats to its stability. In Germany, this can for example be seen in AFD, whose 2013 programme outlined great criticism around its “Europapolitik” agenda, making Euroscepticism even more central to its ideology four years later and shifting even further toward the far-right.<sup>43</sup> Euroscepticism continues to be a central focus of political agendas, and its prevalence is a testament to the fact that it is an extremely significant phenomenon.

---

<sup>40</sup> De Vries, *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>41</sup> R. Crescenzi, M. Di Cataldo & M. Giua, *Regional Science and Urban Economics, Volume 84*. “It’s Not About the Money. EU Funds, Local Opportunities and Euroscepticism” (2020), p. 1, <https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S0166046219304296?token=F3E236806AD01C3ABB5C1223CC13864071AC37387935E9F2D37995D3C5E0D6E758AA0405A666985A23DF646493A092C0&originRegion=eu-west-1&originCreation=20220529154930>.

<sup>42</sup> H. Pautz, Ed. Albertazzi & Vampa, *Populism and New Patterns of Political Competition in Western Europe*, p. 119.

<sup>43</sup> Ed. M. Jessoula, B. Magni, N. Riva & M. Ferrera, *Right Wing Populism and the Welfare State: a Five Countries Comparison*, (2019), pp. 11-12.

A point mentioned so far has been the perceived failure of the integration process, which to many has achieved the contrary of its original purpose by potentially creating an even greater lack of accord. This is a view also expressed by De Vries (2018), who assesses that while over half a century of European integration has created political, economic and social unity, there are currently “deep divisions and conflicts within and alongside its borders”.<sup>44</sup> Euroscepticism is without doubt expressing itself in its most prominent form and this is reflected in the magnitude of texts centered around it. In support of this, Dijkstra (2020), notes how between 2013 and 2018, 13.4% of national voters within the EU turned to “hard” Eurosceptic parties, increasing to 26.7% when also calculating moderate Eurosceptic parties.<sup>45</sup> As will be seen in the next Chapter, the efforts made by the EU through budgetary support in the form of cohesion policy cannot be understated, but continue falling short of expectations. According to many sources, the outcome of votes in recent years are a testament of this. Rodríguez-Pose & Dijkstra (2020), conclude that Eurosceptic roots are far deeper than recent EU intervention in terms of cohesion, but sustain that the EU can still play an underlying role in reducing this by reforming its policies.<sup>46</sup> Undoubtedly, the long-term (and not yet realized) objective of European integration has not been without struggles, contributing to the increase in Eurosceptic views. Many modern writers have pointed toward cohesion policy as a significant contributor to this, which naturally prompts its inclusion as the central focus of the next Chapter.

A leading contemporary scholar, De Vries, presents important findings of research on Euroscepticism. Whilst this Chapter has largely attributed external factors such as political and economic instability to increases in Euroscepticism, the theory presented by De Vries considers internal factors. It in fact hinges on the notion that people’s evaluation of the EU is dependent on national context and in instances of political and economic stability, Euroscepticism will be higher.<sup>47</sup> This can be attributed to a tendency to place national influence above that of a supranational institution, thus believing that a viable alternative to membership exists. It can be said that some level of mistrust of the EU will therefore exist in all types of economic and political conditions, regardless of the efforts put in place by the EU. However, the fact that literature surrounding analysis of Euroscepticism has been somewhat contradictory in nature, may not be a completely negative summary of the term’s influence within the European context.

---

<sup>44</sup> De Vries, *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration*, p. 204.

<sup>45</sup> Dijkstra & Rodríguez-Pose, “Does Cohesion Policy Reduce EU Discontent and Euroscepticism?”, p. 354.

<sup>46</sup> Dijkstra & Rodríguez-Pose, “Does Cohesion Policy Reduce EU Discontent and Euroscepticism?”, p. 367.

<sup>47</sup> De Vries, *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration*, pp. 205-206.

It can in fact serve to highlight the difficulty of interpreting how people view the EU, which will be a central focus of the subsequent Chapters.

### **1.3 Overall findings and the main theoretical propositions**

This Chapter has comprehensively glanced at the literature written about Euroscepticism from its origins to its current developments. The main finding is that the term was academically coined by Taggart in 1998, even though criticism of the EU, to varying degrees, is as long-lasting as the organization itself. In addition, the literature review is indicative of the fact that there has been a steady increase in the debate following Taggart's article. This is also reflective of the overall feelings of discontent of the general public, which has seen a great amount of support being directed toward Eurosceptic parties across the European continent. This can be attributed to several main factors, with the first being the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht. While attempting to foster greater integration and move away from being a strictly economic union, the Treaty and its subsequent ratification process instead triggered discontent among Member States due to a perceived loss of national legitimacy that it would entail.<sup>48</sup> Secondly, the consequences of the Eastern Enlargement and Eurozone crisis in the mid-2000s are essential to accounting for the increase in Euroscepticism across literature. The sudden increase of Member States created a clear imbalance and it can be argued that it was too drastic a change. It undoubtedly destabilized the previous members, whilst increasing levels of Euroscepticism were also observed among those that had newly acceded. The failure of the EU to rapidly deal with the extreme negative economic repercussions of the Eurozone crisis can also be seen as a strong contributing factor for the fall in support for the organization.<sup>49</sup> Today, Euroscepticism is a phenomenon that can be witnessed across the European continent and has emerged from the underground to frequently occupy mainstream media and politics. In the academic space, the literature present can be identified as a direct extension of the public feeling, with the prevalence of the debate around Euroscepticism indicative of the weight it holds today.

From the literature review, it can also be concluded that the process of European integration, whilst successful to varying extents, is currently placing significant strain on the

---

<sup>48</sup> De Vries, *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration*, p. 33.

<sup>49</sup> Bijsmans, "The Eurozone Crisis and Euroscepticism in the European Press", p. 334.

general public's opinion of the EU. Feelings of discontent are unquestionably at an all-time high and Euroscepticism is an ever-more recognized phenomenon, with an increasing amount of academic texts presenting the debate on this topic. Due to the prevalence of literature available, there has never been a more appropriate time to explore why European integration has fallen short and account for why the public perception of the EU is worsening. The timing of the thesis coincides with the ongoing debate and the investigation as a whole can effectively explore the connection between Euroscepticism and the failure of the EU to achieve the long-term harmonious integration it set out to complete in the decade of the 1990s. Using this early information gathered, the next Chapter will focus on one of the tools with the highest potential when it comes to achieving this goal: cohesion policy. Bearing in mind the findings from the academic debate on Euroscepticism in fact, an overview of EU redistributive policies should provide insightful toward beginning to answer the overall research question of the linkage between the two.

## Chapter II – Cohesion policy in the context of Euroscepticism

### 2.1 EU enlargements and cohesion policy: the main issues

The overall objective of this Chapter is to contextualize the role played by EU redistributive policies in relation to attitudes of Euroscepticism. As already mentioned, the reduction of territorial disparities has been a long-term objective of European integration and is crucial to take into consideration when assessing the success of the EU. One third of the EU budget is currently allocated to cohesion policy, which aims to provide more homogenous unity across Europe. More specifically, €392 billion has been allocated to cohesion policy for the 2021-2027 period, amounting to half a trillion when also factoring in national financing, indicating the extent of its importance as an EU policy for the present and future.<sup>50</sup> Its importance in terms of maintaining balance within the EU can be identified in the opinions of a few political historians, who have attributed a rise in Euroscepticism to the shortcomings of cohesion policy, linking the two together as related elements of European studies. Using this school of thought as a starting point, the Chapter will work toward justifying why cohesion policy is important to consider, having just taken a deep dive into the literature about Euroscepticism. It will also place emphasis on the inconsistency of Euroscepticism being present in areas that have been heavy recipients of European aid in the form of cohesion policy. This will prove valuable in preparation for the case studies that will be looked at in depth in later Chapters.

Before delving into cohesion policy's role when it comes to analyzing Euroscepticism, it must be defined in the context of the evolution of the European political construction. As stated in the previous Chapter, the seeds for European integration were planted in the immediate aftermath of WWII, with six nations coming together to foster economic cooperation and lay the foundations for long-term peace. Right from the beginning, there was an emphasis placed on promoting collective economic growth through integration. This can be seen in the Preamble of the Treaty of Rome, with the six original members "anxious to strengthen the unity of their economies and to ensure their harmonious development by reducing the differences existing between the various regions and backwardness of the less favored regions".<sup>51</sup> It was clear that further integration was of paramount importance to the institution, but it would prove too

---

<sup>50</sup> European Commission, "Available Budget of Cohesion Policy 2021-2027", (2021), [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/funding/available-budget/](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/available-budget/).

<sup>51</sup> M. Brunazzo, Ed. Piattoni & Polverari, *Handbook on Cohesion Policy in the EU*, p. 17.

ambitious a plan to be effectively implemented at that given moment in time. As the decades progressed however, the organization sought to further integration through expansion of its members which, while providing several benefits, exposed inequalities in the economic and social development of Member States. Although 1988 is the year that cohesion policy was born, Molle (2008) recognizes that regional imbalances were exposed from the first enlargement in 1973, where the UK presented several fears toward the distribution of the budget once they acceded.<sup>52</sup> Further enlargement would inevitably lead to disparities and a separate section of this Chapter is dedicated entirely to the repercussions of the 2004 Enlargement. In anticipation of analyzing the impact of enlargement, it can be determined that the pursuit of regional development and the reduction in disparities across Europe has been a focal point of the EU since its inception.

In line with the concept that expansion demands concrete policies, Faiña, López-Rodríguez & Montes-Solla (2016) consider the enlargement to include Greece, Spain and Portugal, as well as the Single European Act (SEA), both taking place in 1986, as events that “predisposed an investment policy aimed at reducing regional disparities”.<sup>53</sup> The fact that disparities had existed before is unquestionable, but the enlargement of these countries immediately highlighted them and led to further inequalities across EU territory. The SEA made cohesion policy a competence of the Union, economic cohesion a concrete goal and the structural funds the instrument to achieve this.<sup>54</sup> It must be recognized that the immediate aftermath of this was generally positive, with a great deal of regions embracing the opportunities offered by the EU to promote growth.<sup>55</sup> In contrast however, from the decade of the 1990s, it can be said that the efforts to promote further integration presented new difficulties, with cohesion policy being one of the main instruments used. Highlighting the importance of this decade is pivotal, as it represented an essential turning point in the EU. Brunazzo (2016) notes how despite having long-term origins, “1988 marked the beginning of the fully-fledged cohesion policy”, with the aforementioned structural funds being doubled, rising to 30.7% of the total EU budget by 1993, a percentage that is more or less the same in the present day.<sup>56</sup> This clearly emphasizes the steps taken toward integration in this time as the organization

---

<sup>52</sup> W. Molle, *European Cohesion Policy*, (2008), p. 141.

<sup>53</sup> J. A. Faiña, J. López-Rodríguez & P. Montes-Solla, Ed. Piattoni & Polverari, *Handbook on Cohesion Policy in the EU*, p. 339.

<sup>54</sup> M. Brunazzo, Ed. Piattoni & Polverari, *Handbook on Cohesion Policy in the EU*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>55</sup> E. Hepburn, Ed. Piattoni & Polverari, *Handbook on Cohesion Policy in the EU*, p. 205.

<sup>56</sup> M. Brunazzo, Ed. Piattoni & Polverari, *Handbook on Cohesion Policy in the EU*, p. 22.



underwent important changes. As discussed earlier, this shift led to a rise in discontent among citizens of Europe, and it can be stated that a common thread can be drawn between the furthering of cohesion policy and the rise of Euroscepticism, in the decade of the 1990s. This is essential toward bearing in mind the connection between Euroscepticism and EU redistributive policies.

In the present, cohesion policy is heavily integrated with EU policies and constitutes a third of the EU budget, making it one of the most significant elements of the EU. Currently, the main actors are the European Commission, Council of the European Union, the European Council and European Parliament. These are charged with renegotiating the structural funds and interpreting them in the context of the programme being outlined, with a number of actors then carrying this out at national and subnational level.<sup>57</sup> In 2013, cohesion policy underwent arguably its largest regulatory change since 1988, with the alignment of policies toward the greater objective of the EU, centering around smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.<sup>58</sup> This is valuable in showing the weight of cohesion policy within the EU as a whole, fully falling in line with the core values of the organization. It is hence undeniable that cohesion policy constitutes a central part of the EU budget and can therefore be considered to be a valuable tool when analyzing EU activity. It is “one of the largest and most visible expenditure items in the EU budget”, which makes it accessible and open to interpretation from the public.<sup>59</sup> This is something that will be key to the investigation, which will make use of official figures released by EU sources, particularly in the next two Chapters. To get an initial idea of this, the most recent allocation of funding in regard to cohesion policy has been portrayed in Figure 3 on the next page, outlining the breakdown of the €392 billion budget for the 2021-2027 period. It identifies how a great portion is allocated to the Investment for Jobs and Growth Goal (IJG), which is funded by the ERDF, ESF, CF and the Just Transition Fund (JTF). This highlights how job creation and the reduction of unemployment, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, are major priorities. In addition to the cohesion policy allocations, REACT-EU (Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe) added €50.6 billion extra funds toward supporting areas particularly hit by the pandemic.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> P. Stephenson, Ed. Piattoni & Polverari, *Handbook on Cohesion Policy in the EU*, p. 36.

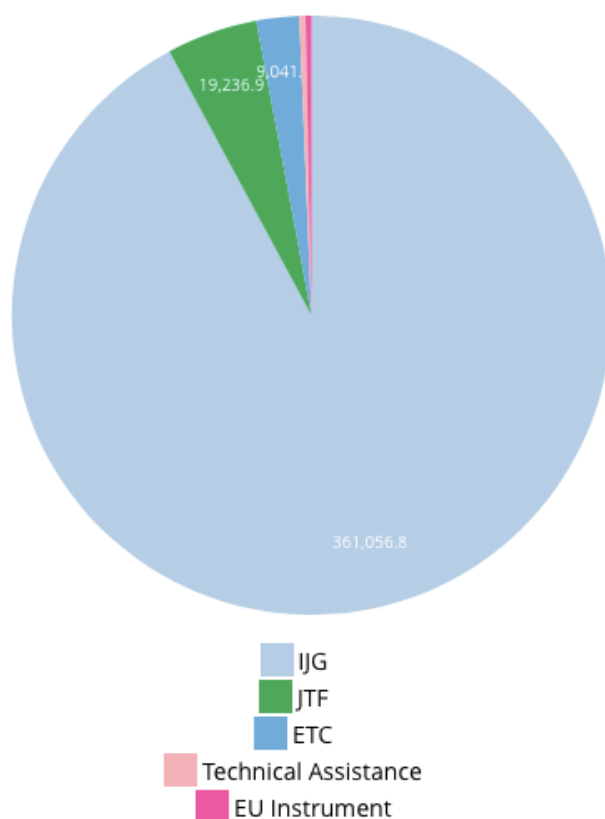
<sup>58</sup> Ed. J. Bachtler, P. Berkowitz, S. Hardy & T. Muravska, *EU Cohesion Policy: Reassessing Performance and Direction*, (2017), p. 1.

<sup>59</sup> Crescenzi, Di Cataldo & Giua, “It’s Not About the Money. EU Funds, Local Opportunities and Euroscepticism”, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> European Commission, “Flash Eurobarometer 497: Citizens’ Awareness and Perception of EU Regional Policy”, (2021), p. 1, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2286>.

Figure 3: Budget Allocation for the 2021-2027 Period

61



The reported figures serve to explain the importance of cohesion policy and confirm the EU's long-term objective of reducing disparities among its Member States, whilst at the same time pursuing additional economic growth.<sup>62</sup> The creation of employment is a central focus of the EU, which is all but confirmed when glancing at some of the objectives outlined in the 2021-2027 programming period. Figure 3 is therefore valuable when it comes to highlighting the role played by redistribution policies, which can be identified as a clear extension of the overall objectives of the EU. While it can be argued that the persistence of Euroscepticism is a sign that cohesion policy has fallen short in some ways, it cannot be denied that the EU has provided significant support toward reducing inequalities. The immediate conclusion that the EU does provide investment toward achieving its policies begs the question of why this has not proven effective. This is an issue that the thesis sets out to investigate, particularly in the fourth Chapter when the case study of Italy will be examined at length.

<sup>61</sup> T. Krausova & J. Walsh, *European Commission*, "2021-2027 Cohesion Policy EU Budget Allocation", (2021), <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/stories/s/2021-2027-EU-allocations-available-for-programming/2w8s-ci3y>.

<sup>62</sup> J. Pienkowski & P. Berkowitz, Ed. Bachtler, Berkowitz, Hardy & Muravska, *EU Cohesion Policy: Reassessing Performance and Direction*, p. 55.

## 2.2 The turning point with the EU's Eastern Enlargement

Enlargement in the 1980s and 1990s has proven to be one of the main reasons that justify the need for effective redistributive policies to be put into place. In an even more prominent way, the Eastern Enlargement of 2004 placed a significant strain on cohesion policy and caused it to evolve even further. When looking at the statistics, it can be seen that more than half of the €336.5 billion budget allocated between 2007 and 2013, was assigned to the ten new Member States.<sup>63</sup> This instantly demonstrates the effort made by the EU toward developing recently assimilated countries at the same time justifying how this would inevitably lead to existing states feeling slighted. Dissatisfaction from the Member States can in fact be traced to six years earlier, where the main net contributors, Germany and the Netherlands, were against any EU increase in cohesion policy spending. Similarly, net beneficiaries such as Italy and Spain did not want to fund this enlargement by giving up resources that were previously allocated to them through the structural funds.<sup>64</sup> Extending membership beyond the initial six countries has been a long-term objective of the EU and was pivotal to shaping cohesion policy. It can be said that these new Member States added value to the organization as a whole and as beneficiaries of the policies and funding of the EU, provided few problems toward integration. There are undoubtedly exceptions, such as the criticism of integration presented by Thatcher, but overall the early enlargements did not lead to major issues.<sup>65</sup>

However, the Eastern Enlargement was by far more challenging and unprecedented when compared to previous enlargements. For example, the richest country, Slovenia, displayed a GDP per capita that was only 70% of the EU average at the time.<sup>66</sup> Molle (2008) considers this augmentation to be a pivotal moment in terms of public opinion, with disparities, already evident at the turn of the century, increasing in this period as seen by the average GDP per capita being half of the EU average in the ten of the new Member States.<sup>67</sup> Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of the funds assigned to new Member States between 2007 and 2013, highlighting the breakdown of the allocation of funds through cohesion policy. It demonstrates how the new Member States were significantly behind the EU average and accounts for existing

---

<sup>63</sup> G. Gorzelak, Ed. Bachtler, Berkowitz, Hardy & Muravska, *EU Cohesion Policy: Reassessing Performance and Direction*, p. 33.

<sup>64</sup> M. Brunazzo, Ed. Piattoni & Polverari, *Handbook on Cohesion Policy in the EU*, p. 26.

<sup>65</sup> Ed. Leruth, Startin & Usherwood, *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*, p. 472.

<sup>66</sup> M. Brunazzo, Ed. Piattoni & Polverari, *Handbook on Cohesion Policy in the EU*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>67</sup> Molle, *European Cohesion Policy*, pp. 4-5.

states feeling hindered by the burden of having to allocate some of their resources toward fostering harmonious growth across the entirety of the Union.

Figure 4: Funding Assigned to New Member States (2007-2013)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Value (€ billions)</i>
Bulgaria	6,674
Czech Republic	26,303
Estonia	3,403
Hungary	24,921
Latvia	6,775
Lithuania	4,530
Poland	65,222
Romania	19,213
Slovakia	4,101
Slovenia	11,361
<b>Total</b>	<b>172,503</b>

68

From the beginning, the EU can be seen as an organization that was intended to expand and as previously identified, the effects of the 1986 Enlargement led to cohesion policy being born. Enlargement is therefore by no means a new phenomenon for the EU to deal with. It must be recognized however, that the Eastern Enlargement presented several key differences when compared to the previous ones. From a strictly numerical point of view, this was the greatest number of states the EU had ever assimilated, which would inevitably result in a prominent shift in the balance of the Union. With this in mind, Agenda 2000 was created, agreeing that a great deal of the structural funds would be invested in the new states, whilst at the same time increasing the volume of funding.<sup>69</sup> According to Hepburn (2016), this meant that many regions in the West received decreased support, leading to “regionalist actors adopt[ing] more critical stances on Europe”.<sup>70</sup> From the offset, this immediately accounts for the emergence of Euroscepticism within the existing Member States, who would feel threatened that the EU would focus a great deal of its resources on the acceding states. Furthermore, while all the previous countries who had joined the organization benefited from being in a market economy, the new ones, while fulfilling all of the criteria, were forced to transition from a protectionist,

<sup>68</sup> G. Gorzelak, Ed. Bachtler, Berkowitz, Hardy & Muravska, *EU Cohesion Policy: Reassessing Performance and Direction*, p. 34.

<sup>69</sup> I. Tömmel, Ed. Piattoni & Polverari, *Handbook on Cohesion Policy in the EU*, p. 109.

<sup>70</sup> E. Hepburn, Ed. Piattoni & Polverari, *Handbook on Cohesion Policy in the EU*, p. 204.

closed economy to an open one, in an incredibly short timeframe.<sup>71</sup> For these reasons, it is difficult to compare the Enlargement of 2004 to previous ones, and cannot be treated as a routine expansion of the EU in the context of studying the impact between cohesion policy and Euroscepticism. This was an unprecedented moment and disrupted the balance within the organization from the very start.

As the overall aim of the thesis is to analyze the link between Euroscepticism and cohesion policy, a pivotal component is determining the effectiveness of cohesion policy and some of the evaluation models used. While there have been many efforts to improve cohesion, it must also be identified that “integration may unleash forces that tend to lead to an increase in economic, social and territorial disparities”, thus producing a converse effect to the one intended.<sup>72</sup> This is a central point to linking cohesion policy’s shortcomings to Euroscepticism, as citizens may feel that their tax-paying money is being wasted on inefficient policies that are implemented each year with mixed results. Carrying out a study in 2012, Bachtler, Beggs, Charles and Polverari confirmed general dissatisfaction with cohesion policy and found that progress in addressing regional disparities had been slow, with a deterioration in implementation quality in some cases across the 2007-2013 period.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, the onset of the 2008 economic crisis, in the immediate aftermath of the Eastern Enlargement cannot be underestimated as a significant indicator of the failure of cohesion policy to realize its long-term objectives.<sup>74</sup> Whilst disconnected from enlargement itself, the recession proved disastrous, impacting most of the Union. In particular, the states that were the greatest hit were those in the Mediterranean, and the uneven distribution of sovereign debt crisis and austerity measures undoubtedly played a contributing role to a rise in anti-EU sentiment in these areas.<sup>75</sup> Based on the emergence of dissatisfaction within the EU in the aftermath of enlargement, a connection can definitely be drawn between cohesion policy and Euroscepticism.

The enlargement of 2004 was without doubt a pivotal moment in the context of the EU redistributing funds. Whereas the EU faced numerous challenges related to reducing disparities

---

<sup>71</sup> Molle, *European Cohesion Policy*, p. 240.

<sup>72</sup> Molle, *European Cohesion Policy*, p. 224.

<sup>73</sup> J. Bachtler, I. Beggs, D. Charles & L. Polverari, Ed. Bachtler, Berkowitz, Hardy & Muravska, *EU Cohesion Policy: Reassessing Performance and Direction*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>74</sup> T. Notermans, Ed. Piattoni & Polverari, *Handbook on Cohesion Policy in the EU*, p. 461.

<sup>75</sup> M. Dabrowski, D. Stead & B. Mashhoodi, *Regional Science Policy & Practice, Volume 11, Issue 4*, “EU Cohesion Policy Can’t Buy Me Love? Exploring the Regional Determinants of EU Image”, (2019), p. 29, <https://rsaiconnect.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/rsp3.12237>.

and improving territorial cohesion, it can be said that subsequent enlargements exacerbated existing problems. The EU in fact shaped its whole agenda, displayed through the Lisbon Treaty, around this enlargement, with cohesion policy being one of the most targeted areas. Casula (2020) recognizes the significance of the 2007-2013 period, where cohesion policy shaped a great part of the EU's objectives through the Lisbon Agenda. There was in fact a significant increase in investment toward job growth, particularly in the lesser developed countries, where 65% of funds were intended for Lisbon related expenditure under the Convergence Objective and 82% under the Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective.<sup>76</sup> This all reflects a heavy emphasis on cohesion policy, in the wake of the Eastern Enlargement, foreshadowing further difficulties that would come in the form of economic troubles as well as discontent from within the Member States. The historical debate formed in this period heavily reflects this and goes about chronicling the difficulties faced by the EU in tailoring regional policy to these new demands as well as highlighting discontent progressively developing from within the Member States.

---

<sup>76</sup> M. Casula, *Economic Growth and Cohesion Policy Implementation in Italy and Spain*, (2020), p. 81.

## 2.3 Current challenges

It is important to note that due to cohesion policy being heavily intertwined with EU and national policies, it is often difficult to determine its overall effectiveness.<sup>77</sup> This has not hindered political scientists from debating its role and providing assessments. Dijkstra and Rodriguez-Pose (2020) are some of the most influential when it comes to measuring the impact of EU redistributive policies and determine that it can directly influence public perception of the EU when there is awareness of its implementation.<sup>78</sup> In areas where there was high attentiveness to EU efforts in terms of cohesion policy in fact, there was proven to be support of the organization as a whole. The EU itself is undoubtedly conscious of the need to be noticeable, with the European Parliament in 2017 calling for “increased accountability and visibility in the implementation of cohesion policy”, which can be seen as a response to the rise of Euroscepticism.<sup>79</sup> It is essential to note that the EU is therefore well aware of the effect of regional distribution on improving public opinion. It is key, particularly in future Chapters, to strongly consider public awareness before drafting conclusions, as visibility of policies is essential when accounting for the success of cohesion policy. The EU may implement strong measures, but its effectiveness does get undermined by a lack of public knowledge about the actions taken.

While not every citizen may be completely aware of the efforts made by the EU, it must again be recognized that there has been an undeniable effort made by the organization to increasingly provide funding to cohesion policy, particularly in the past decade. Fratesi (2016) maintains that it is impossible for a policy that accounts for a third of the total budget to be fully ineffective, but instead points toward the much more pressing question of the extent of its efficiency.<sup>80</sup> One of the main objectives of cohesion policy is job creation and unemployment reduction and Crescenzi, Di Cataldo and Giua (2020) identify how voters generally perceive improvements in the labor market as fruit of EU work, being later more susceptible to show

---

<sup>77</sup> Z. Darvas, A. M. Collin, J. Mazza & C. Midoes, *Policy Department Director General for Budgetary Affairs*, “Effectiveness of Cohesion Policy: Learning from the Project Characteristics that Produce the Best Results”, (2019), p. 23, <https://www.bruegel.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/cohesionpolicyep.pdf>.

<sup>78</sup> Dijkstra & Rodriguez-Pose, “Does Cohesion Policy Reduce EU Discontent and Euroscepticism?”, pp. 360-361.

<sup>79</sup> K. Westphal, *European Parliament Report 2016/2326 (INI)*, “REPORT on Building Blocks for a Post-2020 EU Cohesion Policy”, (2017), [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2017-0202\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2017-0202_EN.html).

<sup>80</sup> U. Fratesi, Ed. Piattoni & Polverari, *Handbook on Cohesion Policy in the EU*, pp. 456-457.

appreciation for the EU's redistributive policies.<sup>81</sup> The literature examined in Chapter I already determined that Euroscepticism is currently being expressed in its most prominent form, which raises the immediate question of why there seems to be a positive relationship between greater EU investment and an increase in Euroscepticism in certain areas. Central to the paper is the concept that Eurosceptic thoughts have emerged in areas that have indeed received significant support from the EU through cohesion policy, with Dijkstra & Rodriguez-Pose (2020), raising concrete concerns over the effectiveness of redistributive policies.<sup>82</sup> It must be conceded that cohesion policy does not directly work to counter Euroscepticism, but it can undoubtedly be claimed that through its change in policies the EU has been indirectly addressing voter discontent. Once it cannot be denied that the EU has been consistently devoting significant resources to cohesion policy, the question of why Euroscepticism continues to increase must be posed. Noting the case of Brexit, for example, it has to be remembered that UK citizens were voting not just to leave the EU, but to also cease receiving financial support, mainly in the form of cohesion policy directed at providing support to the poorest regions.<sup>83</sup>

At the same time, it must be recognized that the EU's efforts have not fallen completely short of expectations. While recognizing its failure to meet several goals and highlighting the shortcomings of a vague agenda, Tömmel (2016) recognizes how the Commission has utilized cohesion policy to obtain "far-reaching results".<sup>84</sup> There are undoubtedly several arguments against the effectiveness of cohesion policy, which have largely been covered throughout the Chapter. However, it must also be recognized that there has also been a great deal of success that it has brought about, with the idea that Euroscepticism would be even more diffused had there not been cohesion policy, a largely accepted one. Countries that accede to the EU tend to benefit and have experienced economic growth, in line with the EU's objective of not only promoting economic growth but ensuring it remains harmonious.<sup>85</sup> The important question must also be raised in relation to the notion that many of the papers dealing with cohesion policy fail to provide accurate ways to measure success, with few exceptions emerging in recent

---

<sup>81</sup> Crescenzi, Di Cataldo & Giua, "It's Not About the Money. EU Funds, Local Opportunities and Euroscepticism", p. 8.

<sup>82</sup> Dijkstra & Rodríguez-Pose, "Does Cohesion Policy Reduce EU Discontent and Euroscepticism?", pp. 354-367.

<sup>83</sup> Crescenzi, Di Cataldo & Giua, "It's Not About the Money. EU Funds, Local Opportunities and Euroscepticism", p. 2.

<sup>84</sup> I. Tömmel, Ed. Piattoni & Polverari, *Handbook on Cohesion Policy in the EU*, pp. 118-119.

<sup>85</sup> R. Leonardi, *Cohesion Policy in the European Union: the Building of Europe*, (2005), p. 13.



academic literature.<sup>86</sup> Recognizing this, the next Chapter will strongly focus on providing answers that can accurately measure the success of cohesion policy when implemented in given areas across the EU.

## 2.4 Tracing of the linkage between cohesion policy and Euroscepticism

To sum it up, the reduction of disparities within Member States of the EU, as well as the implementation of policies to create greater unity, has been a focal point of the organization since its inception. 1988 can be identified as the year when the decision was made to allocate a significant portion of the budget toward this visible policy. Since then, it can be claimed that cohesion policy has consistently placed high on the agenda of the EU, with over one third of the current budget being allocated to it for the most recent 2021-2027 period. Despite decades of implementation, however, inconclusive evidence regarding the effectiveness of cohesion policy have left many at odds regarding its success and justification for the portion of the budget it occupies.<sup>87</sup> Charron and Bauhr (2019) concisely summarize how there is limited knowledge regarding European citizen's support for cohesion policy, which is considered to be the EU's most effective method of redistribution.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, the fact that it has needed to adapt throughout the years, is testament to the many shortcomings that have hindered it from being truly effective, at least in the eyes of the general public. Whilst it cannot be denied that the EU has shown dedication when it comes to improving its policies and increasing funding, the final results have not been desired, with the organization falling short of providing the social and political unity it sought to foster in the wake of full economic integration.

Cohesion policy can without a doubt be connected to Euroscepticism. As determined in Chapter I, the term "Euroscepticism" was born in the decade of the 1990s, which coincides with the measures taken by the EU toward promoting greater levels of integration, as the birth of cohesion policy can be traced to 1988. It was in this period in fact that the EU began promoting further integration, shifting away from being a strictly economic force and fostering social

---

<sup>86</sup> Darvas, Collin, Mazza & Midoes, "Effectiveness of Cohesion Policy: Learning from the Project Characteristics that Produce the Best Results", p. 9.

<sup>87</sup> J. Bachtler, I. Begg, D. Charles & L. Polverari, Ed. Bachtler, Berkowitz, Hardy & Muravska, *EU Cohesion Policy: Reassessing Performance and Direction*, p. 9.

<sup>88</sup> N. Charron & M. Bauhr, *Investigaciones Regionales- Journal of Regional Research, Volume 46, Issue 1*. "Linkages and Channels Between Cohesion Policy and European Identity", (2019), p. 21, [https://investigacionesregionales.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/04/1.-Charron\\_vf.pdf](https://investigacionesregionales.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/04/1.-Charron_vf.pdf).

growth as well as territorial cohesion. This inevitably created immediate discrepancies among the existing Member States, who began displaying uncertainties with the accelerated process of integration. This was exacerbated by the Eastern Enlargement of 2004, which proved a turning point as the EU centered many of its further plans around this moment, furthering discontent, particularly among the already established Member States. In the last few decades, there has been an undeniable rise in discontent with the EU, which also extends to the organization's management of redistributive policies. Dealing with Euroscepticism through the redistribution of funds is not a direct objective of the EU, but it is hard to deny that many of the reforms implemented in this sense have been indirectly facing the problems of wavering support and overall mistrust of the Union.

Overall, the scope of this Chapter was to provide an outline of cohesion policy, with the greater objective of tying it into the debate on Euroscepticism that was comprehensively covered in Chapter I. Cohesion policy is undoubtedly a solution toward taming Euroscepticism, while the economic recession and refugee crisis are widely considered to be strong drivers of anti-European sentiments.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, cohesion policy has gone a long way toward fostering integration and it cannot be regarded as a complete failure in having obtained its objectives. However, the role of cohesion policy in furthering Euroscepticism must be recognized as a driving force that is worth exploring in subsequent Chapters. A point of contention can be brought to light, where the EU has become the main economic investor in many of its Member States whilst these are at the same time becoming increasingly Eurosceptic. This was the starting point of the research, which will now be presented in greater detail in Chapter III. Having analyzed the literature surrounding Euroscepticism and provided an overview on the history and implementation of cohesion policy, it can be said that the two are intrinsic elements of the current EU. The first two Chapters can therefore be considered fundamental in determining that there is the potential for a connection to be made between cohesion policy and Euroscepticism. The next Chapter will present the research design and method, bringing to light the similarities that exist between the two in preparation for the case study of Italy that will then take place in the fourth Chapter.

---

<sup>89</sup> De Vries, *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration*, p. 4.

### Chapter III – Regional distribution and Euroscepticism: cementing the link

Thus far it has been determined that a link can be found between Euroscepticism and the regional distribution of EU funding, justifying this thesis. It can be said that both became prevalent in the decade of the 1990s and both currently present some of the most contested academic debates. The literature review accounted for this, showing how in recent years a number of texts have been written with a focus on the connection between cohesion policy and varying forms of Euroscepticism.<sup>90</sup> It definitely remains a relevant topic that has been explored by political scientists in the past few years. The next Chapter of this investigation will continue expanding on the writing already available online by presenting the research design needed to draw a more concrete link. Central to the investigation is the need to prove that cohesion policy is proving ineffective in countering the rise of Euroscepticism. The methodology to reach this will be varied. The first section of the Chapter will take an in depth look at Eurobarometer sources, which will serve to determine the level of satisfaction within regions, when compared to the amount of funding allocated to these same regions. This will serve to begin answering the overall research question of why there are high levels of Euroscepticism in areas funded by EU redistribution policies. This will be accompanied by aid in the form of graphs and charts, providing a visual representation of figures surrounding public opinion in the last few years.

Another essential element to bear in mind is the extent of public awareness surrounding the implementation of EU policies. In their seminal paper accounting for whether cohesion policy reduces Euroscepticism, Rodríguez-Pose and Dijkstra (2020) highlight how public attentiveness to EU policies is pivotal in shaping their image of the EU as a whole.<sup>91</sup> It is in fact possible for individuals and groups to display high levels of Euroscepticism, at the same time being completely unaware of the efforts made by the EU to foster integration. This undermines their strong anti-EU stance as strong Eurosceptic opinions should be backed up by extensive knowledge. When determining the link between the two elements, considering the level of public awareness is therefore paramount. This section of the Chapter will assess studies and polls carried out in given areas to ascertain the level of public awareness for EU efforts made to successfully implement elements of cohesion policy within their region. The goal will be to

---

<sup>90</sup> M. Bayerlein & M. Diermeier, *Kiel Working Paper No. 2219*, “Exchanging Money for Love? A Regional Analysis of EU Cohesion Policy on Euroscepticism”, (2022), p. 19, [https://www.ifw-kiel.de/fileadmin/Dateiverwaltung/IfW-Publications/-ifw/Kiel\\_Working\\_Paper/2022/KWP\\_2219\\_Exchanging\\_Money\\_for\\_Love\\_/KWP\\_2219](https://www.ifw-kiel.de/fileadmin/Dateiverwaltung/IfW-Publications/-ifw/Kiel_Working_Paper/2022/KWP_2219_Exchanging_Money_for_Love_/KWP_2219).

<sup>91</sup> Dijkstra & Rodríguez-Pose, “Does Cohesion Policy Reduce EU Discontent and Euroscepticism?”, abstract.

determine whether Euroscepticism has arisen in spite of positive instances of redistribution of funds, or if there is a severe lack of awareness toward the efforts made by the EU. In order to fully analyze this, surveys carried out on the topic will be consulted, with a particular emphasis on studies that account for instances of high Euroscepticism arising in areas heavily supported by cohesion policy. This is one of the apparent inconsistencies that served to spark the investigation and it will be examined in depth. Having examined both Euroscepticism and cohesion policy in previous Chapters, Chapter III will look to account for the paradox. It will also pose the question of whether or not the presence of Euroscepticism across the continent can be seen as indicative of the failure of cohesion policy.

### **3.1 Solidifying the connection between cohesion policy and Euroscepticism**

The previous two Chapters have determined that cohesion policy is a potential solution toward reducing Euroscepticism, although the prevalence of the latter is indicative of redistribution policies falling short of the mark. It is in fact generally accepted on an academic level that high levels of EU funding do lead to an improved image of the EU and a consequent decline in Euroscepticism.<sup>92</sup> At the same time, shortcomings in the way the EU distributes funding can lead to a rise in criticism of the institution.<sup>93</sup> This begs the important question of how strong the relationship between cohesion policy and Euroscepticism is. The EU must undoubtedly be credited with its transparency, which is manifested through surveys and subsequent feedback, that provide an accurate reflection of public opinion. When conducting empirical research on EU issues, an important resource is the Eurobarometer, which has conducted biannual surveys in all EU Member States since 1973.<sup>94</sup> With cohesion policy being one of the EU's most visible strategies, it is also something that is encompassed within the Eurobarometer. Most recently, Eurobarometer 497, indicates the level of satisfaction that EU citizens have with the EU, particularly in the context of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Eurobarometer is unquestionably a valuable primary source when dealing with

---

<sup>92</sup> Dabrowski, Stead & Mashhoodi, "EU Cohesion Policy Can't Buy Me Love? Exploring the Regional Determinants of EU Image", p. 706.

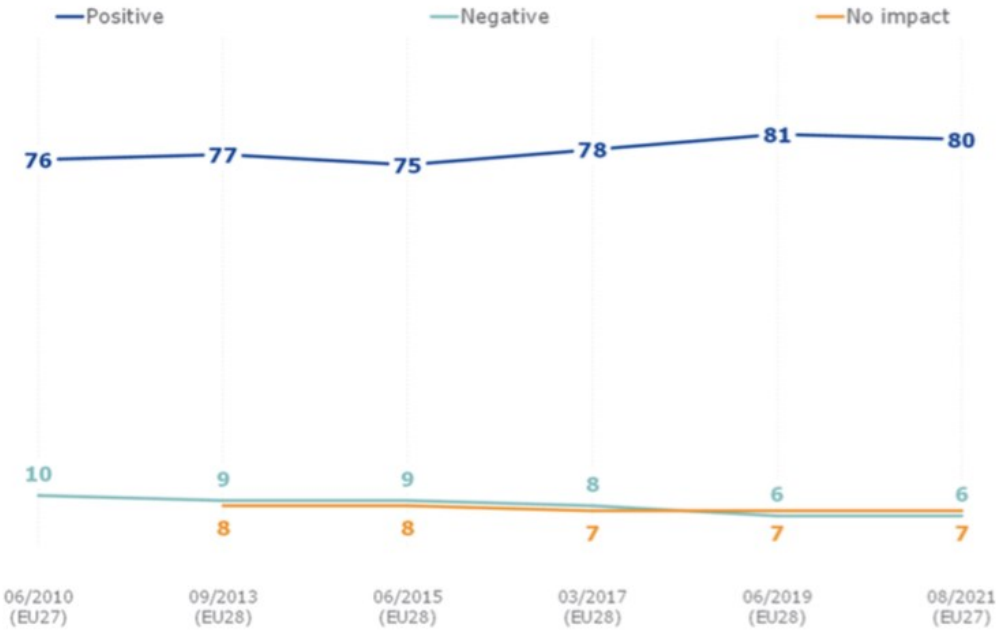
<sup>93</sup> G. Cunico, E. Aivazidou & E. Mollona, *European Journal of Operational Research*, Volume 289, Issue 2. "Building a Dynamic Theory of Citizens' Awareness of European Cohesion Policy Interventions". (2020), p. 758,

<https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S0377221720306287?token=626FD18306DCFC814D956F4E94D2592D0E36E0823A061A18A859B2BF4AF7FAC75A9035F8B518168F171025C85D2EF2B3&originRegion=eu-west-1&originCreation=20220728190618>.

<sup>94</sup> De Vries, *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration*, preface.

primary data concerning public opinion on cohesion policy. Delving into the specifics, the data present in the latest Eurobarometer serves to highlight how in fact, there has been a marginal increase with satisfaction with EU policies between 2010 and 2021, despite a 1% fall in the wake of the pandemic, as can be seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Level of Satisfaction with EU Intervention within Regions / Cities



Based on this survey, it can be said that there appears to be general satisfaction from individuals in terms of their opinion of EU policies impacting their specific city or region. Speaking on behalf of the Commission in late 2021, Director General Marc Lemaître praised the effort made by redistributive policies in the context of the global pandemic, citing an overall rise in public awareness and satisfaction from previous years.<sup>96</sup> Based solely on this part of the Eurobarometer, it can be seen that the efforts made by cohesion policy, which increased during the pandemic period, should have played a role in reducing Euroscepticism. Previous research however would dismiss this, and it must be noted that shortcomings in many of the EU’s general policies have contributed on some level, to the uniform rise in Euroscepticism across the European continent in the past decade. It can further be determined that the influence of EU

<sup>95</sup> European Commission, “Flash Eurobarometer 497: Citizens’ Awareness and Perception of EU Regional Policy”, p. 14.

<sup>96</sup> Panorama Stories from Regional and Urban Policy. “Interview with Marc Lemaître”, (2021), [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/newsroom/panorama/2021/10/13-10-2021-i-am-very-happy-to-say-cohesion-policy-was-one-of-europe-s-first-responders-to-the-crisis-and-it-is-now-a-driver-of-recovery](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/panorama/2021/10/13-10-2021-i-am-very-happy-to-say-cohesion-policy-was-one-of-europe-s-first-responders-to-the-crisis-and-it-is-now-a-driver-of-recovery).

policies on rising sentiments of discontent with the EU has been prominent. Reporting face-value figures from the Eurobarometer alone is not sufficient and in order to explain the connection between cohesion policy and Euroscepticism more figures will have to be consulted. In order to delve deeper into the question of whether or not cohesion policy is effective in countering Euroscepticism, further analysis must therefore be carried out.

### **3.2 Are citizens aware of the EU's efforts to reduce social and economic disparities across countries and regions?**

One of the greatest difficulties encountered by the EU when implementing cohesion policy has been the lack of conclusive answers regarding public awareness of efforts being made to promote territorial cohesion. There is in fact a great deal of discrepancy surrounding the notion of whether citizens are aware of cohesion policy efforts, or if these even have an effect on fostering their support of the EU.<sup>97</sup> Cognitive mobilization is a long-lasting aspect of European integration that focuses on citizen awareness of EU institutions and their roles. This plays an underlying role in determining how likely citizens are to be supportive or critical of the EU, thus directly influencing Euroscepticism. It determines their knowledge of EU policies and subsequent willingness to be active participants in the policy-making process. In a recent study, Borz, Brandenburg and Mendez (2022) referred to this phenomenon as a “necessary but not sufficient condition for European identity”.<sup>98</sup> Determining the extent of citizen awareness can therefore be considered extremely important when concluding whether Euroscepticism continues to rise because citizens are not aware of the efforts made by cohesion policy or if they believe that these are insufficient. All of the studies conducted so far show that increased citizen awareness of EU support, as well as hearing about effective implementation within their region, contributes toward the lowering of Euroscepticism.<sup>99</sup> This means that cohesion policy can play a role in reducing Euroscepticism and it is pivotal for it to be visible in order to receive the greatest amount of public support.

---

<sup>97</sup> G. Borz, H. Brandenburg & C. Mendez, *European Union Politics 2022, Volume 23 Issue 2*, “The Impact of EU Cohesion Policy on European Identity: a Comparative Analysis of EU Regions”, (2022), p. 261, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epub/10.1177/14651165221076444>.

<sup>98</sup> Borz, Brandenburg & Mendez, “The Impact of EU Cohesion Policy on European Identity: a Comparative Analysis of EU Regions”, p. 262.

<sup>99</sup> Bayerlein & Diermeier, “Exchanging Money for Love? A Regional Analysis of EU Cohesion Policy on Euroscepticism”, p. 21.

There have been a number of surveys investigating the amount of citizen awareness toward cohesion policy. The general statement agreed upon across the literature centered around this topic is that awareness is present when a citizen has heard of an EU-funded project in their area.<sup>100</sup> Returning to the Eurobarometer, surveys conducted between 2008 and 2015 found that around half of EU citizens had heard about cohesion policy, shrinking to a third when asked if they had knowledge of the EU funding a specific project within their region.<sup>101</sup> This is undoubtedly low and it can be surmised that Euroscepticism can be in part linked to reduced knowledge of EU intervention and could certainly be countered with greater public awareness. Without doubt, Hungary has been one of the most openly Eurosceptic countries in recent times, particularly at a governmental level, with national institutions not holding back when it comes to criticizing the EU. This has been particularly relevant through the Orbán administration, who has cited the poor economic situation and handling of the migratory crisis as justifiable factors for discontent within the country.<sup>102</sup> Along with Poland, Hungary can definitely be considered to be one of the most Eurosceptic countries from the Eastern Enlargement. In a survey carried out in July of 2021, asking 1,004 citizens whether they had heard about EU-financed projects within their region, a startling 36% had no knowledge about projects aimed at improving their area. Undoubtedly, awareness of the EU's operation within regions can be pivotal in furthering or reducing sentiments of Euroscepticism. The findings from the survey are reported on the next page, begging the compelling question of whether the country would be less Eurosceptic if it in fact had greater awareness of EU regional policies.

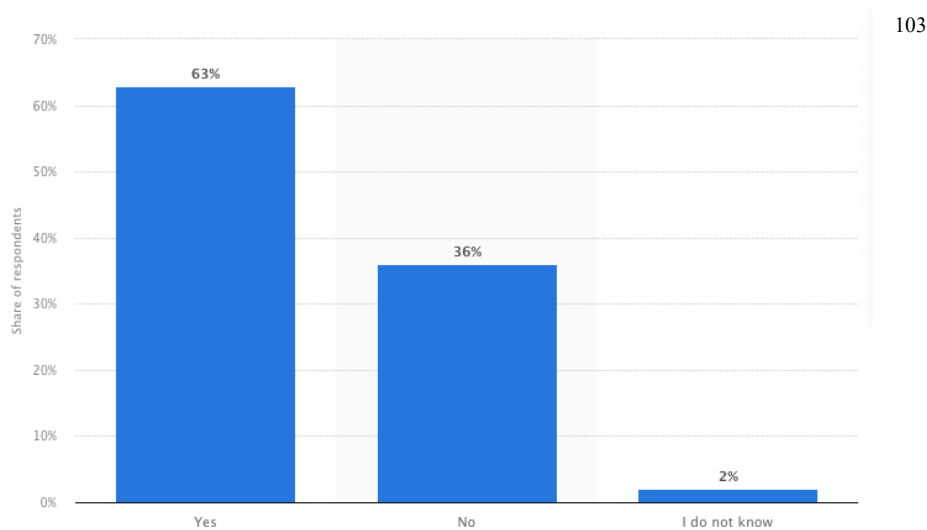
---

<sup>100</sup> Cunico, Aivazidou & Mollona, "Building a Dynamic Theory of Citizens' Awareness of European Cohesion Policy Interventions", p. 761.

<sup>101</sup> J. Bachtler & C. Mendez, "European Identity and Citizen Attitudes to Cohesion Policy: What do We Know?", (2016), p. 16, [http://www.cohesify.eu/downloads/Cohesify\\_Research\\_Paper1.pdf](http://www.cohesify.eu/downloads/Cohesify_Research_Paper1.pdf).

<sup>102</sup> N. Styczynska, Ed. Leruth, Startin & Usherwood, *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*, p. 148.

Figure 6: Have You Heard About EU-Financed Projects in Your Region? (Hungary, July 2021)



An important study in the area of public awareness is carried out by Cunico, Aivazidou and Mollona (2020), who analyzed fifteen Member States (accounting for 85% of the EU population), concluding that a long-term decline in awareness of cohesion policy has meant that many citizens had begun taking many of the EU's efforts for granted.<sup>104</sup> This analysis provides a direct link to Euroscepticism, with decreasing awareness of the efforts made by the EU meaning that citizen complaints about the institution may be misdirected. Moreover, national governments often take credit for successes in the economy, further undermining the role of the structural funds.<sup>105</sup> As a result, it can be claimed that failing support for the EU can strongly be attributed to a lack of knowledge of the efforts made, skewing the results obtained. In the present context in particular, it is interesting to note the true extent of EU aid. The COVID-19 pandemic in fact, exposed supranational and national intervention made to aid countries during an unprecedented global crisis. It proved a significant reminder to citizens of the undeniable efforts made by national governments, whether insufficient or not, and surveys carried out in this period can be effective in identifying public perspectives. One such example is the aforementioned Eurobarometer 497, an investigation carried out by the European Commission between July 22<sup>nd</sup> and August 8<sup>th</sup> of 2021. Importantly, a total of 25,706 interviews were conducted within 27 Member States to determine citizens' awareness of regional support and citizen perspective on cohesion policy being implemented in specific areas, especially in the

<sup>103</sup> F. Medve, *Statista*. "Poll on Familiarity with EU Co-Financed Projects in Hungarians' Own Living Area 2021", (2021), <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1272640/hungary-familiarity-with-eu-co-financed-projects-improving-own-living-area/>.

<sup>104</sup> Cunico, Aivazidou & Mollona, "Building a Dynamic Theory of Citizens' Awareness of European Cohesion Policy Interventions", p. 771.

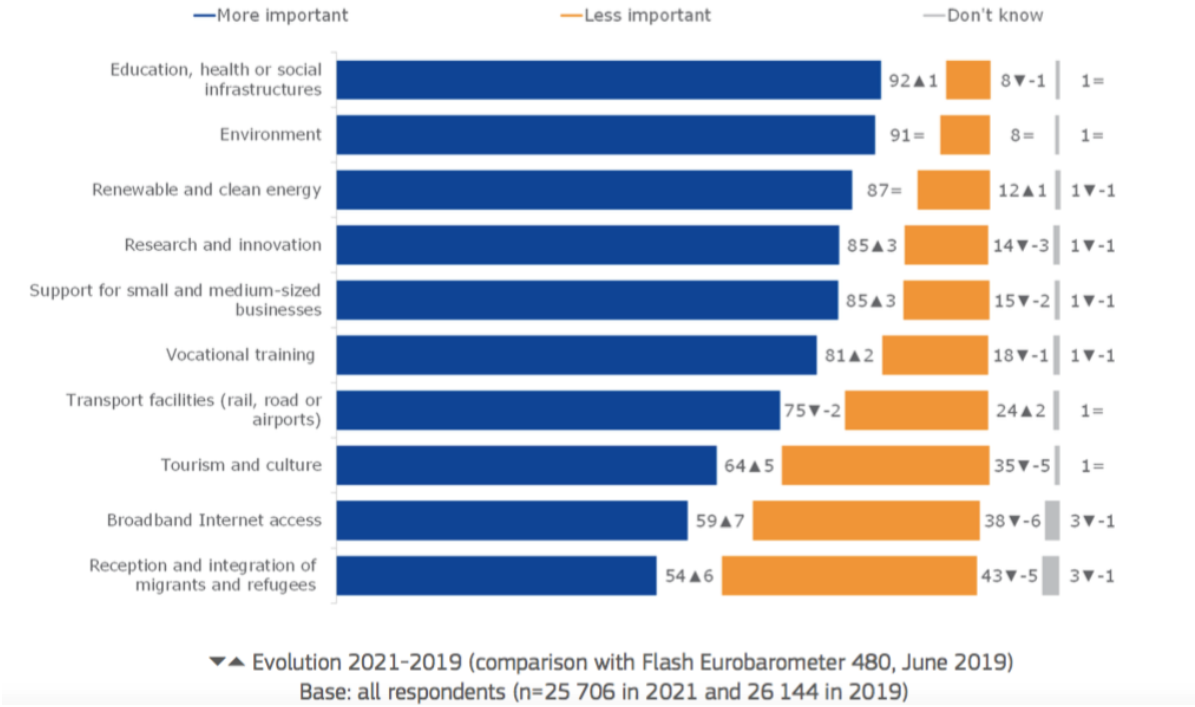
<sup>105</sup> De Vries, *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration*, p. 96.



context of recovery from the pandemic.<sup>106</sup> The Eurobarometer is an important resource that has been also used at large in many of the secondary sources thus far. Through extensive analysis presented around the topic of cohesion policy it is significant in determining the general opinion of the public.

When examining it in greater detail, the Eurobarometer also brings to light the importance of not treating cohesion policy as a single entity, but rather breaking it down into several categories. With so many funds being made available it is important to note that cohesion policy covers a vast array of social and economic spaces. There is direct communication between Member States and EU, which determines the areas the funds should be invested in. When asking questions about these areas of redistribution of funds, the survey provides three responses: “more important”, “less important” and “don’t know”, which serves to highlight the varying degrees of support for redistribution of funding. The breakdown in the importance of policy responses is presented in Figure 7, which brings to light citizen views regarding the allocation of the cohesion policy budget.

Figure 7: Citizens’ View on Cohesion Policy Budget Allocation for Different Domains



107

<sup>106</sup> European Commission, “Flash Eurobarometer 497: Citizens’ Awareness and Perception of EU Regional Policy”, p. 1.

<sup>107</sup> European Commission, “Flash Eurobarometer 497: Citizens’ Awareness and Perception of EU Regional Policy”, p. 53.

Significantly, the survey's response highlights how the reception and integration of migrants and refugees is the one considered of least importance, with 43% of the surveyed population considering it an area of less importance. This is widely in line with the agenda pushed by Eurosceptic individuals and parties, who generally hold these in high regard when presenting agendas against the EU. The past decade and a half have in fact seen a rise in populist parties on both sides of the political spectrum, particularly in the Mediterranean. When providing a five-country analysis, Pavolini, Jessoula, Natili and Germinario (2019), identify anti-immigration sentiments as the connecting line between right-wing populist parties. Assessing the example of the Northern League political party in Italy, they communicate how the ideological focus moved from regionalism to the radical nationalistic right, maintaining strong anti-immigration sentiments.<sup>108</sup> This topic will be explored in greater depth later on in the Chapter and particularly in Chapter IV, accounting for some of the other factors that contribute toward Euroscepticism. Figure 7 is also important in highlighting some of the most desirable areas to be invested in, such as education and sustainable development. The latest installments of cohesion policy have reflected this, indicating a harmonious point of view shared both by the EU and its citizens under this aspect.

Continuing with the Eurobarometer response, another important question raised was that of which level of governance should carry out regional policy. The EU has in fact undergone its greatest transition to supranational governance in the past few decades, provoking a great degree of consternation from citizens, whilst also being more reliant than ever on public support for legitimacy.<sup>109</sup> The argument that the EU is facing the greatest levels of criticism at a time where it instead needs unprecedented support must once again be reiterated. Although being directed by the EU, regional distribution of funding hinges on uniform policies being executed at various levels of government, with the debate of which one should hold most weight being highlighted in the Eurobarometer. Significantly, the data presented indicates how 32% and 23% of respondents believed that cohesion policy should be carried out at the regional and local level respectively. 20% believed that it should be executed at a national level, with 21% accounting for the need for the EU alone to exert authority over the implementation of cohesion policy. This is outlined in Figure 8, which shows how the order of response for EU cohesion

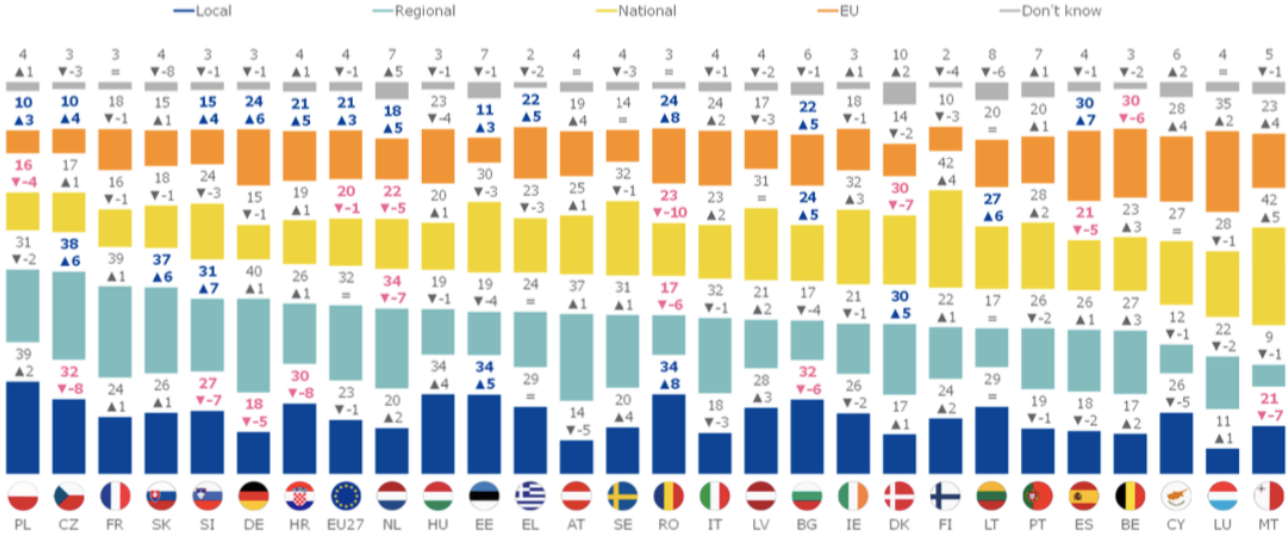
---

<sup>108</sup> E. Pavolini, M. Jessoula, M. Natili & M.R. Germinario, Ed. Jessoula, Magni, Riva & Ferrera, *Right Wing Populism and the Welfare State: a Five Countries Comparison*, 23.

<sup>109</sup> De Vries, *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration*, p. 4.

policy being carried out is: local, regional, national and EU, with a final category for respondents who were unsure.

Figure 8: Levels at which Respondents Believe EU Cohesion Policy Should be Carried Out



▼▲ Evolution 2021-2019 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 480, June 2019 – statistically significant changes shown in bold blue/pink); Base: all respondents (n=25 706 in 2021 and 26 144 in 2019)

110

The survey presented is particularly appreciated, as it shows that in certain cases citizens may not only be unaware of efforts made by the EU, but just as importantly believe that determined policies should not be carried out by the EU, but rather at lower levels of governance. This is a driving sentiment of Eurosceptics, who display discontent for a loss of national authority and competence. This falls in line with the findings made by Crescenzi, Di Cataldo and Guia (2020), who acknowledge the positive impact of the EU, but also identify it as an entity that hinders national governments’ ability to “deliver a more equitable distribution of prosperity”.<sup>111</sup> Much of Euroscepticism in fact comes about when national control is forfeited, and it can be said that under this aspect, redistributive policies contribute to its increase to a limited extent. The supranational nature of the organization can aid in uniformity but does lead to problems when implementing elements of cohesion policy, most notably through skeptics calling for different implementation. Referring to the case of Italy, Terracciano and Graziano (2016) explain how the effectiveness of programming varies based on the

<sup>110</sup> European Commission, “Flash Eurobarometer 497: Citizens’ Awareness and Perception of EU Regional Policy”, p. 67.

<sup>111</sup> Crescenzi, Di Cataldo & Giua, “It’s Not About the Money. EU Funds, Local Opportunities and Euroscepticism”, p. 1.

administrative capacity at the regional level, which can be seen as a key variable.<sup>112</sup> Questions around administrative procedures are problematic across the entirety of the EU, with many concerns being derived from the perceived loss of the full potential of national governments to implement policies. One solution that has been brought to light is the need for cohesion policy to be more adaptable, with Dabrowski, Stead and Mashhoodi (2019) calling for “greater emphasis on flexibility in programming and on locally-led development strategies”.<sup>113</sup> There are several criticisms that the EU is too uniform in its distribution of regional funding and that program structure should be greatly dependent on the region.

Unquestionably therefore, there are a number of criticisms with how the EU goes about implementing its redistributive policies, particularly with the fact that it maintains uniformity across all instances. It can be claimed that this is reflected in surveys reporting citizen opinions on the EU, which expose the fact that there are conflicting views regarding the implementation of policies. The 2021 European Commission study is proof of this, with many people preferring an individual implementation of policies at regional and local level, downplaying the EU’s long-term efforts to foster effective supranational integration. Carrying out an investigation in this realm, Di Cairo and Fratesi (2021) identified that the effectiveness of cohesion policy strongly depended on “national and regional contextual factors, including the level of national development [and] the quality of regional institutions”.<sup>114</sup> Analysis of the case of Italy in the next Chapter, will be particularly important when providing insights on this aspect. All in all, studies like this highlight the importance of strong government at the local level when aiding the implementation of cohesion policy. They also undermine the case of the EU being able to independently implement its policies, which is reflected in the citizens’ relatively low level of trust in the institution. It cannot be forgotten as well, that the Eurobarometer is not the only indication of sentiments across the EU and is a survey of 25,000 people across a geographical area spanning hundreds of millions. The Eurobarometer has also been critiqued, with Borz, Brandenburg and Mendez (2022) calling for “representative citizen surveys at the regional level” to be analyzed as a more accurate portrayal of public sentiment.<sup>115</sup> It is undoubtedly an

---

<sup>112</sup> Terracciano & Graziano, *Regional & Federal Studies, Volume 26, Issue 3*. “EU Cohesion Policy Implementation and Administrative Capacities: Insights from Italian Regions”, (2016), pp. 1-2.

<sup>113</sup> Dabrowski, Stead & Mashhoodi, “EU Cohesion Policy Can’t Buy Me Love? Exploring the Regional Determinants of EU Image”, p. 708.

<sup>114</sup> P. Di Cairo & U. Fratesi, *Journey of Regional Science*. “One Policy, Different Effects: Estimating the Region-Specific Impacts of EU Cohesion Policy”, (2021), p. 319, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/jors.12566>.

<sup>115</sup> Borz, Brandenburg & Mendez, “The Impact of EU Cohesion Policy on European Identity: a Comparative Analysis of EU Regions”, p. 277.

effective tool for determining public awareness of redistributive policies, but in order to explain the relationship that exists between Euroscepticism and cohesion policy it is paramount to also consider the writings of renowned figures in the field.

### **3.3 Euroscepticism in territories that greatly benefited from the EU structural funds**

The spark for the overall investigation was the apparent inconsistency of Euroscepticism being present in areas that have instead been heavy recipients of EU regional distribution. At face value, it does not seem rational that areas comprehensively supported by the EU would in fact harbor sentiments of discontent with the organization, as investment within their region is expected to instead yield a positive reaction from European citizens.<sup>116</sup> The geographical phenomenon is unquestionably an important one that cannot be forgotten when glancing at the correlation between Euroscepticism and cohesion policy. This was prominently brought to light in academic literature by Dijkstra and Rodríguez-Pose (2020), who in the abstract to their influential article on the topic write: “some regions in Europe that have been heavily supported by the European Union’s cohesion policy have recently opted for parties with a strong Eurosceptic orientation”.<sup>117</sup> This paper in particular greatly contributed to this area of study, bringing to light a fascinating trend in voting patterns that solidifies the connection that exists between cohesion policy and Euroscepticism. The two authors identify that insufficient and inefficient investment are two of the main reasons why cohesion policy has been unable to harness the upward trend of Eurosceptic voting. Importantly, they point toward a third factor, which is the relationship between the value of investment in cohesion policy and awareness of citizens, concluding that EU citizens often are ill-informed on intervention within their region, and do not give credit to the institution.<sup>118</sup> This was a notion largely covered in the previous section and will remain essential to consider throughout the thesis.

Along with Rodríguez-Pose and Dijkstra, Bayerlein and Diermeier (2022), have recently been the authors of an insightful publication on the topic that bears the geographical element in mind. Dividing Europe into three distinct regions: North, South and East, they

---

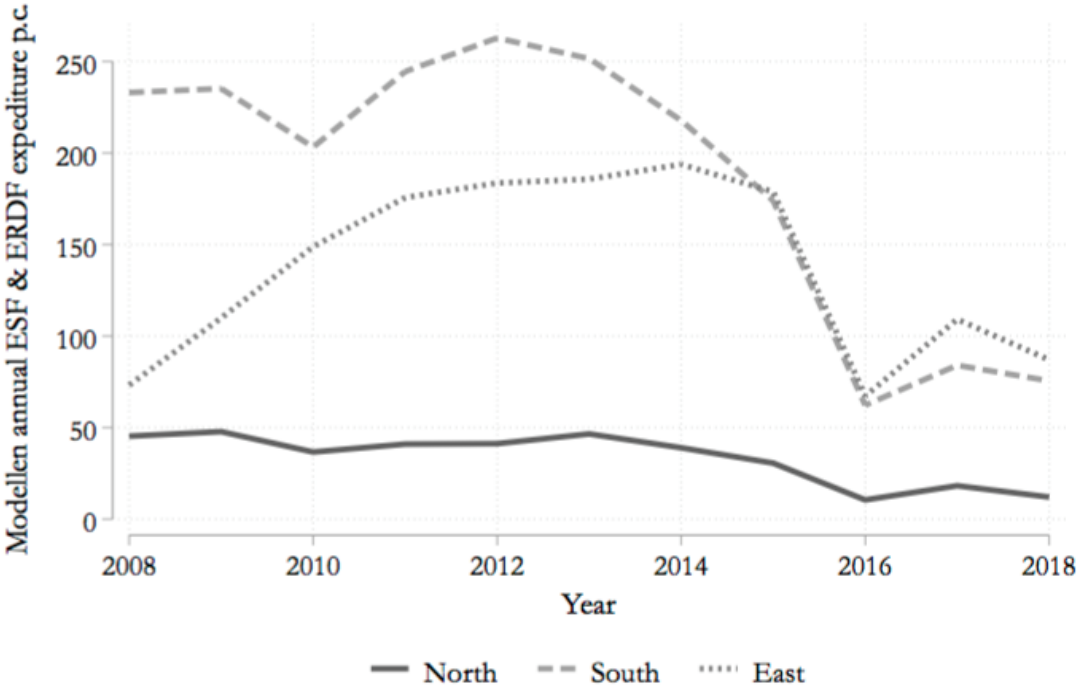
<sup>116</sup> Dabrowski, Stead & Mashhoodi, “EU Cohesion Policy Can’t Buy Me Love? Exploring the Regional Determinants of EU Image”, p. 695.

<sup>117</sup> Dijkstra & Rodríguez-Pose, “Does Cohesion Policy Reduce EU Discontent and Euroscepticism?”, p. 354.

<sup>118</sup> Dijkstra & Rodríguez-Pose, “Does Cohesion Policy Reduce EU Discontent and Euroscepticism?”, p. 358.

describe trends in Euroscepticism in areas highly supported by cohesion policy. Figure 9 illustrates how spending in the North has always been inferior, with heavy investment being made toward the poorer Southern regions as well as regions in the East of the continent. This can be associated with the traditional North-South divide that has manifested itself across most of Europe as well as the particular care given to the nations of the Eastern Enlargement post-accession. Interestingly, the graph depicts a stark fall in funding between 2015 and 2016, which particularly affected the Southern and Eastern regions. The cause of this is undoubtedly the stark increase in refugee influx in this period, which greatly contributed toward shifting overall EU expenditure away from regional distribution of funding.<sup>119</sup>

Figure 9: Cohesion Policy Spending Between 2008 and 2018 in Three Regions



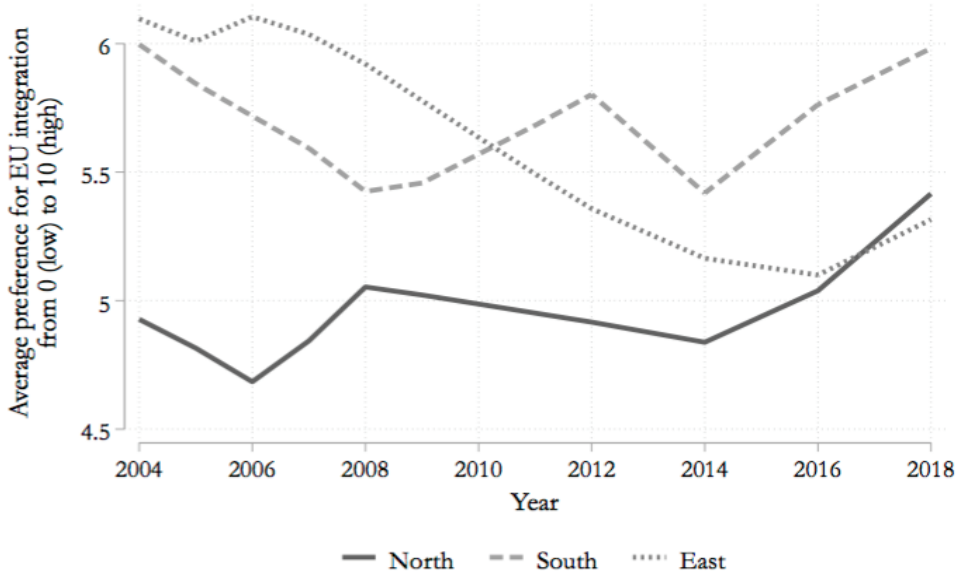
120

Concurrently to what is reported in the previous diagram, Figure 10 represents the levels of Euroscepticism in a similar timespan. In this case defined as “preference for EU integration”, the change in the level of Euroscepticism across the three regions can be examined in the graph on the next page. When compared to the previous figure, it brings to light the remarkable notion that Euroscepticism grew the most in areas that overall were the largest beneficiaries of

<sup>119</sup> Bayerlein & Diermeier, “Exchanging Money for Love? A Regional Analysis of EU Cohesion Policy on Euroscepticism”, p. 20.  
<sup>120</sup> Bayerlein & Diermeier, “Exchanging Money for Love? A Regional Analysis of EU Cohesion Policy on Euroscepticism”, p. 3.

convergence funding.<sup>121</sup> In addition to this, an increase in this trend can be seen in the regions of the North, where upward trends of Euroscepticism have been manifested in spite of being relatively well-off throughout this period.

Figure 10: Euroscepticism Across Three Regions for the 2004-2018 Period



This graph is significant, as it confirms that the increase in Euroscepticism across the EU has been uniform and not limited to a single country or region. It was however most significant in the South, which saw the greatest increase from an initial position of already being Eurosceptic. This can be seen as a reflection of the sentiments of discontent harbored in this particular region and translated into votes being cast for populist parties, particularly in the Mediterranean. In the drafting of the chart, Bayerlein and Diermeier (2022), refer to the European Social Survey (ESS), which “captures Euroscepticism in a broader sense” by including total opposition to the EU as well as disagreement with certain elements.<sup>123</sup> It must once again reiterated that there are varying forms of Euroscepticism and it is unlikely for many Member States following in the footsteps of the UK despite holding major reservations toward the EU. Having said this, the rise of Euroscepticism in areas that have been major beneficiaries of EU regional distribution remains compelling.

<sup>121</sup> Bayerlein & Diermeier, “Exchanging Money for Love? A Regional Analysis of EU Cohesion Policy on Euroscepticism”, p. 4.  
<sup>122</sup> Bayerlein & Diermeier, “Exchanging Money for Love? A Regional Analysis of EU Cohesion Policy on Euroscepticism”, p. 5.  
<sup>123</sup> Bayerlein & Diermeier, “Exchanging Money for Love? A Regional Analysis of EU Cohesion Policy on Euroscepticism”, p. 6.

As mentioned throughout the thesis, Brexit is an essential case study as it represents how, for the first time, sentiments of discontent with the EU led to a Member State deciding to withdraw completely. Within the 2014-2020 period, when the UK was enveloped in the process of leaving the EU, the poorest regions were West Wales and the Valleys in Wales, and Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly in England. Despite only accounting for 4% of the entire UK population, they were entitled to 26% of EU funding, detailing the nature of EU redistributive policies, which are deeply focused on helping poorer regions.<sup>124</sup> Examining the case of West Wales in particular, Crescenzi, Di Cataldo and Giua (2020), found that there was not a connection between increased funding in these areas and Euroscepticism. Seminally, this investigation determined that an increase in allocated funds for cohesion policy alone would not comprise a shift in support for the Union.<sup>125</sup> The fact that some of the areas with greatest funding also displayed the highest levels of Euroscepticism, point toward general dissatisfaction with the EU and cohesion policy in particular. An argument can be drafted for a lack of awareness, as it can be noted that even pro-European groups such as the advocacy group Britain Stronger in Europe (BSIE), made little mention of the regional funding.<sup>126</sup> This is despite it had been essential in galvanizing poorer regions in Wales and Cornwall, at the same time developing cities such as Birmingham and Liverpool. While there is not a final answer to this, it can be determined that it can be a result of a lack of knowledge regarding the impact of important EU institutions and general dissatisfaction the organization as a whole can account for Euroscepticism in areas greatly supported by the EU to a great extent. It must be recognized that British mistrust of the EU also has distant roots, so long-term distance from the prospect of integration can be seen as responsible.

Having examined the phenomenon of Euroscepticism being elevated in areas that have received significant funding from the EU, it is hard to provide a conclusive assessment. From the start, it has been acknowledged that this is a curious occurrence, as it would be expected that recipients of prominent funding would in turn be highly favorable of EU intervention. The presence of high levels of Euroscepticism in areas that have been directly funded by the EU can be attributed to what was explored in the previous section, with the notion that citizens may not be aware of the help they receive or, in the case they are, disillusioned or convinced that the EU

---

<sup>124</sup> Crescenzi, Di Cataldo & Giua, "It's Not About the Money. EU Funds, Local Opportunities and Euroscepticism", pp. 2-3.

<sup>125</sup> Crescenzi, Di Cataldo & Giua, "It's Not About the Money. EU Funds, Local Opportunities and Euroscepticism", p. 6.

<sup>126</sup> N. Startin, Ed. Leruth, Startin & Usherwood, *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*, p. 463.



is not operating at an adequate level. Moreover, there may be sentiments that the EU undermines national governments and a desire for redistribution policies to be carried out at a local or regional level. Importantly, it noted how an increase in funding for highly Eurosceptic areas does not immediately equate to a rise in pro-European feelings. However, it must be acknowledged that these sentiments do not constitute the entirety of the Union, and there are plenty of areas that acknowledge support, reflected through pro-EU sentiments in surveys and at voting polls. The next part of the Chapter will highlight some of the other factors that account for Euroscepticism and provide a final assessment on whether or not cohesion policy can be considered as a failure overall.

### **3.4 Other factors to consider**

An important part of the investigation is the analysis of all the factors connected to the rise in Euroscepticism. While it has been determined that cohesion policy plays a role in reducing or increasing Euroscepticism, it has been acknowledged from the start that a phenomenon of such importance has to have been determined by a variety of factors. Earlier on in the Chapter, Figure 7 identified citizen satisfaction with the allocation of cohesion policy funds to different areas of society. Among these, the one that was regarded as least important was the reception and integration of migrants and refugees. As identified by several political scientists, support for hard Eurosceptic parties largely derives from their promise to limit migration and ensure greater national control.<sup>127</sup> There is undoubtedly an academic debate that Euroscepticism is driven in a major way by dissatisfaction with the EU's failure to accurately deal with the migratory crisis rather than the distribution of funding. In relation to this, Di Matteo and Mariotti (2020) note that mistrust with the diffusion of multiculturalism and advent of mass migration is perhaps the strongest contributing factor toward the prevalence of Euroscepticism.<sup>128</sup> Through what is perceived as an unfair distribution of migrants, the EU has seen a drastic reduction in support, rendering achievements in regional distribution less noticed. Vampa (2021), claims that Euroscepticism became increasingly linked to anti-establishment

---

<sup>127</sup> De Vries, *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>128</sup> D. Di Matteo, & I. Mariotti, *Regional Science Policy and Practice, Volume 13, Issue 2*, "Italian Discontent and Right-Wing Populism: Determinants, Geographies, Patterns", (2020), pp. 372-373, [https://rsaiconnect.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/rsp3.12350?saml\\_referrer](https://rsaiconnect.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/rsp3.12350?saml_referrer).

and anti-immigration sentiments in the later part of its existence.<sup>129</sup> There undoubtedly is a connection between regional distribution of funding and Euroscepticism, but the literature written thus far has been unable to precisely identify the strength of the link. In particular, displeasure with the EU's migration policies have increased displeasure with the organization and rendered cohesion policy irrelevant in gathering support.

The importance of a strongly performing economy in shaping political votes cannot be understated. As affirmed by Pablo Iglesias, populist leader of Podemos, a party that gained significant traction in Spain while demonstrating elements of Euroscepticism, “economics is politics”.<sup>130</sup> A positive performing economy undoubtedly has the ability to sway public sentiment and put certain issues to the side. This was one of the most prominent conclusions from the investigation carried out by Crescenzi, Di Cataldo and Guia (2020), where EU projects that produced visible effects on the labor market were found to be more likely to “translate into a lower level of Euroscepticism and higher electoral support for the EU”.<sup>131</sup> The performance of the labor market is undoubtedly one of the most important factors to consider when analyzing Euroscepticism. Carrying out an investigation attempting to provide geographical patterns of Euroscepticism, Dijkstra, Poelman and Rodríguez-Pose (2019) found that factors such as ageing and net migration were significant when glancing at areas casting Eurosceptic votes, but much lower than economic decline, density, education and wealth.<sup>132</sup> Whilst cohesion policy can go a long way toward reducing unemployment, it is far from the sole factor steering the labor market. Under this aspect, regional distribution can often do little to reduce Euroscepticism across the EU, rendered helpless by the public's decision to often vote against mainstream parties in favor of Eurosceptic ones, in the wake of economic difficulties. This was confirmed in the investigative report into Brexit made by Fidrmuc, Hulényi and Börke (2019), which determined EU redistributive policies to be insignificant toward influencing the “stay” vote, which was instead mainly determined by economic factors such as GDP per capita.<sup>133</sup>

---

<sup>129</sup> D. Vampa, Ed. Albertazzi & Vampa, *Populism and New Patterns of Political Competition in Western Europe*, pp. 217-218.

<sup>130</sup> P. Iglesias, trans: L. S. Fox, *Politics in a Time of Crisis: Podemos and the Future of European Democracy*, (2015), pp. 111-112.

<sup>131</sup> Crescenzi, Di Cataldo & Guia, “It's Not About the Money. EU Funds, Local Opportunities and Euroscepticism”, p. 8.

<sup>132</sup> L. Dijkstra, H. Poelman & A. Rodríguez-Pose, *Regional Studies, Volume 54*, “The Geography of EU Discontent”, (2019), p. 748.

<sup>133</sup> J. Fidrmuc, M. Hulényi & C. B. Tunali, *European Journal of Political Economy, Volume 60*. “Can Money Buy EU Love?”, (2019), p. 12, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0176268018304555>.

This is particularly compelling as it determines economic motives as being the strongest force behind what has thus far been the most notable example of Eurosceptic attitudes.

Directly related to economic performance is the individual Member States governments' response to the economic crisis, which, although connected, is not directly related to EU regional distribution of funds. Through the acceleration of the process of integration in the 1990s, the EU allowed for more uniform policies to counter economic difficulties across the board, at the same time undermining the sovereignty of national governments. In the wake of crises in the mid to late 2000s, the problems caused by the accelerated integration were truly exposed. The implementation of austerity measures to counter the Eurozone crisis for example, have allowed populist parties to gain traction and consequently extend Euroscepticism to national governments.<sup>134</sup> When analyzing these, it can be concluded that parties on the right-wing generally desire greater national authority and regulation of immigration, while left-wing Eurosceptics maintain great reservation toward the austerity policies. As noted by De Vries (2018), austerity measures directed from Brussels undermined the welfare state and in countries such as Spain, the aforementioned Podemos gained support by fighting this through the promise of implementing anti-austerity and anti-corruption measures.<sup>135</sup> In times of crises in fact, the public tends to express its dissatisfaction by casting aside votes for established parties and instead placing trust in alternative ones. These gain confidence by promising to counter the problems of uncontrolled immigration and government-executed austerity. It can be claimed that the response of national governments, particularly in countries heavily affected by the crisis such as Italy, furthered Eurosceptic sentiments. In spite of the efforts made through redistributive policies, measures imposed by the EU on Member States, particularly in the recovery of the Eurozone crisis have strongly undermined its role. Even so, it can be argued that the loss of national control that cohesion policy comprises, means that there will inevitably be discontent harbored by citizens wishing to maintain legitimacy over their own redistributive policies. This has meant that elements of Euroscepticism have characterized parties on both sides of the political spectrum across Europe.

---

<sup>134</sup> C. Froio, Ed. Albertazzi & Vampa, *Populism and New Patterns of Political Competition in Western Europe*, p. 255.

<sup>135</sup> De Vries, *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration*, p. 39.

### 3.5 Does the continuous rise in Euroscepticism mean that cohesion policy has failed?

From its creation in the late 1980s, the main objective of cohesion policy has been to promote harmonious development among Member States. Bayerlein and Diermeier (2022) note how historically, regional distribution of funding allowed for Euroscepticism to be maintained at relatively low levels, with significant strains being placed on the EU following the Eastern Enlargement.<sup>136</sup> Whilst countering Euroscepticism was not initially a direct objective of cohesion policy, it cannot be denied that later statements and reforms have indirectly been addressing the increase of Euroscepticism, which remains one of the EU's most pressing issues. Furthermore, directives have been made specifically referencing the fight against Euroscepticism at the heart of the EU agenda, accounting for the importance it currently occupies. For example, for the 2014-2020 period, €188 million funds were granted to the Europe for Citizens Programme, with a specific focus on countering Euroscepticism.<sup>137</sup> This undoubtedly validates Euroscepticism as one of the most important issues currently being faced by the EU and regional distribution of funds is one of the ways in which the organization is attempting to work toward reducing it. Whilst it was not the original intention of the EU, it cannot be denied that redistributive policies are currently being implemented with the goal of increasing public support and reducing the influence of Euroscepticism. Dijkstra, Poelman and Rodríguez-Pose (2019) determine that “anti-EU voting reflects long-term economic trajectories” and suggest that the EU should correct this by aiding economic growth particularly in disadvantaged economic regions.<sup>138</sup> This is a clear critique of the EU's inability to promote long-term harmonious economic development across the entirety of its territories, with regional distribution often falling short of its objectives. There is a visible effort being made but questions have been posed regarding the effectiveness of EU regional distribution of funding.

At the same time however, this also means that the upward trend of Eurosceptic voting can be corrected through cohesion policy measures aimed at going beyond “simple compensatory and /or appeasement measures”.<sup>139</sup> Targeted and visible change in poor areas can definitely sway support in favor of the EU in the time period of its existence where it needs it

---

<sup>136</sup> Bayerlein & Diermeier, “Exchanging Money for Love? A Regional Analysis of EU Cohesion Policy on Euroscepticism”, abstract.

<sup>137</sup> European Commission. “Europe for Citizens Infographic”, (2020), [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/infographics\\_final\\_04102019.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/infographics_final_04102019.pdf).

<sup>138</sup> Dijkstra, Poelman & Rodríguez-Pose, “The Geography of EU Discontent”, p. 751.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

most to justify its existence and further its legitimacy.<sup>140</sup> This is a recurring sentiment across most of the literature cited in this Chapter, which sees many of the authors call for changes in cohesion policy. As identified before for example, public awareness of the works of the EU is paramount when justifying support of the Union. It can be said that the presence of a high level of Euroscepticism can be attributed to cohesion policy's many shortcomings, with this also being capable of fostering change. As discovered by Crescenzi, Di Cataldo and Giua (2020), this cannot simply be implemented through increased funding, but must instead be targeted and bring about visible change to the overall economic performance.<sup>141</sup> In many ways therefore, it can be said that the presence of a large amount of Euroscepticism can be attributed to inadequacies in cohesion policy, although correction of this remains in the EU's hands. This is explained by Dijkstra and Rodríguez-Pose (2020), who state that the roots of discontent are deep and in need of targeted intervention, particularly in "middle-income areas, long suffering from economic decline".<sup>142</sup> There are significant measures that need to be taken but overall the EU can work toward changing its own perception in the eyes of its citizens and influential parties within its Member States.

One important factor that has been identified across academic literature is the "one shoe fits all" approach taken by the EU, that has proven largely ineffective in this form of policy.<sup>143</sup> Despite efforts at fostering integration, it needs to be acknowledged that the diversity across the EU prevents uniform policies from being effectively implemented, rendering a single policy difficult to put into place. This is one of the many deficiencies of the EU, an organization that is often exalted by its diversity, which has also proven to be an insurmountable obstacle. One potential suggestion is the call for greater national control when it comes to administering policies, which has become central to the political agendas of many Eurosceptic parties. This will be a topic treated at length in the Chapters about Italy, when analysis of a single country will prove insightful to answering the main question of the thesis. Overall however, it cannot be denied that the increase in Euroscepticism is an indication of a fall in trust of EU institutions and policies, including the nature of regional distribution. The main objective of cohesion policy has always been to foster harmonious development among the entirety of the Union, and the

---

<sup>140</sup> Bachtler & Mendez, "European Identity and Citizen Attitudes to Cohesion Policy: What do We Know?", p. 4.

<sup>141</sup> Crescenzi, Di Cataldo & Giua, "It's Not About the Money. EU Funds, Local Opportunities and Euroscepticism", p. 6.

<sup>142</sup> Dijkstra & Rodríguez-Pose, "Does Cohesion Policy Reduce EU Discontent and Euroscepticism?", p. 15.

<sup>143</sup> Di Cairo & Fratesi, "One Policy, Different Effects: Estimating the Region-Specific Impacts of EU Cohesion Policy", p. 319.

persistence of inequalities and mistrust of EU institutions is testament to a failure for this to be fully realized. While cohesion policy and Euroscepticism are not directly linked, there are several connecting lines between the two and it can be claimed that a rise in Euroscepticism can be attributed to the failure of regional distribution to a certain extent.

Despite this, it must be recognized that cohesion policy has proven successful and had a number of triumphs. At its most basic level, regional distribution involves transferring funds from richer European regions to poorer ones, supporting regional and social development with the aim of fostering a sense of unity across the EU.<sup>144</sup> It can be said that this has been achieved in many areas, notably through the opportunity granted to citizens to participate. An example of this is the implementation of Community-Led Local Development instrument (CLLD), with the objective of dealing with inequalities and empowering communities at the local level.<sup>145</sup> This was particularly important for the distribution of funds in the 2014-2020 period and contributed toward fostering sustainable urban development, particularly within Europe's poorer communities. A case must also be made in defence of cohesion policy, due to the tendency of citizens to attribute improvements in economic performance at the regional and national level to their own government, instead using the EU as a scapegoat for any negative externalities.<sup>146</sup> The EU is often in fact overlooked in its role of having provided significant funding to regional projects, relating back to the organization's problem that citizens are unaware of its operations. In addition, it cannot be forgotten that cohesion policy is one of the most visible EU policies because of its "multi-level governance model of implementation involving shared decision-making between EU, national and sub-national actors".<sup>147</sup> Euroscepticism can be seen as an indirect consequence of failures in regional policy to a certain degree, but the many successes of cohesion policy need to be acknowledged.

All in all, this Chapter has solidified the connection that exists between cohesion policy and Euroscepticism. It glanced at figures, which initially showed content from the citizens' perspective with the way the European Commission handled the distribution of regional funding, particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic. This once more justified the paradox of Euroscepticism being present in spite of redistributive policies and warranted further

---

<sup>144</sup> Bachtler & Mendez, "European Identity and Citizen Attitudes to Cohesion Policy: What do We Know?", p. 21.

<sup>145</sup> Ministero delle Politiche Agricole Alimentari e Forestali, "CLLD – Community Led Local Development", (2016), <https://www.politicheagricole.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/8740>.

<sup>146</sup> Dijkstra & Rodríguez-Pose, "Does Cohesion Policy Reduce EU Discontent and Euroscepticism?", p. 6.

<sup>147</sup> Bachtler & Mendez, "European Identity and Citizen Attitudes to Cohesion Policy: What do We Know?", p. 22.

investigation. This concluded that regional distribution of funds has mainly fallen short due to a lack of awareness on behalf of the citizens, which leads to opinions of the EU that can be considered to be somewhat misguided. When glancing at the opinions of citizens that were indeed aware of cohesion policy, it showed dissatisfaction with redistributive policies as a whole. Next, the analysis veered toward the apparent inconsistency of high levels of Euroscepticism being present in areas that had received important support as a result of cohesion policy. This did not provide any concrete conclusions and it can be surmised that there is no immediately identifiable connection between the two factors and it can be hypothesized that Euroscepticism is driven by other factors. This formed the basis of the final part of the Chapter, which addressed other contributing factors to Euroscepticism, which posed the final question of whether the presence of Euroscepticism can account for the failure of cohesion policy. It must be said however, that thus far the analysis made has been limited due to its broad nature, with data being gathered from the EU as a whole and a few case studies being examined without much focus. The next Chapter will examine the topics pondered thus far from a more national perspective, narrowing in on the specific case study of Italy, which will be essential in tying everything together to then be able to draft conclusions.

## Chapter IV – Insights from the case of Italy

Having looked in depth at the debate around Euroscepticism and cohesion policy in Chapters I and II respectively and justified their connection in the next one, the fourth Chapter will now relate the knowledge gathered to Italy. As stated in the introduction, Italy is a valuable country to examine as it is a founding Member State of the EU that has contributed to redistributive policies. At the same time, it has also been a notable recipient of cohesion policy, due to several regions presenting levels of development well-below the EU average. Italy has in fact experienced long-lasting problems regarding harmonious regional development, which continue to be manifested, especially through the North-South divide. As a result of the poor economic performance of the Mezzogiorno area in the South of the nation, Italy currently encompasses the most extended underdeveloped area within Western Europe, which has consequently allowed the country to benefit from the largest share of EU regional support.<sup>148</sup> As of 2009, the Mezzogiorno region, comprising around a third of the population, was obtaining 85% of the funds.<sup>149</sup> It cannot be denied therefore that Italy receives significant funding from the EU and that much of this goes toward its most underdeveloped areas. When taking an historic glance, it needs to be said that Italy, particularly in the 1990s, took steps toward adapting Italian regional policy to that of the EU. Notable figures in this period were the center-left Prime Minister Romano Prodi, who was also president of the European Commission.<sup>150</sup> Since then however, the country has struggled to implement these reforms partly due to political instability, which has resulted in governmental shifts from center-left to center-right, along with stints of Italy being guided by technical governments. The failure to correct regional disparities can, among several other factors, be associated with the general increase in Euroscepticism.

A definite change in pro-European sentiment can be noted following 1994, where the two main parties, Forza Italia and Alleanza Nazionale, “converged on the principles of domestic interests from the EU and preservation of national sovereignty”.<sup>151</sup> It was previously identified

---

<sup>148</sup> B. Quintieri & G. Stamato, *Regional Economy, Volume 5, Issue 3*, “Qualità delle Istituzioni e Politiche di Coesione nel Mezzogiorno”, (2021), p. 3, [https://www.regionaleconomy.eu/RePEc/pdf/5Q3/q5\\_3\\_2021\\_3-13.pdf](https://www.regionaleconomy.eu/RePEc/pdf/5Q3/q5_3_2021_3-13.pdf).

<sup>149</sup> F. Barca, *An Agenda for a Reformed Cohesion Policy: a Place-Based Approach to Meeting European Union Challenges and Expectations*, (2009), p. 78, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009\\_2014/documents/regi/dv/barca\\_report\\_/barca\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/regi/dv/barca_report_/barca_report_en.pdf).

<sup>150</sup> Casula, *Economic Growth and Cohesion Policy Implementation in Italy and Spain*, p. 111.

<sup>151</sup> N. Conti, F. Marangoni & L. Verzichelli, *South European Society and Politics*, “Euroscepticism in Italy from the Onset of the Crisis: Tired of Europe?”, (2020), p. 3, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2020.1757885>.



how the processes of integration and enlargement undermined existing members, leading to declining support and this is what can be identified as having happened in Italy in this case. Cohesion policy has long been a central objective to the EU, but as previously discussed, several enlargements have made it an even more diverse organization, putting “unprecedented pressures on the Member States and on their economies”.<sup>152</sup> As mentioned, Italian regional policy was structured in a way that would mirror EU regulations in the long-term, which undoubtedly influenced citizens’ beliefs that Italian sovereignty was being challenged.<sup>153</sup> Following this period, the relationship between Italy and the EU definitely took a nose-dive and has not recovered since. Some decades later, the Eurozone crisis represented a pivotal moment in the relationship with its Member States. In particular, the way the EU went about managing the situation by imposing austerity measures and controlling Italy’s own handling of the banking crisis, significantly influenced a fall in public support for the organization.<sup>154</sup> The general elections of 2018 are universally regarded as a turning point, where challenger parties, sharing Eurosceptic sentiments, won more votes than mainstream ones for the first time in the country’s republican history, since the Communist Party’s rise in influence in the mid 1980s. This was confirmed in the most recent 2022 elections where the Eurosceptic center-right coalition achieved a resounding victory. For these reasons, it can be said that Italy is undoubtedly a country heavily linked to cohesion policy that is also currently enveloped in a great deal of Eurosceptic thought. It is without doubt an important country to examine when considering the thesis’ goal of examining the relationship that exists between the two.

#### **4.1 Euroscepticism in Italy: a growing trend?**

As seen previously, the Eurobarometer can be useful in determining individual support among the population, with the outcome of elections being key to evaluating the overall direction of public sentiment. Italy is no different, with two thirds of people voting for a populist party in the 2018 general election, all of which displayed varying levels of Euroscepticism.<sup>155</sup> It must immediately be noted that populism and Euroscepticism are not the same phenomenon, with a 2022 investigation carried out by Conti, Memoli and Di Mauro failing to find a strong

---

<sup>152</sup> Conti & Memoli, *Citizens, Europe and the Media: Have New Media Made Citizens More Eurosceptical?* p. 8.

<sup>153</sup> Casula, *Economic Growth and Cohesion Policy Implementation in Italy and Spain*, p. 111.

<sup>154</sup> De Vries, *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration*, p. 28.

<sup>155</sup> D. Albertazzi, Ed. Albertazzi & Vampa, *Populism and New Patterns of Political Competition in Western Europe*, p. 2.

correlation between the two.<sup>156</sup> Keeping this in mind, a majority of populist parties from both the left and right in Italy can be described as Eurosceptic, albeit to varying degrees. As recognized by Froio (2021), Italy presents a compelling portrayal of the interaction between mainstream and populist parties, as it has been one of the countries whose established parties have been most challenged by emerging ones.<sup>157</sup> This is particularly true in the context of the Eurozone crisis, confirming the connection that exists between politics and economics. All in all, Italy's inability to rapidly recover from the economic crisis has undoubtedly led to a shift in public opinion, with votes being cast for alternative parties at an increasing rate. Perhaps even more significantly, the last few years have even seen pro-EU parties "play into Eurosceptic sentiments to remain in tune with the dominant sentiment across Italy".<sup>158</sup> The increase in Euroscepticism is certainly notable when analyzing the doctrines of populist parties but to a lesser extent, mainstream parties have also begun showing subtle signs of criticism of the EU. Undoubtedly, the pivotal piece of evidence that comes to mind when proving this is the outcome of the 2018 elections. This saw the Five Star Movement gaining the greatest number of votes, with the second highest beneficiary of the elections being the center-right coalition headed by the Northern League. From the right and left respectively, they can be grouped together by their anti-EU sentiments that can be described as "soft" Euroscepticism. While both these parties have long challenged the EU, an exit has never seemed to be a realistic prospect. According to Conti, Marangoni and Verzichelli (2020), the emergence of a Eurosceptic majority within the Italian government in 2018 did however a rift in Italy's relationship with the EU.<sup>159</sup> Whilst there had been discontent with the EU since the 1990s, these elections proved that the point of view of the general population was undeniable.

Critically, it must be reiterated how the literature review in the first Chapter found Euroscepticism not to be a black and white phenomenon, but rather something that expresses itself in different forms. Whilst there is a strong case to be argued for Italy being a Eurosceptic country, in the context of the EU, it can also be said that this largely veers toward being

---

<sup>156</sup> N. Conti, V. Memoli, & D. Di Mauro, *Italian Journal of Electoral Studies*, Volume 85, Issue 1. "Euroscepticism in Italy Among Party Elites and the Public", (2022), pp. 34-35, <https://doi.org/10.36253/qoe-11552>.

<sup>157</sup> C. Froio, Ed. Albertazzi & Vampa, *Populism and New Patterns of Political Competition in Western Europe*, p. 250.

<sup>158</sup> B. Romano, *Notre Europe* "Italy's Euroscepticism: a Case of Victimhood and a Tale of Missed Opportunity", (2018), p. 3, <https://institutdelors.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ItalysEuroscepticism-Romano-March18-1-1.pdf>

<sup>159</sup> Conti, Marangoni & Verzichelli, "Euroscepticism in Italy from the Onset of the Crisis: Tired of Europe?", p. 1.

categorized as “soft”. Dijkstra and Rodríguez-Pose (2020) have been two of the greatest exponents when it comes to drafting the link between cohesion policy and Euroscepticism. They carried out an influential investigation in this realm that focused on the mobilization of parties between 2013 and 2018. In their methodology, three categories of political parties are outlined, with category “a” being an example of “hard” Euroscepticism, completely opposed to further integration and advocating for the dismantlement of the EU. When grouping Italian parties, the Northern League was placed in category “b”, which is designed for parties opposed to further integration but not aiming to separate from the EU. The Five Star Movement was instead placed in “c”, encompassing parties with moderate opposition to the EU, shared through the desire to halt further integration and reform aspects of the EU and Euro.<sup>160</sup> It can be claimed that many of the most influential Italian parties are Eurosceptic, although none of them can be categorized as “hard”, ranging instead across various levels of “soft” Euroscepticism. While “hard” Euroscepticism is undoubtedly present within Italy, it does not occupy the political agendas of the major political players. The outcome of the most recent elections will be telling, and it will be interesting to see whether the center-right coalition will maintain a more pro-European stance, after having potentially used Euroscepticism as a vote winner. The desire to greatly reform the EU however cannot be denied and it can comfortably be claimed that Italy as a whole does maintain important reservations toward further integration. This justifies its categorization as a Eurosceptic country.

When scrutinizing Euroscepticism, the volatility of a country such as Italy must also be considered, with even the most recent government crisis being an example of this. Speaking on the impact of the 2018 elections, Pinto (2020) accounts for the effect of instability, accurately predicting that it would remain a characterizing feature of the Italian government in years to come.<sup>161</sup> Changes in governments are inevitably reflected on the public, who have displayed varying sentiments in recent times. For example, a late 2021 survey carried out by Demos on behalf of Italian publication *La Repubblica* found that Italian trust of the EU had fallen from 46% to 35% despite having previously grown as a result of the heavy funding package received by the country in the wake of the global pandemic.<sup>162</sup> Overall, it is impossible to deny the impact of Euroscepticism in Italy, that is manifested across national sentiment and is being converted

---

<sup>160</sup> Dijkstra & Rodríguez-Pose, “Does Cohesion Policy Reduce EU Discontent and Euroscepticism?”, p. 8.

<sup>161</sup> L. Pinto, *Italian Political Science Review, Volume 50, Issue 2*, “The 2018 Italian General Election: a ‘New Italy’ or a ‘Dead End’”, (2020), p. 302.

<sup>162</sup> I. Diamanti, *La Repubblica*, “L’Euroscetticismo Italiano”, (2021), [https://www.repubblica.it/commenti/2021/10/25/news/1\\_euroscetticismo\\_italiano-323635667/](https://www.repubblica.it/commenti/2021/10/25/news/1_euroscetticismo_italiano-323635667/).

into votes cast for Eurosceptic parties at both national and European elections. At the same time, it must be recognized that the Italian case is far from being a simple one to analyze. Citing a 2016 Eupinions survey, De Vries (2018) confirms this point, reporting that 86% of loyal supporters would vote remain and 50% of exit skeptics would vote remain.<sup>163</sup> This is indicative of the polarizing role that the EU plays within Italian society and is yet another indication that the level of Euroscepticism in the country is “soft”. It would appear therefore that concrete steps made toward reforming the EU would be sufficient to quell dissatisfaction. All in all, the instability demonstrated both by governments and the public indicates how opinions can be volatile and Euroscepticism can also change rapidly.

Returning once more to the most pressing question of the thesis, it’s hard to draw a definitive link between Euroscepticism and cohesion policy. It cannot be denied that the EU has played an underlying role in supporting regional distribution through notable funding programs. For the 2014-2020 period for example, through 15 national and 60 regional programs, Italy benefited from €63.7 billion from the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), with similar figures allocated to the latest programming period.<sup>164</sup> Speaking on behalf of centrist, pro-EU party Azione, Carlo Calenda states that the support given to Italy from Europe is immense, but it is the responsibility of the country to spend it wisely.<sup>165</sup> The funds are clearly being made available and there is empirical data backing this up. Having said this, there seems to be a converse effect between EU financial support and trust in the institution on behalf of the general Italian public. As the EU provides more funding, particularly to the South, citizens choose to support parties that can be categorized as “soft” Eurosceptics. Eurosceptic sentiments have become prevalent at an increasing rate, most notably through the extreme popularity of emerging parties such as the Five Star Movement and the Northern League. Their definitive breakthrough in 2018 has proven to not have been an isolated incident and they continue to apply pressure to established parties, who have also begun sharing more conservative views on pursuing further integration as a result of this. Italy can therefore be comfortably used as a case study to provide insights on the relationship between cohesion policy and Euroscepticism. The fact that the country is displaying anti-EU sentiments while at the same time receiving significant funding is fascinating and needs to be explored in depth.

---

<sup>163</sup> De Vries, *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration*, p. 162.

<sup>164</sup> European Commission, “European Structural and Investment Funds”.

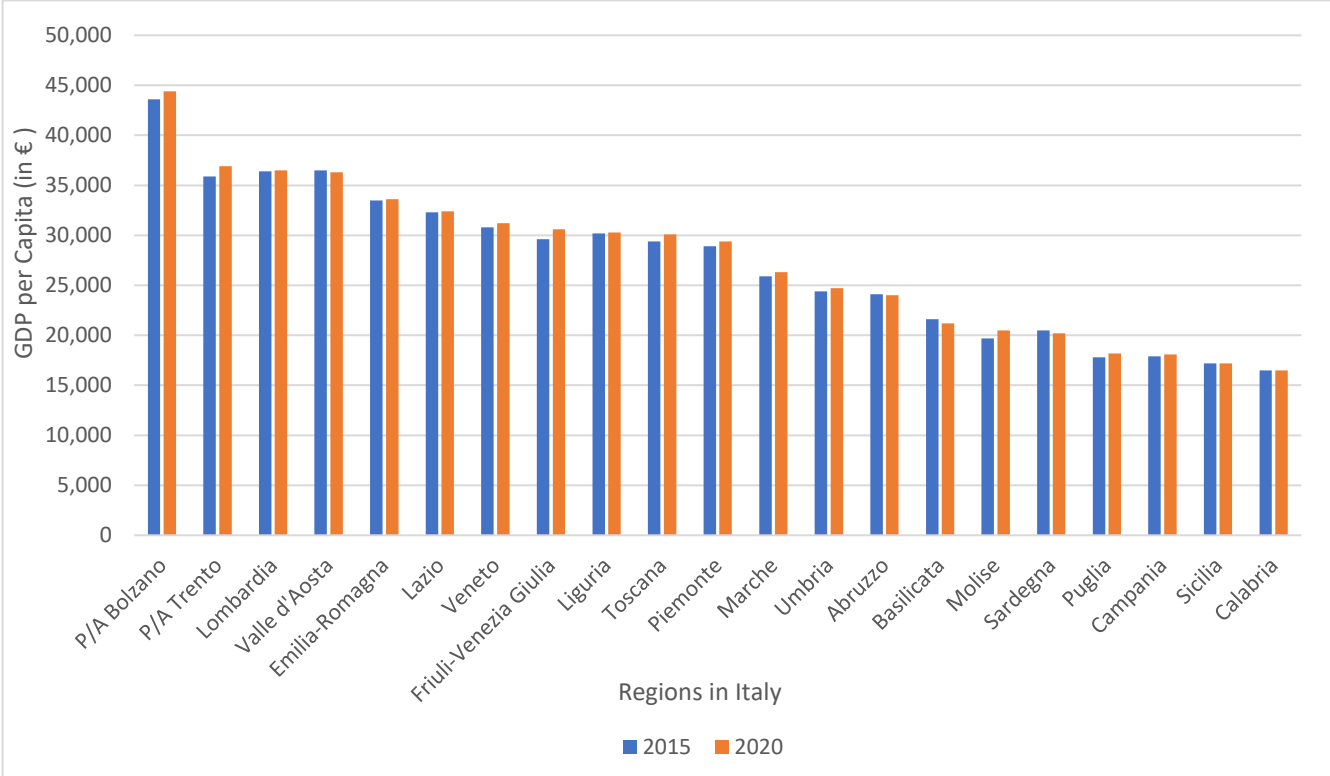
<sup>165</sup> Rai Play, *Porta a Porta*, “Politiche ‘22”, (2022),

<https://www.raipaly.it/video/2022/09/Porta-a-Porta-Politiche-22----22092022-22d15dec-6f11-4843-8f5d-c8d087a7c318.html>.

### 4.2 The long-term divide between Centre-North and South

When using Italy as a case study, the long-lasting divide between the North and South cannot be understated as a pivotal driver of EU redistributive policies being implemented in great volume. Casula (2020) better notes the extent of this divide, identifying it as a cause for national agenda setting going as far back as the initial Republican period in Italy, coinciding with the introduction of the Marshall Plan.<sup>166</sup> It was in fact apparent that the socio-economic gap between the North and Centre and the Mezzogiorno regions in the South, was undeniable. Figure 11 presents a graph that was made by collecting Eurostat data, to illustrate the GDP per capita for two base years (2015 and 2020), listed in decreasing order. It can be immediately seen that there is a stark contrast between the regions in the North and Centre, when compared to the ones in the South. All of the regions from the South in fact occupy the lower positions, with no significant change occurring anywhere between the two analyzed years. Starting with Abruzzo in fact, the remaining eight regions occupying the final positions are all Southern.

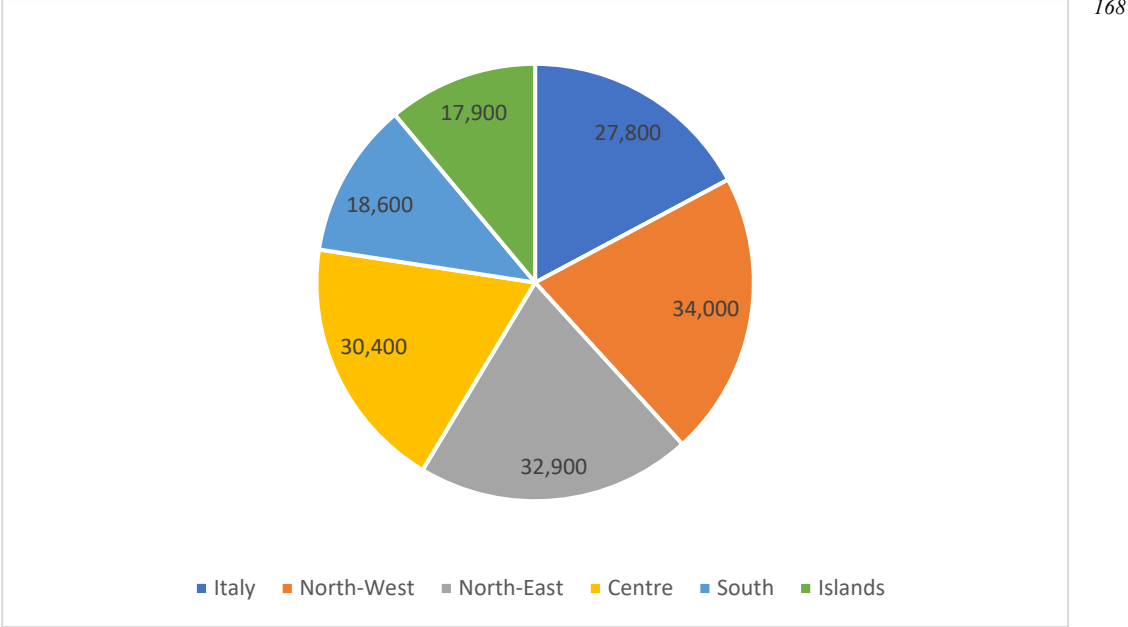
Figure 11: GDP per Capita Across Italian Regions for 2 Reference Years



<sup>166</sup> Casula, *Economic Growth and Cohesion Policy Implementation in Italy and Spain*, p. 114.  
<sup>167</sup> Eurostat, “Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at Current Market Prices by NUTS 2 Regions”, (2022), [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=nama\\_10r\\_2gdp](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=nama_10r_2gdp).

Figure 12 takes the same Eurostat data used in the previous graph, instead placing regions together into geographical groups and utilizing a single year for reference: 2020.

Figure 12: GDP per Capita (in €s) for Distinct Geographical Groupings



From the chart in Figure 12, it can be reported that the richest regions are undoubtedly the ones in the North, then followed by the Centre, whilst the islands of Sicily and Sardinia, along with the South, are significantly worse off when compared to the Italian average of €27,800 per capita. This indicates that the geographical divide is extremely significant, with the statistics presenting data that might be gathered from unrelated countries. Understanding the context of the geographical divide present in Italy allows to then account for the heavy investment pledged by the EU through regional distribution. Moreover, the fact that this divide has not been breached since the post-war period points toward a failure of European redistributive policies, coupled with shortcomings in Italy’s own national system of regional distribution. Casula (2020) attributes the failure in cohesion policy funds being effectively distributed to the fact that redistribution investments in the Mezzogiorno region were never prioritized, with investments instead being prevalently made in small projects, rather than in developing the region as a whole and allowing for “catch-up” growth.<sup>169</sup> However, he also recognizes the current potential for development within this region, in his opinion hindered by the Italian administration’s need to have control over expenditure, coupled with the cultural

<sup>168</sup> Eurostat, “Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at Current Market Prices by NUTS 2 Regions”.  
<sup>169</sup> Casula, *Economic Growth and Cohesion Policy Implementation in Italy and Spain*, p. 248.

idea that this region will never be able to successfully grow.<sup>170</sup> This is in spite of legislative structures put in place with the specific aim of reducing disparities between the regions of Italy. In relation to EU redistribution, in the 2014 law of stability, n. 147, comma 6 of Article 1, identifies an initial figure of €43.848 million for the 2014-2020 period, to be distributed toward development, with an 80-20 split between South and Centre-North.<sup>171</sup> It appears that investment has been made in the South but its economic distance from the rest of Italy continues to support the argument that regional distribution at national and supranational level has been ineffective.

One of the general conclusions that can be reached thus far is that investment by itself is not enough and institutional quality represents an essential component toward fostering long-term growth and reducing regional disparities. Cohesion policy does succeed in providing support to poorer regions but often falls short when it comes to planting seeds for long-term success of these same areas. This concept can be applied to the South of Italy, where there has been an undeniable influx of funding from the EU that has however been met with the inability of the South to breach regional divides with the North. Leonardi (2005) attributes institutional gaps to the inequalities in Italy and calls for redistributive policies to mainly focus on creating employment and breaching this divide.<sup>172</sup> Casting support from supranational figures aside for a minute, major deficiencies can in fact be noted in the institutional background of Italy, which has not allowed for growth to occur. Leydesdorff (2021), identifies how the 2001 change in the Italian constitution devolved many tasks to regional governments, reducing the national budget for research and development, focusing many of the remaining resources in the Centre and North.<sup>173</sup> Crucial for growth, it can be said that the neglect of these areas renders it impossible for funding to translate to real economic growth and development. Through cohesion policy however, the EU has taken measures to try and compensate for this issue, allocating €21.6 billion “convergence” funds to the South and €6.1 billion “competitiveness” funds in the past programming period.<sup>174</sup> It can therefore be said that the EU has taken steps toward correcting national deficiencies but has ultimately faced the impossible task of developing regions suffering from an immense lack of adequate institutions. Identifying the quality of institutions

---

<sup>170</sup> Casula, *Economic Growth and Cohesion Policy Implementation in Italy and Spain*, p. 249.

<sup>171</sup> *Ispettorato Generale per i Rapporti Finanziari con l'Unione Europea*, “Monitoraggio Politiche di Coesione Programmazione 2014-2020”, (2021), p. 43, [https://www.rgs.mef.gov.it/Documenti/VERSIONE-I/attivita\\_istituzionali/monitoraggio/rapporti\\_finanziari\\_ue/monitoraggio\\_politiche\\_di\\_coesione\\_2014-2020/2021-10-31/Bollettino-Monitoraggio-Politica-di-Coesione\\_Situazione-al-31-ottobre-2021f](https://www.rgs.mef.gov.it/Documenti/VERSIONE-I/attivita_istituzionali/monitoraggio/rapporti_finanziari_ue/monitoraggio_politiche_di_coesione_2014-2020/2021-10-31/Bollettino-Monitoraggio-Politica-di-Coesione_Situazione-al-31-ottobre-2021f).

<sup>172</sup> Leonardi, *Cohesion Policy in the European Union: the Building of Europe*, p. 139.

<sup>173</sup> L. Leydesdorff, *The Evolutionary Dynamics of Discursive Knowledge: Communication-Theoretical Perspectives of an Empirical Philosophy of Science*, (2021), p. 117.

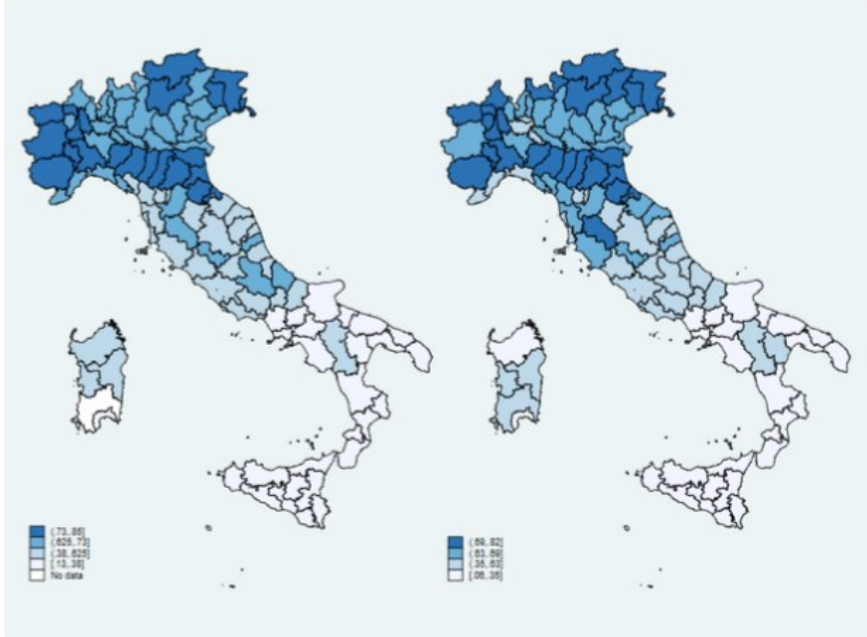
<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*



can in fact be highly indicative of whether an area has the tools to best take advantage of national and supranational support in the form of funding. This was a point explored at length by Quintieri and Stamato (2021), who compiled a map based on Eurostat data for institutional quality within Italian provinces. Their findings are presented in Figure 13, with the darker colors accounting for greater institutional quality when compared to the lighter ones.

Figure 13: Quality of Institutions for Italian Provinces for 2010 and 2018

175



Based on the study, they noted little change in the quality of institutions between 2010 and 2018, concluding that there would be no possibility for regional cohesion unless the great disparities in institutional quality between the Center-North and the South were breached.<sup>176</sup> The regional disparities present within Italy are backed up by EU regional distribution, which has had a long-lasting focus on bridging these gaps although there is a pressing question of whether it can prove effective. The support is there, and this can be seen as recently as the budget allocation for the 2021-2027 period, with a total of €42.7 being provided for Italy, with a particular focus being given to Southern regions.<sup>177</sup> Thus far however, the overall failure of

<sup>175</sup> Quintieri & Stamato, “Qualità delle Istituzioni e Politiche di Coesione nel Mezzogiorno”, p. 6.  
<sup>176</sup> Quintieri & Stamato, “Qualità delle Istituzioni e Politiche di Coesione nel Mezzogiorno”, pp. 6-7.  
<sup>177</sup> European Commission. “EU Cohesion Policy: €42.7 Billion for Italy to Support Sustainable Growth, Employment and Modernization While Reducing Regional Disparities”, (2022), [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/newsroom/news/2022/07/19-07-2022-eu-cohesion-policy-eur42-7-billion-for-italy-to-support-sustainable-growth-employment-and-modernisation-while-reducing-regional-disparities](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/news/2022/07/19-07-2022-eu-cohesion-policy-eur42-7-billion-for-italy-to-support-sustainable-growth-employment-and-modernisation-while-reducing-regional-disparities).



the South of Italy to catch up to the more developed North is testament to shortcomings in regional distribution at both a European and national level. Despite identifying institutional weakness as the main cause of cohesion policy deficiencies within the Mezzogiorno region, Quintieri and Stamato (2021) hold positive sentiments for the 2021-2027 period, believing that national policies, coupled with EU support, could contribute to correcting the problems of the past.<sup>178</sup> Moreover, it can be said that Italy is relatively well integrated at a national level when compared to the rest of Europe, through the sharing of a common language and national institutions with a similar structure in all regions, although there is varying quality.<sup>179</sup> Overall, there is potential for cohesion policy to help harmonize the divide, although it depends on targeted funding and improvement of institutions across the country. This does remain a tentative view and it needs to be understood that the roots of regional inequality are deep and European regional distribution is not the only factor at play when it comes to breaching them.

#### **4.3 Euroscepticism in the areas targeted by EU structural funds**

Italy is without doubt one of the most Eurosceptic countries, despite being both a net contributor and recipient of the EU structural funds. At the same time, the harmonization of regions has proven to be ineffective and the role of cohesion policy must be accounted for. This undoubtedly points toward the value of having Italy as a case study that can provide insight for the rest of the continent due to its intrinsic connection to European regional distribution, running parallel to a rise in Euroscepticism. Having determined this, it must also be reiterated that effective cohesion policy has the potential to fuel pro-European sentiments, in the same breath influencing negative opinions when deemed ineffective or not to be visible enough. Throughout the investigation, great interest has been given to Euroscepticism existing in areas that have been strong recipients of EU funding. This has been central to the investigation throughout and previous investigations carried out by political scientists have focused on this apparent inconsistency. The same will now be done for Italy, where regional distribution within the South has been identified as an important target throughout the existence of EU regional redistributive policies and presented as a central focus for the 2021-2027 period. Whilst early projections from this period must be considered, results in the past decade, particularly between

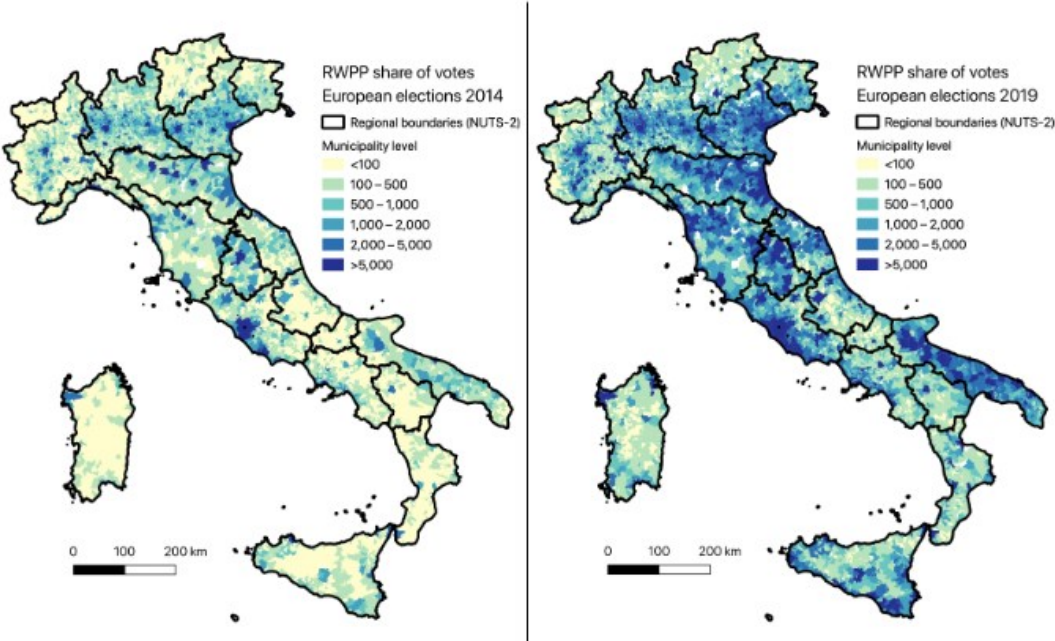
---

<sup>178</sup> Quintieri & Stamato, “Qualità delle Istituzioni e Politiche di Coesione nel Mezzogiorno”, p. 9.

<sup>179</sup> Leydesdorff, *The Evolutionary Dynamics of Discursive Knowledge: Communication-Theoretical Perspectives of an Empirical Philosophy of Science*, p. 130.

the 2014 and 2019 European elections, are most valuable when examining Euroscepticism in different regions of Italy. This, coupled with the information provided regarding EU intervention, allows for a comprehensive overview to be provided. Unfortunately, Euroscepticism is something that is difficult to accurately measure and as a result there is little data available that effectively compiles varying levels of Euroscepticism across Italy at a regional level. This is particularly true for the distinction between “soft” and “hard” Euroscepticism, which are particularly hard to pinpoint when examining the entire population. What can be studied instead are the outcomes of elections in determined regions, which serve to provide a better idea of feelings of discontent existing within specific regions by looking at the share of votes cast for Eurosceptic parties. Concentrating on the 2014 and 2019 European Elections, Di Matteo and Mariotti (2020) create a map indicating the share of votes for right-wing populist parties across Italy. Their findings are presented in Figure 14, with the lighter colors representing lower shares of votes when compared to the darker ones.

*Figure 14: Share of Votes for Right-Wing Populist Parties in 2014 and 2019 European Elections*



180

The outcomes are particularly consistent in illustrating the nation-wide rise in support for populist parties in Italy that occurred between 2014 and 2019, when they mobilized support through the criticism of migratory and economic policies. It must be remembered that this does not encompass the voting trends for left wing populist parties such as the Five Star Movement,

<sup>180</sup> Di Matteo, & Mariotti, “Italian Discontent and Right-Wing Populism: Determinants, Geographies, Patterns”, p. 378.

whose underlying role during the analyzed timeframe must also be considered. Overall, the map presents a significant increase in voting for populist parties in the Centre-North, in line with the sentiment that in recent years right-wing populism has spread in the North, but most importantly also extended to traditional historical strongholds of left-wing politics in the center regions of Emilia-Romagna, Umbria and Tuscany.<sup>181</sup> The most recent 2022 elections are important in outlining how this has only become more significant, with the center-right gaining unprecedented support. Compellingly, the graph also illustrates a prevalent increase in support for populist parties in the southern regions of Puglia and Sicily, who had previously voted for traditional parties that generally display pro-EU feelings. From the graph presented it can be determined that the increase in support for populist and often Eurosceptic parties definitively crossed over to influence a great part of the country. What was initially a Northern phenomenon can be said to have become a national one in this timeframe. Due to this, it is of immediate interest to delve deeper into the impact of cohesion policy on regions in the South and draw a connection with their reception of regional funds and increase in voting for Eurosceptic parties.

As has been stated before, the EU's support for Southern regions cannot be downplayed, in many instances providing greater backing than national expenditure. In Sicily for example, a scheme was successfully implemented between 2015 and 2022 to bring high-speed internet access in areas that had previously been isolated as a result of this.<sup>182</sup> Importantly, European regional funds covered approximately 68% of the share, contributing toward a more modern connection across Italy, reducing the potential for an island like Sicily to become cut off from the rest of the country. This once more portrays the EU in a positive light, with supranational funds contributing significantly more than the Italian government toward development plans. Similarly, the EU has committed a large amount of funding to Puglia. For the 2014-2020 period, an impressive €7 billion were pledged to the region, with the objective of using the ERDF and ESF to fuel economic growth and sustainable, smart and inclusive development.<sup>183</sup> The programme can be seen as an overall success, with EU reports from 2022 indicating an increase in 100,000 annual tourists, 1,200 jobs created, 18km of rail reconstructed and a noteworthy

---

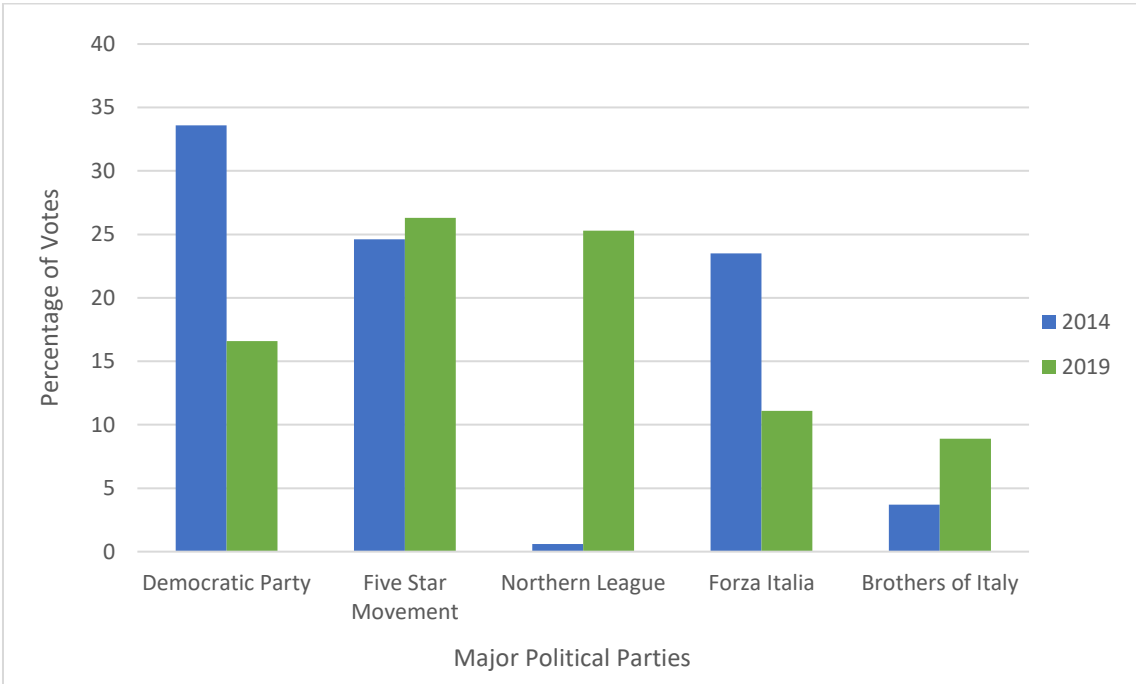
<sup>181</sup> Di Matteo, & Mariotti, "Italian Discontent and Right-Wing Populism: Determinants, Geographies, Patterns", p. 377.

<sup>182</sup> European Commission, "Public Fibre Network Brings High-Speed Internet to Sicily", 2019, [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/projects/europe/public-fiber-network-brings-high-speed-internet-to-sicily](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/projects/europe/public-fiber-network-brings-high-speed-internet-to-sicily).

<sup>183</sup> European Commission. "ROP Puglia ERDF ESF", (2014), [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/atlas/programmes/2014-2020/italy/2014it16m2op002](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/atlas/programmes/2014-2020/italy/2014it16m2op002).

reduction in energy consumption of public buildings.<sup>184</sup> Whilst the scheme is not perfect, most notably with the failure to always meet the investment planned, regional distribution can be said to largely have had a positive effect on Puglia. Whilst on paper this should foster pro-EU sentiments, it is not reflected in the results of the European elections. As a whole, these point toward greater support for Eurosceptic parties, in the same breath undermining parties that have been traditionally pro-European. Interestingly, this shift occurred between 2014 and 2019, when the EU provided significant funding to the region, which once more raises the questions of whether people are aware of programs implemented or if they deem them insufficient. Figure 15 once more makes use of data for the 2014 and 2019 elections, this time considering the statistics for a single region: Puglia.

Figure 15: Share for Parties at the European Elections in Puglia for 2 Base Years



The results of the European elections are important when it comes to illustrating the extent of the change in sentiment occurring across the region in just five years. Notably, there was a sharp decline in parties viewed as generally being pro-European in the case of the Democratic Party and Forza Italia, which fell by 17% and 12.4% respectively. This was exacerbated by the emergence of the Northern League and to a lesser extent Brothers of Italy,

<sup>184</sup> European Commission. “European Structural and Investment Funds, Country Data for: Italy”, 2022, <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/countries/IT>.

<sup>185</sup> La Repubblica, *Elezioni Europee 2019*, “Elezioni Europee – Risultati – Regione Puglia”, (2022), <https://elezioni.repubblica.it/2019/europee/italia/italia-meridionale/puglia/>.

which are seen as two of the most prominent parties in Italy's new right. The Northern League in particular is an interesting case, as it emerged as a marginal party that only had support in the North of Italy, managing to garner voting favor in all regions. An example of this is the aforementioned change experienced between 2014 and 2019 in Puglia. This explains the impressive increase in voting shares for these parties, which can be identified in Figure 14. Lastly, the consistency of the Five Star Movement needs to be noted. As a left-wing party that can be categorized as maintaining elements of "soft" Euroscepticism, it in fact managed to maintain a strong presence throughout, losing some influence in recent years but having performed decently at the latest elections. The findings are highly significant as they show a radical shift away from mainstream parties in favor of embracing challenging ones in a five-year period.

When returning once more to the national stage, it can be identified that in Italy more radical Euroscepticism can be encountered in the North, whereas support for parties manifesting "soft" Euroscepticism is much more uniform in its distribution. This would suggest that cohesion policy has a role to play in influencing Euroscepticism as its heavy implementation in the South has meant that the regions there have generally stayed away from forms of "hard" Euroscepticism. The fact that there is however support for "soft" Eurosceptic parties means that dissatisfaction with the overall nature of regional distribution of funds is present. The most telling figure from the Eurobarometer survey is the question regarding whether the ERDF or CF have benefited individuals, with 86% replying "no" and only 12% replying "yes".<sup>186</sup> Although it must be noted that this survey was only extended to people that had heard of the ERDF and CF, the results are astoundingly low. This once more reinforces the idea dissatisfaction with regional funding, backing up the claim that increasing funding on its own is not sufficient, but this has to be targeted and applied in an effective way in order to work toward breaching the gaps. Even when citizens are aware of funding being provided, the fact that they cannot perceive immediate benefits undeniably leads them to be skeptical. When glancing once more at the country as a whole, it can be claimed that Italy has definitely moved from being supportive of integration to proving skeptical of further integration.<sup>187</sup> This is in

---

<sup>186</sup> European Commission, "Flash Eurobarometer 497: Citizens' Awareness and Perception of EU Regional Policy", p. 36.

<sup>187</sup> L. Basile, M. Cliento & N. Conti, *Partecipazione e Confitto: The Open Journal of Sociopolitical Studies, Volume 14, Issue 1*, "The Coronavirus Crisis as Catalyst for EU Legitimacy? Italian Public Opinion and the EU During the Pandemic", (2021), p. 203, <http://sibaese.unisalento.it/index.php/paco/article/view/24022/20012>.

spite of clear EU intervention within poorer areas, which has however proven insufficient when promoting harmonious regional development as well as fostering individuals' support.

The case of Euroscepticism being present in areas that have been heavy recipients of regional distribution of funds from the EU admittedly presents pressing questions. If the EU is providing monetary resources, many times in a greater magnitude than the national government itself, it is hard to account for rising confidence being placed in Eurosceptic parties. One suggestion is that the significant amount of EU investment in these areas may not be translating into votes of confidence for the EU due to the previously explored concept of public awareness. There are concrete examples of regional distribution of funds having a significant impact, with people however not being aware of the extent of the role that the EU plays in this. Returning once more to Eurobarometer 497, 56% of Italian respondents asserted that they had heard of EU co-financed projects in their region, which placed them in eleventh place out of the twenty seven Member States that were surveyed.<sup>188</sup> Compellingly, when these respondents were then questioned on whether they felt the impact had been positive, 57% said "yes", which was the lowest response recorded.<sup>189</sup> This indicates that the level of awareness could definitely be higher and in cases when people were in fact knowledgeable of determined schemes, they appeared to be dissatisfied with them.

Centering once more on the heavily supported areas in the South, the EU has implemented the Adriatic and Ionian Sea Strategy, aimed at fostering collective development among four Member States and two European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries. The Eurobarometer reports that awareness was highest in Croatia (42%) and lowest in Italy (10%), demonstrating a clear lack of knowledge for EU redistributive policies.<sup>190</sup> It can be definitely be said that there is a general lack of visibility of EU policies in Italy, which plays an important role in people downplaying the impact of the organization on furthering economic development. The Eurobarometer is important in highlighting dissatisfaction and criticism of EU regional distribution, which justifies the overall increase in votes for Eurosceptic parties, particularly over the past five years. Accurate regional distribution of funds can play a positive role in

---

<sup>188</sup> European Commission, "Flash Eurobarometer 497: Citizens' Awareness and Perception of EU Regional Policy", p. 9.

<sup>189</sup> European Commission, "Flash Eurobarometer 497: Citizens' Awareness and Perception of EU Regional Policy", p. 15.

<sup>190</sup> European Commission, "Flash Eurobarometer 497: Citizens' Awareness and Perception of EU Regional Policy", p. 82.

gathering support as well as reducing it, but it may not be as significant in Italy. Having said this, a case must be made for awareness of regional distribution in Italy being significantly low when compared to other countries. This is particularly compelling for regions such as Sicily and Puglia, who have been recipients of significant schemes yet display an undeniable increase in voting for Eurosceptic parties.

#### **4.4 Programming Period (2021-2027) and the EU Recovery Fund**

As determined from the very start, Italy is one of the countries that has been the most aided by EU redistributive policies. While already touched upon, a closer analysis of the 2021-2027 programming plan, can be important in determining the relationship Italy currently has with EU redistributive policies. It can immediately be noted that there has been a significant increase in the structural funds provided by European and national resources. In terms of redistributive policies, Italy will in fact have roughly €75 billion to benefit from with around 57% of these being provided directly by the EU.<sup>191</sup> The increase of roughly €10 billion from the previous programming cycle is important when considering the role played by the EU in aiding Italy. Whether it is successful or not, it cannot be denied that the EU is making a targeted effort toward helping the country. Whilst further research should be conducted to prove that an increase in structural funds is statistically significant toward not effectively preventing the increase of Euroscepticism in Italy, it can be said that augmented funding can be indicative of the EU's desire to improve its image within Italy. The 2021-2027 agenda also reiterates the importance of supporting the Southern part of the country in the long-term objective of breaching regional disparities. All of the regions of Southern Italy are in fact included in the “less developed regions” category, receiving double the funding of “more developed regions”, whilst the sole region categorized as “transition” remains Abruzzo, located in the Center.<sup>192</sup> The poorest areas of Italy are all located in the South, with very few exceptions. The categorization of regions not only highlights the attention given to the South but also indicates how there is a significant lack of progress. There has in fact been no substantial change within the South of Italy, meaning that cohesion policy can be perceived to have failed in its long-term objective

---

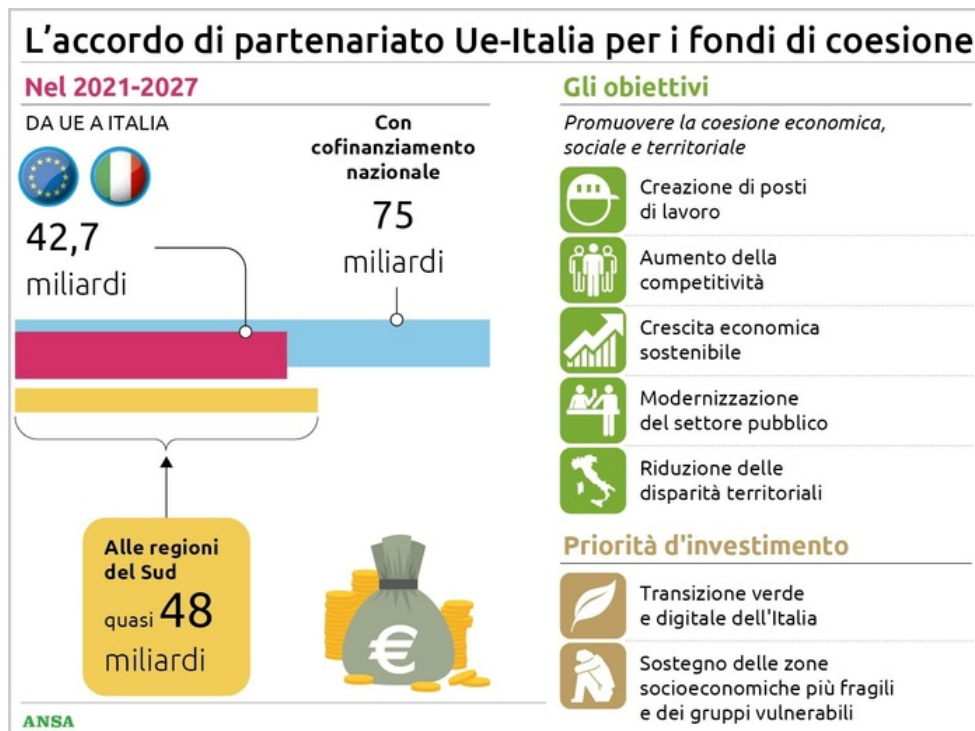
<sup>191</sup> Minister for Southern Italy and Territorial Cohesion, “European Structural Funds, the 2021-2027 Programming Cycle in Italy”, (2022), <https://www.ministroperilsud.gov.it/en/news/european-structural-funds-the-2021-2027-programming-cycle-in-italy/>.

<sup>192</sup> Minister for Southern Italy and Territorial Cohesion, “European Structural Funds, the 2021-2027 Programming Cycle in Italy”.



of breaching these inequalities. All of this is illustrated in Figure 16, which whilst presented in the Italian language, visually shows the weight of the funding allocated to the South. These amount to almost €48 billion, with the objectives of reducing regional disparities, promoting sustainable economic growth and creating jobs, among other objectives. Once more the influence of the EU can be noted, with the pink bar representing how 57% of the total funding is being provided directly from the EU.

Figure 16: Breakdown of the 2021-2027 Programming Period



193

The need for the South to be given particular care cannot be understated and the 2021-2027 Programming Period is indicative of the financial backing provided. In addition to this, support can be identified in the Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza (PNRR). This falls under the umbrella of the Next Generation EU (NGEU) and is aimed at galvanizing the economy following the global pandemic.<sup>194</sup> Whilst it is hard to group it into cohesion policy, in the unprecedented times of the pandemic it can be identified as an important measure being implemented to accomplish many of the same objectives of that traditional redistributive

<sup>193</sup> Redazione ANSA, "Dall'UE 42,7 Miliardi all'Italia per 2021-2027", (2022),

[https://www.ansa.it/europa/notizie/la\\_tua\\_europa/notizie/2022/07/19/da-ue-427-miliardi-a-italia-per-politica-di-coesione-2021-2027\\_5e8a9f79-9f8b-436e-b8c5-afe0f58e40b0.html](https://www.ansa.it/europa/notizie/la_tua_europa/notizie/2022/07/19/da-ue-427-miliardi-a-italia-per-politica-di-coesione-2021-2027_5e8a9f79-9f8b-436e-b8c5-afe0f58e40b0.html).

<sup>194</sup> V. Conte, *La Repubblica*, "I Soldi del PNRR per Ferrovie e Bonus Edilizi: Finora l'Italia ha Speso Solo 11,7 Miliardi", (2022), [https://www.repubblica.it/economia/2022/10/07/news/pnrr\\_spesa\\_progetti-368864327/](https://www.repubblica.it/economia/2022/10/07/news/pnrr_spesa_progetti-368864327/).



policies seek to achieve. The PNRR can therefore undoubtedly be seen as another example of the EU providing financial support to Italy. When speaking in Parliament, Italian prime minister Mario Draghi made two main points. The first of these is that, whilst the funds in the South could have been used more efficiently, there has definitely not been a discrimination against these regions.<sup>195</sup> He brings up the main point identified in this Chapter, that there is a large amount of funding being received, that is not limited to the more developed areas in the North. Secondly, he notes how resources will always seem to be “few” when they are not used at all.<sup>196</sup> The words of the former Prime Minister therefore undoubtedly echo what has been identified thus far in the thesis. There has been great support provided by the EU to Italy, particularly in the region of the Mezzogiorno that has historically lagged behind from an economic perspective. They also show how Italy has been unable to efficiently transfer these funds across its most underdeveloped regions. To some extent this reduces the responsibility of the EU, who cannot be denied as having played an underlying role in financially supporting its programs. It is instead a clear indication of the fact that the problems in the South need strong reforms to national policies, particularly from an administrative level. The PNRR is generally viewed as a great opportunity for Italy, although questions have arisen regarding the effective distribution of the funds, also in light of how the aforementioned structural funds have not been handled in an efficient way. Notably, this could prove to be the exception to Italy’s poor management of redistributive policies, although only time will tell. What can be said, is that it has become a source of contention within Italy, with the leader of the opposition, Giorgia Meloni, criticizing the current government for not having implemented it quickly enough. This was rebutted by Draghi, who claimed that Italy had already reached 21 objectives, and that the Commission would not have made funding available had Italy not made significant moves.<sup>197</sup> Undoubtedly the PNRR is a divisive issue within Italian debate, causing problems within the government amongst its distribution. However, there is almost universal agreement on the fact that, if used correctly, it can prove useful.

---

<sup>195</sup> M. Draghi *Youtube*, “Il Presidente Draghi Illustra le Risorse Destinate al Sud”, (2021), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1AU6Pt1PD8>.

<sup>196</sup> Draghi, “Il Presidente Draghi Illustra le Risorse Destinate al Sud”.

<sup>197</sup> Conte, “I Soldi del PNRR per Ferrovie e Bonus Edilizi: Finora l’Italia ha Speso Solo 11,7 Miliardi”.

Figure 17: Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi and Commission President Ursula Von Der Leyden Presenting the EU's Plan for Recovery in Italy During a Visit to Rome



The most recent programming plan for both cohesion policy and the PNRR has extended the debate beyond political figures. In an interview provided to Italian publication “Il Sole”, journalist Raffaele Spallone defines Italy as *il paese delle differenze* (the country of differences), pointing toward cohesion policy as an actor that has attempted to breach gaps within Italy, economically and socially.<sup>199</sup> Acknowledging the support provided by the EU, this once more points toward the insurmountable task of correcting regional imbalances that stretch back to before the Treaty of Rome. The problems in Italy are deep and the EU has proven unable to deal with issues that would instead need to be faced with profound national reform. A cursory analysis of the 2021-2027 programming period serves to highlight the particular attention that the EU persistently grants to Italy. From an ampler perspective, the sentiment currently shared across the country can be identified in the efforts made by popular parties to garner support. The most recent Italian general elections are a testament to the problems within the country that have exposed the inequalities between North and South to an even greater extent. When gathering support for the upcoming elections at the popular national TV programme “Porta a Porta” conducted by renowned journalist Bruno Vespa, Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs Luigi di Maio greatly criticized the center-right coalition, calling out their policies as an attempt to take money from the South.<sup>200</sup> This can be largely dismissed when

---

<sup>198</sup> Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, “Il Presidente Draghi Incontra la Presidente della Commissione UE Von der Leyden”, (2021), <https://www.governo.it/it/media/il-presidente-draghi-incontra-la-presidente-della-commissione-ue-von-der-leyen/17233>.

<sup>199</sup> G. Chiellino, *Youtube*, “La Programmazione dei Fondi Europei di Coesione 2021-2027”, Uploaded by: Il Sole 24 ORE, (2022), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-yVt\\_Wgleo8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-yVt_Wgleo8).

<sup>200</sup> Rai Play, “Politiche ‘22”.

citing aforementioned sources that indicate that the amount of money allocated to the South of Italy has been significant. Indirectly responding to this, Brothers of Italy leader Meloni noted the importance of the ESF, criticizing its lack of usage within Italian society to create work.<sup>201</sup> Although they are in undeniable disagreement, both sides of the political spectrum can be said to be united by the common desire for EU funding to be effectively used.

Based on all of the opinions therefore, it can be concluded that cohesion policy is one of the most appreciated European policies within Italy. This is clear from the recent programming period, where even parties that have been traditionally viewed as Eurosceptic have conceded that the funds provided have been valuable. In addition to the regular structural funds made available, the PNRR proved instrumental in demonstrating to the Italian population the notable effort that the EU is placing into supporting Member States, in this case their own country. The reactions to the most recent cohesion policy programming period are indicative of the common ground reached by varying political parties when it comes to embracing aid from the EU in the form of cohesion policy and the PNRR. It is also even more important in solidifying the claim that Italian Euroscepticism is “soft”, and it is extremely unlikely for there to even be a concrete movement calling for Italy to exit the EU. Whilst the new government is expected to cause problems within Europe, it needs to be conceded that there is the potential for the criticism to be constructive and for there to be a better allocation of funding. The PNRR and 2021-2027 cohesion policy plan indicate that funding is being provided and now it is largely in the hands of the new government that will be formed to use them efficiently. It can be said that thus far there has been a communication deficiency, which has meant that the policies of the EU have not been visible enough, manifested by low public awareness, as seen by the Eurobarometer, and the confidence placed in Eurosceptic parties. In addition to this, poor administrative capacity between the different levels of Italian government have meant that the funding has not been fully allocated. The structural funds and PNRR are valuable resources and it remains to be seen whether they will be fully used and if this will comprise an improvement in public opinion.

---

<sup>201</sup> Rai Play, “Politiche ‘22”.

#### 4.5 Can cohesion policy prevent Euroscepticism?

It cannot be denied that recent national and European elections have shown the true extent of Euroscepticism in Italy, in spite of a long-lasting history of pro-Europeanism. The voting polls in fact confirm overwhelming support for populist parties on both the left and right, that have been brought together by a similar mistrust of supranational organizations.<sup>202</sup> This was most evident in the joint government of the Northern League and Five Star Movement four years ago.<sup>203</sup> It can be said that marginal parties have in certain instances even surpassed mainstream ones, with some established parties going as far as adopting a more cautious approach to EU policies, when compared to traditional optimism. It therefore cannot be denied that Italy, in a similar vein to much of Europe, is currently expressing prominent Eurosceptic thoughts. This is in stark contrast to the country's past, where citizens and policy makers were united under the impression that European integration would lead to modernization and improvements in the efficiency of the national government.<sup>204</sup> However, the question must be inevitably raised of how much this can be accurately linked to cohesion policy. Returning to the discussion of Euroscepticism within politics, Conti, Marangoni and Verzichelli (2020) attribute the Northern League and Matteo Salvini's electoral peak in 2019, to their ability to channel Eurosceptic sentiments into anti-immigration and anti-EU policies.<sup>205</sup> In the Italian case, it can be said that people are more frustrated with lax policies toward migration and the handling of the economic crisis. Political figures like Salvini and Meloni are much more likely to complain about the migratory crisis rather than call for reform of redistributive policies. The same can be said for the Five Star Movement and as already explored, Euroscepticism is most reflected through these populist parties, who largely display anti-austerity and anti-immigration sentiments.<sup>206</sup> This allows them to network public discontent and call for the EU to implement more stringent regulations on immigration, resulting into concrete votes for them. It may seem that although regional distribution is one of the most prominent EU policies, dissatisfaction with the running of the Union may be directed elsewhere.

---

<sup>202</sup> D. Vittori & L. Morlino, Ed. Albertazzi & Vampa, *Populism and New Patterns of Political Competition in Western Europe*, p. 23.

<sup>203</sup> C. Froio, Ed. Albertazzi & Vampa, *Populism and New Patterns of Political Competition in Western Europe*, p. 263.

<sup>204</sup> Conti, Memoli, & Di Mauro, "Euroscepticism in Italy Among Party Elites and the Public", p. 26.

<sup>205</sup> Conti, Marangoni & Verzichelli, "Euroscepticism in Italy from the Onset of the Crisis: Tired of Europe?", p. 21.

<sup>206</sup> A. Borin, E. Macchi & M. Mancini, *University of Zurich Working Paper No. 289*. "EU Transfers and Euroscepticism: Can't Buy Me Love?", (2018), p. 4, <https://www.econ.uzh.ch/static/wp/econwp289.pdf>.

By examining past Eurobarometer surveys, Conti, Marangoni and Verzichelli (2020), identify two major incidents post-2008 that led to the exacerbation of Euroscepticism in Italy. These are the implementation of austerity during the Monti government (2011-2013) and the lack of EU intervention for the migratory crisis of 2015-2016.<sup>207</sup> These largely coincide with much of the Eurosceptic sentiments shared across the continent. Neither of these are directly connected to cohesion policy and it can therefore be said that the public was dissatisfied with the EU's response to incidents that put economic and foreign policy at risk rather than its handling of redistributive policies. This is further backed up by Conti, Memoli and Di Mauro (2022), who state that "EU constraints materialized through the bitter medicine imposed on Italy by the technocratic Monti government", where the EU's conditionality was implemented and people in Italy began feeling that the gains of membership were being far outweighed by the losses.<sup>208</sup> The overall control manifested by the EU through regional distribution can be seen as an extension of the policies that have directly led to citizen discontent. The EU's influence over national policies can be related to the sentiment that exists in many European countries opposed to integration that feel supranational institutions undermine existing national ones. Excessive EU control when it comes to managing crises undoubtedly played a role in furthering Euroscepticism and this is no different for Italy where there has been a definite rise in the past decade.

It must be said that the EU's policies on immigration and monetary stabilization, in the years following 2008 are therefore largely responsible for the rise in Euroscepticism within Italy, with gaps in regional distribution playing a lesser role. When accounting for the established Democratic Party's struggle to deal with the emergence of populist parties, Froio (2021) notes how the party cast aside its pro-European sentiment to call for stronger policies on immigration.<sup>209</sup> Importantly, there is a general sentiment shared among Italy that the burden of crises is not distributed evenly among all Member States, with immigration being a prime example of this. Basile, Clinto and Conti (2021) attribute this to Italy's close exposure to "crisis-led imbalances", which has resulted in mistrust for the EU as well as a call for greater intervention.<sup>210</sup> As has been said throughout the paper, cohesion policy and Euroscepticism are

---

<sup>207</sup> Conti, Marangoni & Verzichelli, "Euroscepticism in Italy from the Onset of the Crisis: Tired of Europe?", p. 7.

<sup>208</sup> Conti, Memoli & Di Mauro, "Euroscepticism in Italy Among Party Elites and the Public", p. 26.

<sup>209</sup> C. Froio, Ed. Albertazzi & Vampa, *Populism and New Patterns of Political Competition in Western Europe*, p. 364.

<sup>210</sup> Basile, Clinto & Conti, "The Coronavirus Crisis as Catalyst for EU Legitimacy? Italian Public Opinion and the EU During the Pandemic", p. 204.

not directly linked. In Italy, Euroscepticism can be said to have been largely born out of the extreme repercussions of the Eurozone crisis, in a period where regional funding from the EU remained consistent. This means that concrete fears of an economic crisis, coupled with loose immigration policies, were the main drivers for Eurosceptic sentiments. Romano (2018) goes as far as noting that dissatisfaction with the EU derives from the fact that their stringent laws on reducing public debt are serious enough to bring into question “the country’s post war social order”.<sup>211</sup> Regional distribution of funding can undoubtedly influence support for the EU, but Euroscepticism is mainly born out of the desire to effectively deal with immigration. The case of Italy is paramount in demonstrating changes in public opinion derived from crisis response. This falls in line with the academic debate surrounding current Euroscepticism, with Höglinger (2016) identifying immigration as the most divisive issue in current society.<sup>212</sup>

It must be remembered however, that effective regional distribution of funds has the ability to have a positive effect on support for the EU. Having determined that shortcomings in regional distribution contribute to Euroscepticism, it must be noted that it can also have the converse effect. Dijkstra and Rodríguez-Pose (2020) indicate that studies have shown that in many cases EU cohesion policy funding can lead to lower levels of support for Eurosceptic parties.<sup>213</sup> This is something that has been reflected across research, where it can be concluded that EU investment can play a role in reducing, even if at times indirectly, public discontent.<sup>214</sup> This is the case for Italy, where concrete results manifested by investment in cohesion policy have contributed to a reduction in Eurosceptic sentiments in certain instances. Nonetheless, this does not account for the overall rise in Euroscepticism across Italy in a satisfactory way, rendering it difficult to draw a connection between the two. There must also be a case made for the argument pointed out by Kritzing (2003), who claims that citizens share generally positive views about the EU due to it being perceived as an alternative to national governments that are often corrupt or inefficient.<sup>215</sup> This is not relevant for Italy, where the overwhelming support for populist, Eurosceptic parties is a testament to mistrust in the mainstream parties that have governed Italy in the past as well as supranational EU institutions. Whilst it is hard to argue with voting outcomes, there have been critics of the populist movement, who claim that it is

---

<sup>211</sup> Romano, “Italy’s Euroscepticism: a Case of Victimhood and a Tale of Missed Opportunity”, p. 2.

<sup>212</sup> P. De Wilde, C. Teney & O. P. Laceywell, Ed. Leruth, Startin & Usherwood, *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*, p. 48.

<sup>213</sup> Dijkstra & Rodríguez-Pose, “Does Cohesion Policy Reduce EU Discontent and Euroscepticism?”, p. 7.

<sup>214</sup> Borin, Macchi & Mancini, “EU Transfers and Euroscepticism: Can’t Buy Me Love?”, p. 31.

<sup>215</sup> P. de Wilde, C. Teney & P. Laceywell, Ed. Leruth, Startin, & Usherwood, Simon, *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*, p. 53.

used as a medium to gather public support and gain power. Once this is achieved, Eurosceptic ideas are generally abandoned, and the EU can be seen as a scapegoat for public discontent and something that is exploited by populist leaders. The argument can certainly be made that in the case of Italy, Euroscepticism was primarily used by the center-right as a vote winner. It is fully expected that their government will largely tone down its Eurosceptic stance, although only time will tell if this will be the case.<sup>216</sup> In the wake of the elections, there have been many who have proven doubtful that the promises made by the center-right, many of them Eurosceptic, would be reflected in their government. Centrist politician Calenda was amongst those calling out the winning coalition, claiming that generally Eurosceptic populists always become pro-European when they obtain power. Calenda's tweet is presented in Figure 18, in clear reference to the Center-Right coalition and predicting an increased support for Europe during their administration.

*Figure 18: Calenda's Recent Critique of the Populist Movement*



Con i populisti è sempre lo stesso: all'opposizione dicono che l'UE va ribaltata, i barconi affondati e promettono tutto; quando arrivano al governo nominano i tecnici, diventano europeisti e spiegano che per responsabilità istituzionale non possono mantenere le promesse.

[Translate Tweet](#)

217

The argument made by Calenda and others fully supports the idea that cohesion policy is not a strong driver of Euroscepticism and, on the contrary, political parties are generally welcoming of EU funds. Euroscepticism is instead born out of disagreements with economic and migratory policies, in many cases being used as a vote winner from alternative parties. This falls in line with a prevalent point of contention that has been brought up throughout the thesis, which is the notion that in many cases, the EU is seen as a scapegoat. It is consequently often helpless toward improving the situation in a country like Italy, despite making significant efforts. Having examined the Italian case in depth, Casula (2020) notes that geographical disparities mean that a trap has been created, from which it is near impossible to escape from,

---

<sup>216</sup> E. Vasquez, *EURACTIV*, "Italy's Right Dials Down Anti-EU Rhetoric as they Prepare for Power", (2022), <https://www.euractiv.com/section/elections/news/italys-right-dials-down-anti-eu-rhetoric-as-they-prepare-for-power/>.

<sup>217</sup> C. Calenda, *Twitter*, (2022), <https://twitter.com/CarloCalenda/status/1577720797426323463>.

in spite of EU funding.<sup>218</sup> The South is undoubtedly much worse off than the rest of the country and it has proven impossible to reduce inequalities due to conceptual, administrative and political barriers. As already mentioned, variable explored by Terracciano and Graziano (2016), has been administrative capacity. Notably, they identify a significant delay between the policy adoption and implementation phase, with the average implementation time for a €100 million programme is eleven years.<sup>219</sup> This has led to inefficient use of funds provided and questions arising over the purpose of the structural funds being made available if they cannot be adequately used, particularly in a timely manner.

The problems in Italy are without question deeply rooted and there is the need for prevalent institutional reform. From this point of view, it can be determined that the EU is unable to play a significant role in effectively reducing regional disparities, which would be essential to gather support. Bearing this in mind, cohesion policy has had little influence when it comes to achieving its long-term goals in Italy, and shortcomings in other areas such as the management of the migratory crisis and implementation of austerity have led to a drastic fall in support. In addition, Basile, Cliento and Conti (2021) identify a paradox of Italian citizens feeling that the EU is increasingly inefficient when it comes to helping their country, at the same time also wanting to benefit from even more EU support.<sup>220</sup> They further highlight the fact that Italy has undergone a number of crises, determining that unreasonable expectations of the EU coupled with displeasure with past interventions have created feelings of dissatisfaction within Italian society.<sup>221</sup> Using the case of Italy, it can be ventured that any level of EU support fails to meet its potential for approval as citizens will always desire more and look for fault in what they obtain.

All in all, it must be recognized that in the present day, it is impossible to confidently link EU regional distribution and Euroscepticism, particularly when looking at Italy. As conceded by Dijkstra and Rodríguez-Pose (2020), there is no universal consensus regarding the exact role that cohesion policy can play in influencing the support of parties in favor of the EU

---

<sup>218</sup> Casula, *Economic Growth and Cohesion Policy Implementation in Italy and Spain*, p. 246.

<sup>219</sup> Terracciano & Graziano, "EU Cohesion Policy Implementation and Administrative Capacities: Insights from Italian Regions", p. 3.

<sup>220</sup> Basile, Cliento & Conti, "The Coronavirus Crisis as Catalyst for EU Legitimacy? Italian Public Opinion and the EU During the Pandemic", p. 217.

<sup>221</sup> Basile, Cliento & Conti, "The Coronavirus Crisis as Catalyst for EU Legitimacy? Italian Public Opinion and the EU During the Pandemic", pp. 217-218.



and this is no different for the Italian peninsula.<sup>222</sup> Effective regional distribution can sway public support in favor of the EU, but it remains ineffective if there are low levels of public awareness and poor institutional support for its effective implementation. In Italy, considerable efforts made toward regional distribution have been met with a nation-wide increase in support for Eurosceptic parties, raising more questions than answers. It can be therefore said that in the Italian case, the link between regional distribution and Euroscepticism is relatively low as there is little awareness of regional distribution and in the rare cases it is present, it is seen as insufficient. As a result, citizens tend to feel that it is often ineffective, and do not consider themselves to be beneficiaries. The factors that can be said to truly have an effect are dissatisfaction with the EU's policies on immigration and economic management. These have been effectively able to channel social discontent and result in a shift away from general pro-Europeanism that has been manifested in Italy.<sup>223</sup> Having said this, the Chapter took a deep dive into the case of Italy, and many of the conclusions as well as questions drawn can be useful when assembling all of the research made thus far with a focus on the EU as a whole. The next Chapter will tie this all together and determine how insights from the case of Italy can account for the connection that exists between Euroscepticism and European regional distribution policies.

---

<sup>222</sup> Dijkstra & Rodríguez-Pose, "Does Cohesion Policy Reduce EU Discontent and Euroscepticism?", p. 8.

<sup>223</sup> Conti, Memoli & Di Mauro, "Euroscepticism in Italy Among Party Elites and the Public", p. 34.

## **Chapter V – Linking the Italian case to the investigation**

The case study of Italy is unquestionably a significant one that is essential toward providing insights that will help answer the overall question of whether Euroscepticism is linked to EU redistributive policies. The primary data investigated, paired with the analysis of the views shared by influential figures at both the political and academic level serve to determine that within Italy there are distinct opinions on both cohesion policy and Euroscepticism. Most importantly, the outcome of this research justifies the selection of Italy as a single country that can prove valuable when subsequently relating the findings back to the EU as a whole. This is particularly true when considering the general elections, which were carried out during the final phase of the thesis' elaboration. They in fact provide the most current data available when making an overall assessment of the current sentiment that is felt across Italy, using voting shares for parties as an indicative factor. The elections are also important when considering the reaction of figures outside of Italy. The country is undoubtedly an accurate reflection of many of the feelings currently being felt across Europe, fully justifying its selection as a case study. The outcome was met with congratulatory messages from significant Eurosceptic figures such as Spanish party Vox, as well as Orbán and Morawiecki, the prime ministers of Hungary and Poland respectively.<sup>224</sup> Italy can hence be said to undoubtedly reflect many of the Eurosceptic views that are present across Europe and its decision to vote for the right is suggestive of a much greater movement occurring across Europe. Overall, it can be said that based on the research carried out in Chapter IV, several conclusions can be reached and linked back to the foundation built in the first three Chapters.

### **5.1 EU cohesion policy as a tool of enhancing public support for European integration**

The immediate conclusion that can be drawn from the research is that the EU currently finds itself in a position where it is most in need of public support, at the same time facing a period of greatest criticism from many of its Member States. While this critical claim has been made by notable figures in the academic space such as De Vries (2018), it is something that the EU itself does not shy away from. Eurobarometer 497 in fact, clearly states that one of the objectives of cohesion policy for the 2021-2027 period is to increase visibility of EU-funded

---

<sup>224</sup> A. Magnani, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, "Da Vox a Morawiecki, chi sono gli Alleati in Europa di Meloni", (2022), <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/da-vox-morawiecki-chi-sono-alleati-europa-meloni-AEEjdL3B>.

projects in order to improve the public image of the organization.<sup>225</sup> Whilst not directly mentioning it, the greater emphasis placed on visibility can be perceived as a clear reference to the EU's efforts to counter rising Euroscepticism. With the support for parties of this nature being at an all-time high, the case of Italy is without doubt an important one to consider in this aspect. Moving from being generally pro-European, it can be said that sentiments of discontent bubbled for years, reaching an undeniable apex at the national elections of 2018. This was the year where Conti, Memoli and Di Mauro (2022) note that the government formed was undeniably a populist and Eurosceptic one, marking a pivotal moment in Italian politics.<sup>226</sup> This was further cemented in the most recent elections with a win for the center-right coalition, which will certainly present Europe with a challenge in the long-term. This is a clear indication of the ability of definitive changes in ideology to occur over time and a testament to the fact that long-term supporters of the EU are still able to change allegiance. The EU currently needs to receive public support in the present day as a way of maintaining its legitimacy. The presence of Eurosceptic voting trends, particularly notable in traditionally pro-European countries such as Italy, is therefore an issue of pressing concern that threatens the long-term future of the EU. This has been immediately seen in a recent conference held at Princeton University, where Von der Leyden tentatively warned Italy that the EU has the necessary tools to deal with the center-right government, referring to threats previously made to Poland and Hungary.<sup>227</sup> The prevalence of Euroscepticism, particularly on the political right, is a clear threat to the EU, who is well aware of the potential for public discontent to escalate further. This also gives the Eurosceptic parties material to further their agenda, and it can be said that statements such as these undermine much of the positive work done by cohesion policy.

While it can be acknowledged that cohesion policy and Euroscepticism are connected, it is even more important to note that cohesion policy plays a double role when influencing support for the institution. On one hand, the redistribution of funds can go a long way toward fostering support for the organization as a whole. On the other, dissatisfaction with EU regional policy influences Euroscepticism. Tying into this is the significant notion that European citizens may not even be aware of the support they are receiving, something that was particularly

---

<sup>225</sup> European Commission, "Flash Eurobarometer 497: Citizens' Awareness and Perception of EU Regional Policy", p. 1.

<sup>226</sup> N. Conti, V. Memoli & D. Di Mauro, *Italian Journal of Electoral Studies*, "Euroscepticism in Italy Among Party Elites and the Public", p. 34.

<sup>227</sup> U. Von Der Leyden, *Youtube*, "Keynote Address at Princeton University by President Von Der Leyden – UNGA", (2022), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bKUB-oafe9E>.

compelling when examining the Eurobarometer findings in Italy. As a result of a lack of visibility of EU policies, citizens can be seen as less likely to be aware of support they are receiving and subsequently prove to be Eurosceptic. As noted by Cunico, Aivazidou and Mollona (2020), there has in fact been a general fall in the awareness of the impact of cohesion policy, despite the EU taking measures to implement it in an ever more prominent way.<sup>228</sup> This has been the case for Italy, where there have been a great amount of redistributive policies implemented in the country, most notably through the outlining of the 2021-2027 cohesion policy agenda and the PNRR being made presented as a special measure of support in the post-pandemic period. This has not been able to translate into support for the EU as the voting continues to lean toward populist and Eurosceptic parties, as proven by the most recent outcomes. For these reasons it can be comfortably claimed that it would be advisable for the EU to strengthen its existing policies aimed at making it more visible across the board, ensuring that communicative barriers at the national level be breached. Whilst it must be said that policy remains relatively visible, and the prevalence of primary figures online definitely made the drafting of the thesis easier, at the same time, there should be more effort put into highlighting projects that are EU driven. In this way citizens themselves could be aware of the efforts made by the EU to aid them. Whether this is by maintaining a greater online presence, investing more in promotional campaigns, or placing the EU emblem on all projects made possible through the structural funds, the case of Italy is instrumental in highlighting the need of the EU to make its policies noted on a greater level. The outline for the 2021-2027 programming period does in fact demonstrate an effort being made in this aspect, as the EU has set the objective of placing the emblem on all communication materials alongside the statement “co-funded by the European Union”.<sup>229</sup> Placing the EU’s stamp, both literally and symbolically, on its redistributive policies remains of great significance, in order to improve its public image, which the thesis has demonstrated to be fundamental for its future survival.

All in all, it cannot be denied that in the current climate the EU needs public support in order to remain influential. The relatively low levels of awareness regarding policies are therefore bound to be a cause for concern. As claimed by Verney (2018), European integration has been historically “elite-driven”, with public opinion playing a minor role in shaping the

---

<sup>228</sup> Cunico, Aivazidou & Mollona, “Building a Dynamic Theory of Citizens’ Awareness of European Cohesion Policy Interventions”, p. 771.

<sup>229</sup> European Commission, “Communicating Cohesion Policy in 2021–2027”, (2020), p. 5, [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/informing/communicating\\_cohesion\\_policy\\_2127\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/informing/communicating_cohesion_policy_2127_en.pdf).

reaching of the overall objective.<sup>230</sup> This claim was strongly put to the test during the Brexit talks, where it became clear that public discontent could result in an entire country electing to leave the EU through a referendum. The populist movement has been another example of this, where the mobilization of public discontent with EU and national policies has led to a rise in the popularity of Eurosceptic parties. When it comes to the prospect of more Member States leaving the EU it is paramount for a positive public image to be maintained. For this reason, the actors tasked with overseeing cohesion policy do not shy away from communicating in their overall agenda that they consider the gathering of public support to be a main objective. The case of Italy is a compelling one, with Euroscepticism having without a doubt become a staple in the mainstream politics of the country. Italian voting patterns are a clear indication of support for the EU falling in recent years, with the 2013, 2018 and 2022 elections representing a concrete change in traditional Italian support of European policies.<sup>231</sup> The EU needs public support in order to continue justifying its legitimacy and as long as there are these outcomes in countries like Italy, in spite of efforts made through cohesion policy, it will continue to be threatened. Visibility of cohesion policy is key to raising public awareness, as identified by Barca (2009), in his agenda for a reformed cohesion policy, presented thirteen years ago.<sup>232</sup> In the present day this is even more relevant and something the EU is working toward mitigating.

## 5.2 Why is money not enough?

The investigation so far has shown that the EU can shape support for its objectives through cohesion policy. In the same breath however, it can also cause murmurs of discontent when it implements policies inefficiently, through administrative and institutional barriers, as well as a lack of visibility. An immediate glance at the funds made available through cohesion policy justifies the claim that the EU does indeed provide financial backing to its Member States. In terms of the long-term goal of breaching regional disparities, the fact that over a third of the total budget has consistently been used on cohesion policy for the last thirty years, is a clear indication of the desire to bring about real change. However, in spite of the important financial support that has been made available, there has been an overall decrease in the support

---

<sup>230</sup> S. Verney, Ed. Leruth, Startin & Usherwood, *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*, pp. 168-169.

<sup>231</sup> Pinto, "The 2018 Italian General Election: a 'New Italy' or a 'Dead End'", p. 303.

<sup>232</sup> F. Barca, *An Agenda for a Reformed Cohesion Policy: a Place-Based Approach to Meeting European Union Challenges and Expectations*, p. 24.

shown to the EU, largely manifested through the increase in the following of Eurosceptic parties, which are a direct reflection of public dissatisfaction. A conclusion that can be drawn from the overall investigation therefore, is that funding alone cannot lead to an increase in support for the EU. Whilst it can be said that there is a correlation between increasing regional funding in a given area and that same area becoming more pro-European, it must be noted that this is far from being direct. Rather, in certain instances, some of the most supported regions go as far as being openly Eurosceptic as explored in depth by Dijkstra & Rodríguez-Pose (2020). This is particularly relevant in the case of the UK, where areas that were given special attention by the EU through redistributive policies, symbolically turned their back on the organization, with their vote for Brexit.<sup>233</sup> In a similar way, the analysis of Italy in Chapter IV exposed how the large number of EU sponsored projects in Southern Italy did not coincide with an improvement in the overall feeling of support for the organization. Rather, the increase in support for populist parties in areas that had traditionally been more pro-European proved the opposite. Whilst it cannot be claimed that redistributive policies led to a fall in support, it can be ventured that funding with the direct objective of benefiting Italian citizens within Southern regions did not seem to translate into votes of confidence for pro-European parties.

The geographical phenomenon within Italy is a great example that can be brought up when supporting the conclusion that money alone is insufficient, as a greater influx in monetary support to a given region does not immediately result in greater support for the EU. Analysis of the Italian case was paramount in determining this and definitively stating that providing financial support on its own does not translate into votes of confidence. Perhaps most compellingly, Quintieri and Stamato (2021) point toward the ample research that has identified how gaps in institutional quality play a significant role in preventing the effectiveness of cohesion policy. They state that the empirical evidence available points toward poor success in the Mezzogiorno region in Italy, calling for the need for there to be policies of national intervention aimed at increasing human capital and improving institutions.<sup>234</sup> It must also be conceded that in many instances, the support provided by the EU was unable to reach its full potential, due to there being deep-rooted issues that can only be corrected through stringent national policies. A main issue in this space is identified by Terracciano and Graziano (2016) who, when analyzing the case of Italy, determine that ineffective redistributive policies can be

---

<sup>233</sup> Dijkstra & Rodríguez-Pose, “Does Cohesion Policy Reduce EU Discontent and Euroscepticism?”, p. 2.

<sup>234</sup> Quintieri & Stamato, “Qualità delle Istituzioni e Politiche di Coesione nel Mezzogiorno”, p. 9.

explained by low administrative capacity.<sup>235</sup> Furthermore, lengthy delays in the policy making process, as well as financial barriers, mean that the government is often unable to spend the entirety of the funds in a short amount of time.<sup>236</sup> This is also backed up by Spallone (2022), who believes that while Italy is currently dealing with the greatest amount of resources at its disposal at the moment, long-term administrative difficulties that make it impossible to accurately use them.<sup>237</sup> Overall, Italy is insightful in exemplifying this, as the effects of significant EU regional funding have not been felt in the long-term due to many factors. Long-term geographical divides, low institutional quality and a lack of administrative capacity have prevented cohesion policy from expressing its full potential within Italy. Returning to the EU as a whole, Piattoni and Polverari (2016) note how administrative barriers are a disincentive for Member States to implement cohesion policy, due to past difficulties experienced.<sup>238</sup> This is clearly not just an Italian phenomenon, but rather one shared by most of Europe, while dealing with Euroscepticism. A number of barriers present across individual nations in Europe mean that the support provided by the EU through redistributive policies has not proven effective.

Voting results are valuable primary sources, providing evidence as to why Euroscepticism is a concrete phenomenon. Despite negative views of the EU, it may be said that financial support is welcomed, and that Euroscepticism has come about for other reasons. However, it cannot be denied that some of the provisions provided by the EU have been unsuccessful in breaching disparities. Italy was chosen due to it being a net contributor and beneficiary of cohesion policy but seemingly becoming increasingly Eurosceptic. It can further be stated that the victory of the center-right coalition in the general elections is an indication of the direction that the country will take at a political level in the future. Analyzing the buildup to the voting, two of the most outspoken leaders of the emerging right have been Salvini and Meloni, who have been clear critics of the EU, with the latter poised to become Italy's new prime minister. It must be remembered how Meloni's own party, Brothers of Italy, voted against the EU provided "Recovery Fund", in the wake of the pandemic.<sup>239</sup> This is a clear indication of

---

<sup>235</sup>Terracciano & Graziano, "EU Cohesion Policy Implementation and Administrative Capacities: Insights from Italian Regions", p. 26.

<sup>236</sup> Terracciano & Graziano, "EU Cohesion Policy Implementation and Administrative Capacities: Insights from Italian Regions", p. 3.

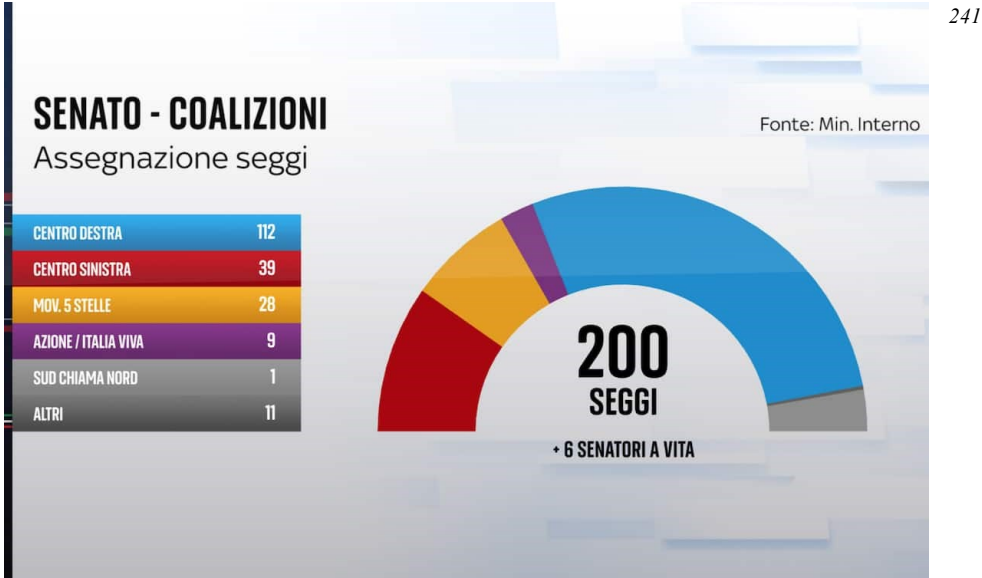
<sup>237</sup> G. Chiellino, *Youtube*, "La Programmazione dei Fondi Europei di Coesione 2021-2027", Uploaded by: Il Sole 24 ORE, (2022), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-yVt\\_Wgleo8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-yVt_Wgleo8).

<sup>238</sup> Ed. Piattoni & Polverari, *Handbook on Cohesion Policy in the EU*, p. 10.

<sup>239</sup> C. Tito, *La Repubblica*, "Quei Cinque no di Fratelli d'Italia al Recovery che l'Europa non Dimentica", (2022), [https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2022/08/03/news/quei\\_cinque\\_no\\_di\\_fratelli\\_ditalia\\_al\\_recover\\_y\\_che\\_leuropa\\_non\\_dimentica-360315028/](https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2022/08/03/news/quei_cinque_no_di_fratelli_ditalia_al_recover_y_che_leuropa_non_dimentica-360315028/).

how there is a general mistrust of EU programs from the Eurosceptic right in Italy and that when opposition to the EU is strong, funding alone cannot play a role in reducing such sentiments. This is evidence that the support provided by the EU, particularly in the wake of the pandemic, has been unable to cause an overall shift in the general sentiment shared of mistrust of the EU.<sup>240</sup> Whilst there have been cases of the aforementioned parties showing appreciation for funding, it must be said that it has overall proven ineffective in reaching the more recent objective of improving the EU’s public image. The general elections held on the 25<sup>th</sup> of September are indicative of the undeniable presence of the center-right as a concrete force in Italy, with the expected victory obtained. The coalition of Meloni, Salvini and Berlusconi emerged as clear winners, with the long-established Democratic Party unable to obtain the votes of Eurosceptics on the left and maintain its stronghold on the center-left. Importantly, the winning coalition is made up of populist parties, with the Northern League and Brothers of Italy in particular having held past reservations of the EU. This pattern mirrors what happened four years prior. While a case must be made for the great decrease in votes obtained by the Northern League, the overall victory of the center-right coalition is definitely one for the “soft” Eurosceptic parties of Italy. Significantly, the Five Star Movement also maintained influence on the left side of the political spectrum. Figure 19 presents the assigned seats in the Italian Senate based on the election data, as reported by Italian news outlet Sky TG 24.

Figure 19: Assigned Seats to Coalitions in the Senate



<sup>240</sup> European Commission. “EU Cohesion Policy: €42.7 Billion for Italy to Support Sustainable Growth, Employment and Modernization While Reducing Regional Disparities”.

<sup>241</sup> Sky TG 24, “Elezioni, la Ripartizione dei Seggi alle Camere e al Senato”, (2022), <https://tg24.sky.it/politica/2022/09/26/risultati-elezioni-ripartizione-seggi-camera-senato#05>.



As can be determined from the visual representation, the center right coalition in blue, comprising Brothers of Italy, the Northern League and Forza Italia, obtained a significant 113 out of 200 available seats. The opposition denoted by the color red and headed by the effectively defeated Democratic Party will have 39 seats, whilst the Five Star Movement exceeded expectations, gaining more support than the Northern League and rallying to obtain 28 seats, despite a visible decline in their influence over the past few years. The immediate results of the general elections and subsequent allocation of seats within Parliament are indicative of the shift within Italy to move toward embracing the populist and often Eurosceptic center-right. Connecting this back to the investigation, the outcome is indicative of Euroscepticism being present in spite of the funding provided by the EU. Most significantly, these parties have proven critical of financial aid being provided by the EU, with prominent plans to renegotiate the PNRR constituting an important part of their party programs. For these reasons it can be concluded that providing financial support does not equate receiving support, with Italy being one of the clearest indications of this. As noted by Spanish publication *El Mundo*, this was an impressive victory for Italy's right, which will undoubtedly make Europe "tremble".<sup>242</sup> The global reaction is indicative of the realization that Italy's new government will undoubtedly be Eurosceptic and proof that even the most heavily supported Member State, in terms of redistributive policies, can be opposed to the EU.

The case of Italy must be considered insightful toward highlighting how money proves insufficient when working toward the objective of increasing public support. The fact that a country so significantly sustained by funds would then in turn vote for a Eurosceptic coalition at the most recent general elections undeniably backs up this claim. It can also be said that EU is also undoubtedly aware of the problem it faces and is implementing significant measures aimed at raising awareness of its policies. This can be identified in the aforementioned publication of the European Commission who, in late 2020, outlined how the EU considers increasing visibility of policies and public awareness to be a priority. Importantly, Article 46 of the document calls for a single national website to be provided in order to increase the visibility of all the projects supported by the structural funds.<sup>243</sup> This significantly caters to the audience in the modern age, and through the presentation of information online, can aim to reach large numbers of people. In addition, Article 49 ensures that within 6 months of a

---

<sup>242</sup> P. R. Suanzes, *El Mundo*, "La Derecha Dura de Meloni Vence en Italia y Sacude la Unión Europea", (2022), <https://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2022/09/25/6330b752fc6c8362268b4575.html>.

<sup>243</sup> European Commission, "Communicating Cohesion Policy in 2021-2027", p. 8.

programme being approved, the local authority should create significant online visibility.<sup>244</sup> It cannot be said with certainty whether this will prove effective, but it definitely points toward the effort made by the EU toward greatly improving the visibility of its policies in order to increase public awareness. It further shows that money alone is insignificant if it does not help improve the EU's image and reduce Euroscepticism. An online presence must be definitely be maintained and the EU mark should be placed on all of its redistributive policies in the most visible way possible.

So far, the thesis has consistently demonstrated that the EU provides substantial financial contributions and is currently working toward improving visibility of its policies as a means of increasing public awareness and therefore garner support. It must be recognized that low public awareness is the only factor at play. As previously determined, a factor that can be pointed to is administration, which often does a poor job at communicating to citizens the efforts made by the EU. When analyzing the case of money alone being insufficient in Italy, it can be said that much of the blame can fall on national and regional administrative figures. This does take away responsibility from the EU, with the problems in implementation falling elsewhere. As identified in an investigation carried out by Fidrmuc, Hulényi and Börke (2019), money is insufficient, and a lack of visibility and awareness of EU policies creates Euroscepticism, when redistributive policies should instead work toward reducing it.<sup>245</sup> Chapter IV exposed how in Italy, a lack of efficient usage implementation of the structural funds has failed to breach regional gaps. It can be said that the PNRR has recently presented Italy with a chance to redeem this and put an unprecedented amount of funds to effective use. As a new measure introduced in the wake of the pandemic, it has received greater media coverage than the standard structural funds that are regularly received, and there is therefore greater public attention. Notably, this could lead to there being awareness of the support provided by the EU, which could lead to an increase in support over the next few years. It can therefore be said that the PNRR might become the exception to EU redistributive policies when it comes to visibility. Overall it can be said that the EU falls short of its objectives of territorial cohesion due to the fact that money alone proves insufficient, and its poor usage at a national and regional level can account for poor results and a prevalence of Euroscepticism. The case of Italy, most notably in the context of the latest general elections, is a clear indication of this sentiment that is currently also shared across most of the EU.

---

<sup>244</sup> European Commission, "Communicating Cohesion Policy in 2021-2027", p. 18.

<sup>245</sup> Fidrmuc, Hulényi & Tunali, "Can Money Buy EU Love?", pp. 12-13.

### 5.3 Cohesion policy and Euroscepticism are not definitively linked

The thesis was based around the idea that Euroscepticism and cohesion policy are linked in some capacity, as EU redistributive policies can undoubtedly act as a mitigating factor and not a trigger for Euroscepticism. The Commission itself states that its regional policy aims to improve the EU's public image, thus reducing Euroscepticism, and there are a multitude of academic texts that have been published recently on the topic. It can be said that regional distribution can go a long way toward influencing positive perceptions of the EU and even though it is often done in an indirect way, reduce feelings of discontent. The case study of Italy is also an example of how, when there is a general lack of awareness or dissatisfaction with EU policies, there can be a significant fall in support. At the same time however, it must be recognized that there are a number of other factors at play and that the relationship between the two is not an exclusive one. Importantly, Baimbridge (2018), notes that while preserving long-term roots, Euroscepticism was catapulted to the forefront of the political debate of the EU by economic events such as the Eurozone crisis, sovereign debt and austerity crisis. In addition to this there are also external factors to consider such as the refugee crisis and threats to democracy in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>246</sup> These are all events that occurred in the mid to late 2000s and coincide with the emergence of Euroscepticism as a prevalent topic within academic debate. It can in fact be stated that Euroscepticism has commonly been exacerbated by sudden and unforeseen factors and only to a lesser extent by elements like EU redistribution of funding which, in contrast, has remained consistent throughout. Batory (2018) also identifies that when the states of the Eastern Enlargement were preparing for accession, there were issues of concern being brought up as a disadvantage, whilst the positive benefits of cohesion policy were seen as the main advantage of membership.<sup>247</sup> It must be said therefore that rising sentiments of Euroscepticism have mainly been provoked by external factors and the EU's subsequent response to these, whilst cohesion policy has generally been seen as an overall benefit for integration.

In contrast to this, one of the greatest drivers of Euroscepticism is the perception that EU integration forfeits a great amount of national control. This can be traced back to the 1990s, where important steps were taken toward furthering integration, also coinciding with cohesion policy beginning to truly take its current form. Romano (2018) notes that Italian Euroscepticism

---

<sup>246</sup> M. Baimbridge, Ed. Leruth, Startin & Usherwood, *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*, p. 427.

<sup>247</sup> A. Batory, Ed. Leruth, Startin & Usherwood, *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*, p. 261.

differs from that in Britain and Germany where there were fears of a “super-state” or mismanagement of the Euro respectively, with Italy mainly being worried by a potential loss of sovereignty.<sup>248</sup> This is not unique to the Italian case however and a general loss of national control is a cause for concern across many of Europe’s Eurosceptic parties. Whilst cohesion policy does forfeit a level of national authority to the supranational level, it can be claimed that there has been displeasure with the way the EU has directed other economic policies of its Member States, particularly in response to the Eurozone crisis. It can also be claimed that criticisms for cohesion policy have been gradually reduced in recent times, with disapproval of the EU mainly being directed toward events that occurred post-2008. Tömmel (2016) reports that while there was criticism in the early 1990s, the prospect of enlargement made redistributive policies something essential for the EU, which gradually became more accepted as the original Member States became greater beneficiaries.<sup>249</sup> It can be argued that, while public awareness may not be as high as it could be, influential figures at governmental level are conscious of the benefits that can be reaped from EU membership. This includes regional redistribution of funds, which means that overall, Euroscepticism is not strongly derived from dissatisfaction with cohesion policy.

What can be taken away from the investigation, is that cohesion policy still has an important role to play when it comes to the reduction of Euroscepticism. As noted by Hobolt and De Vries (2016), while events such as the Eurozone crisis have led to criticism of the EU, the desire for redistributive regional policies across the East and South of Europe have allowed for support to remain relatively high.<sup>250</sup> This suggests that even when there are factors that provoke significant increases in Euroscepticism, cohesion policy does remain one of the policies of the EU that warrants support from citizens and is seen as an overall benefit even when the rest of the aspects of being an EU member are brought into question. The relationship between the two has been justified from the start of the investigation but it is inaccurate to claim that EU regional distribution of funds plays a direct role in shaping Euroscepticism. There are in fact other factors at play and, in certain cases, people can manifest feelings of Euroscepticism without losing overall support of the EU. It can therefore be confidently said that Euroscepticism comes about as a result of a multitude of factors and EU distributive policies, though influential, cannot play a direct role in shaping it. The Italian case undoubtedly plays an

---

<sup>248</sup> Romano, “Italy’s Euroscepticism: a Case of Victimhood and a Tale of Missed Opportunity”, p. 3.

<sup>249</sup> I. Tömmel, Ed. Piattoni & Polverari, *Handbook on Cohesion Policy in the EU*, p. 109.

<sup>250</sup> Hobolt, & De Vries, “Public Support for European Integration”, p. 419.

underlying role in determining that levels of Euroscepticism are varied. Speaking on behalf of center-right party Forza Italia, Berlusconi maintains a pro-European stance, whilst instead calling for the “restauration” of the EU.<sup>251</sup> Pointing to factors such as the unanimity of votes and a lack of a common foreign policy, there is importantly no criticism directed toward redistributive policies in his discourse. This positive view of the funds is also shared by the victorious party in the 2022 elections, Brothers of Italy. Whilst analyzing the elections in an interview with “Il Fatto Quotidiano”, journalist Peter Gomez notes how the outcome in favor of the center-right will most likely lead to a less conservative government than what was first advertised, noting how the Euroscepticism was more centered on reforming the EU.<sup>252</sup> This once more the notion that the Euroscepticism within Italy is “soft” and there is a general appreciation for the funding received by the EU to be allocated toward regional convergence.

While the connection between Euroscepticism and cohesion policy had been analyzed throughout the thesis, it was from the point of the EU as a whole, with reference to specific cases presented throughout. The decision to allocate an entire Chapter to the case study of Italy was not a random one. Referring to the case of Italy helped confirm some of the information that had been gathered, such as the importance of public awareness and the role cohesion policy plays in swaying Euroscepticism. This final Chapter connected the remaining dots and definitively accounted for the connection that exists between EU regional distribution policies and Euroscepticism. This bore in mind both the EU as a whole as well as Italy as an individual Member State. It presented some of the main conclusions reached, fully determining the strength of the connection between the two and reporting the value that Italy can have in providing insights. The empirical research presented in the analysis of the Italian case was of paramount importance to be able to provide three main conclusions. The first point discussed was the notion that the EU currently relies heavily on support and cohesion policy is one of the ways that it attempts to gather favor with the public. Euroscepticism can be seen as a reflection of public displeasure with the EU overall, with regional distribution of funding being used as an indirect means of reducing discontent. Related to this, one of the most prevalent notions is that of there not being sufficient visibility of EU policies, with lower levels of public awareness generally coinciding with higher levels of Euroscepticism. Secondly, the point must be reiterated that funding alone is not sufficient and as has been identified by renowned political

---

<sup>251</sup> Rai Play, “Politiche ‘22”.

<sup>252</sup> P. Gomez & D. Pretini, *Youtube*, “Elezioni Politiche, i Dati Definitivi: l’Analisi di Peter Gomez”, Uploaded by: Il Fatto Quotidiano, (2022), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Btrl16tADzQ>.

scientists such as Kiel and Diermier (2022), who state that money cannot buy love.<sup>253</sup> This is where the case of Italy proved most enlightening, showing how cultural and institutional barriers can prove almost insurmountable when it comes to obtaining effective regional distribution. Finally, it can be concluded that Euroscepticism is mainly born out of displeasure with the EU's handling of the economic and migratory crises and that cohesion policy is in fact seen as a factor justifying overall support of the EU.

---

<sup>253</sup> Bayerlein & Diermeier, "Exchanging Money for Love? A Regional Analysis of EU Cohesion Policy on Euroscepticism", p. 20.

## Overall Assessment and Findings

The investigation was born out of the identification of Euroscepticism being present in areas that have been heavy recipients of EU redistributive policies. As cohesion policy can be seen as a mitigating factor rather than a trigger for Euroscepticism, the overall objective of the thesis was to explore the linkage between the two. It began with an initial literature review that found Euroscepticism to be almost universally recognized as a term officially coined by Taggart in a 1998 article, that has later manifested itself at an increasing rate across academic research, particularly in the past decade.<sup>254</sup> Prior to the Eurozone crisis of 2008, entering the EU was seen as absolutely beneficial, with great economic advantages to be drawn from acceding. This significantly changed with the implementation of measures of austerity and the various bailouts, particularly in Greece, which, according to Startin (2018) rendered it easy for the UK to perceive the negative effects of integration.<sup>255</sup> The advent of Brexit undoubtedly was an important one and has created uncertainty regarding other Member States potentially following suit. It can be therefore claimed that while the EU was traditionally an attractive prospect for candidate countries, it has recently turned into an entity that Member States, with varying degrees of satisfaction, can be critical of. Cohesion policy is without doubt one of the ways through which the EU is attempting to correct this, by implementing visible policies with the aim of improving its image. Whereas the significance of public opinion for the EU was in the past largely ignored, in more recent decades the accelerated process of integration has meant that maintaining a positive image has become essential.<sup>256</sup> The initial research carried out before the drafting of the thesis determined the potential for a link being drawn between Euroscepticism and cohesion policy, thoroughly justifying the investigation being carried out.

Central to the thesis was the deep dive that was taken into the case study of Italy, which was instrumental in providing insights to the overall elements being explored. The country was selected carefully for two main reasons. Firstly, it has developed a long-lasting relationship as both a net recipient and contributor to the structural funds, being therefore intrinsically linked to cohesion policy. Secondly, recent national and European elections have exposed the rising levels of Euroscepticism within the country. When also factoring in the general elections held

---

<sup>254</sup> Taggart, "A Touchstone of Dissent: Euroscepticism in Contemporary Western European Party Systems", pp. 363-388.

<sup>255</sup> N. Startin, Ed. Leruth, Startin & Usherwood, *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*, p. 462.

<sup>256</sup> Hobolt, & De Vries, "Public Support for European Integration", p. 426.

on September 25<sup>th</sup>, it cannot be denied that Italy is one of the most relevant countries that can be examined, justifying its selection as a case study. As noted by New York Times journalist Erlanger (2022), the results mark the first time Italy has been led by a far right-wing leader since Mussolini, which is something that will undoubtedly concern the EU.<sup>257</sup> This is especially true when considering that the views of the center-right coalition also coincide with those of many parties across Europe. While certain conclusions were reached in the previous Chapters, the section dedicated to Italy was instrumental in highlighting an individual case study. The first of these was that the EU relies on public support in order to justify its existence. It can be said that the amount of investment provided to Italy is a testament to the EU's desire to gain favor from the general public, which the past few elections have shown to not have happened. This ties in well to the second main conclusion, which is that money cannot buy support. The case study of Italy is a perfect example of this and indicative that an increase in funding does not automatically lead to a rise in support and subsequent fall of Euroscepticism. In addition to low public awareness being a driver of reduced support, the case of Italy is instrumental in highlighting the role that administrative and institutional barriers can play in reducing the value of money made available. This has been manifested through failures to effectively implement cohesion policy, whilst the recent introduction of the PNRR could be a chance for Italy to effectively implement EU funds and work toward reducing Euroscepticism. This is however a notion that will only be determined with time, as the management of this most recent form of EU support has been cause for significant political debate.<sup>258</sup> The third conclusion reached with insights from the case of Italy is that there is not a strong direct correlation between Euroscepticism and cohesion policy. There are in fact a multitude of factors that are at play, that influence Euroscepticism within Italy and beyond, such as dissatisfaction with the EU's handling of the economic and migratory crises as well as the repercussions of Enlargement. An analysis of the recent victory of the center-right in Italy points toward dissatisfaction with EU policies in this regard, whilst there has been overall support of redistributive policies.

When connecting this all back to the initial observation of Euroscepticism being present in areas highly funded by the EU, it needs to be concluded that there is therefore not a direct correlation that exists between Euroscepticism and cohesion policy. Whilst the implementation of cohesion policy does have the ability to improve the EU's public image, it cannot be

---

<sup>257</sup> S. Erlanger, *The New York Times*, "Europe Looks at Italy and Meloni with Caution and Trepidation", (2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/26/world/europe/european-union-italy-meloni.html>.

<sup>258</sup> Conte, "I Soldi del PNRR per Ferrovie e Bonus Edilizi: Finora l'Italia ha Speso Solo 11,7 Miliardi".



concluded that cohesion policy alone can reduce Euroscepticism, as manifested by the persistent support for Eurosceptic parties in areas funded by the EU. This is mainly because there are a multitude of factors at play, not a single correlation between the two. One of the viewpoints that can be identified as most significant is that of De Vries (2018), who notes how the EU is currently in the need of upholding its public image, whilst also coming under fire from Eurosceptics.<sup>259</sup> In spite of this, it must be noted that there are also positive elements to take from the investigation. For example, the Italian case is instrumental in proving that a comparison cannot be drawn with Brexit, and while the new government may be Eurosceptic, it cannot be considered to be “hard”. Italians who oppose the EU do not want to leave, but rather call for reform of the EU, whilst the populist movement can be said to have used Euroscepticism as a vote winner, assuming a more moderate stance in Parliament. In this sense it will be pivotal to analyze the future movements of the winning coalition in Italy in this regard. Whilst the analysis of Italy is not sufficient to make an overall assessment of the EU, it can be claimed that cohesion policy is an instrument through which the EU can improve its public image.

Critically speaking, the thesis does not break new ground, but rather reports the ever-increasing literature exploring the connection between Euroscepticism and EU redistributive policies. It mainly identifies the current academic debate that narrows in on the importance of maintaining visibility and continuing to implement measures to reduce regional disparities, as a way the EU can hope to counter Euroscepticism. When analyzing the entirety of the EU, it drew conclusions similar to those of Bayerlein and Diermeier (2022), who identify that visible support is sufficient to reduce sentiments of Euroscepticism, and that even Eurosceptic governments gladly make use of the structural funds.<sup>260</sup> Italy is undoubtedly a valuable case study that justifies this stance and it can be said that the “soft” Eurosceptic view that the current government maintains, may be mitigated by more effective cohesion policy implementation, as well as administrative and institutional reforms at the national level. In addition, greater communication from the national government to its citizens could prove pivotal in improving the EU’s public image. The management of the structural funds and PNRR from the new government in the coming months and years will undoubtedly prove pivotal when determining the development in the connection between Euroscepticism and cohesion policy.

---

<sup>259</sup> De Vries, *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration*, p. 4.

<sup>260</sup> Bayerlein & Diermeier, “Exchanging Money for Love? A Regional Analysis of EU Cohesion Policy on Euroscepticism”, p. 20.

## Bibliography

- Ed. Albertazzi, Daniele & Vampa, Davide. *Populism and New Patterns of Political Competition in Western Europe*. (2021). New York, USA: Routledge.
- Ed. Bachtler, John, Berkowitz, Peter, Hardy, Sally & Muravska, Tatyana. *EU Cohesion Policy: Reassessing Performance and Direction*. (2017). New York, USA: Routledge.
- Bachtler, John & Mendez, Carlos. "European Identity and Citizen Attitudes to Cohesion Policy: What do We Know?". Published: 2016. Available at: [http://www.cohesify.eu/downloads/Cohesify\\_Research\\_Paper1.pdf](http://www.cohesify.eu/downloads/Cohesify_Research_Paper1.pdf)
- Barca, Federico. *An Agenda for a Reformed Cohesion Policy: a Place-Based Approach to Meeting European Union Challenges and Expectations*. Published: April, 2009. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009\\_2014/documents/regi/dv/barca\\_report/\\_barca\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/regi/dv/barca_report/_barca_report_en.pdf).
- Basile, Linda, Cliento, Marco & Conti, Nicolò. *Partecipazione e Confitto: The Open Journal of Sociopolitical Studies, Volume 14, Issue 1*. "The Coronavirus Crisis as Catalyst for EU Legitimacy? Italian Public Opinion and the EU During the Pandemic". Published: March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Available at: <http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/paco/article/view/24022/20012>.
- Bayerlein, Michael & Diermeier, Matthias. *Kiel Working Paper No. 2219*. "Exchanging Money for Love? A Regional Analysis of EU Cohesion Policy on Euroscepticism". Published: April 27, 2022. Available at: [https://www.ifw-kiel.de/fileadmin/Dateiverwaltung/IfW-Publications/-ifw/Kiel\\_Working\\_Paper/2022/KWP\\_2219\\_Exchanging\\_Money\\_for\\_Love\\_/KWP\\_2219](https://www.ifw-kiel.de/fileadmin/Dateiverwaltung/IfW-Publications/-ifw/Kiel_Working_Paper/2022/KWP_2219_Exchanging_Money_for_Love_/KWP_2219).
- Bijsmans, Patrick. *Journal of European Integration, Volume 33, Issue 3*. "The Eurozone Crisis and Euroscepticism in the European Press". Published: March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/07036337.2020.1740698?needAccess=true>.
- Borin, Alessandro, Macchi, Elisa & Mancini, Michele. *University of Zurich Working Paper No. 289*. "EU Transfers and Euroscepticism: Can't Buy Me Love?". Published: June, 2018. Available at: <https://www.econ.uzh.ch/static/wp/econwp289.pdf>.
- Borz, Gabriela, Brandenburg, Heinz & Mendez, Carlos. *European Union Politics 2022, Volume 23, Issue 2*. "The Impact of EU Cohesion Policy on European Identity: a Comparative Analysis of EU Regions". Published: June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epub/10.1177/14651165221076444>.

- Brack, Natalie & Startin, Nicholas. *International Political Science Review 2015, Volume 36, Issue 3*. “Introduction: Euroscepticism, from the Margins to the Mainstream”. Published: June, 2015. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/reader/10.1177/0192512115577231>.
- Calenda, Carlo. *Twitter*. Published: October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022 at 20:02. Available at: <https://twitter.com/CarloCalenda/status/1577720797426323463>.
- Casula, Mattia. *Economic Growth and Cohesion Policy Implementation in Italy and Spain*. (2020). Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Charron, Nicholas & Bauhr, Monika. *Investigaciones Regionales- Journal of Regional Research, Volume 46, Issue 1*. “Linkages and Channels Between Cohesion Policy and European Identity”. Published: December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Available at: [https://investigacionesregionales.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/04/1.-Charron\\_vf.pdf](https://investigacionesregionales.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/04/1.-Charron_vf.pdf)
- Chiellino, Giuseppe. *Youtube*. “La Programmazione dei Fondi Europei di Coesione 2021-2027”. Uploaded by: Il Sole 24 ORE on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-yVt\\_Wgleo8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-yVt_Wgleo8).
- Conte, Valentina. *La Repubblica*. “I Soldi del PNRR per Ferrovie e Bonus Edilizi: Finora l’Italia ha Speso Solo 11,7 Miliardi”. Published: October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Available at: [https://www.repubblica.it/economia/2022/10/07/news/pnrr\\_spesa\\_progetti-368864327/](https://www.repubblica.it/economia/2022/10/07/news/pnrr_spesa_progetti-368864327/).
- Conti, Nicolò, Marangoni, Francesco & Verzichelli, Luca. *South European Society and Politics*. “Euroscepticism in Italy from the Onset of the Crisis: Tired of Europe?”. Published: June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2020.1757885>
- Conti, Nicolò & Memoli, Vincenzo. *Citizens, Europe and the Media: Have New Media Made Citizens More Eurosceptical?* (2016). Chad, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Conti, Nicolò, Memoli, Vincenzo & Di Mauro, Danilo. *Italian Journal of Electoral Studies, Volume 85, Issue 1*. “Euroscepticism in Italy Among Party Elites and the Public”. Published: April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.36253/qoe-11552>.
- Crescenzi, Riccardo, Di Cataldo, Marco & Giua, Mara. *Regional Science and Urban Economics, Volume 84*. “It’s Not About the Money. EU Funds, Local Opportunities and Euroscepticism”. Published: June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Available at: <https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S0166046219304296?token=F3E236806AD01C3ABB5C1223CC13864071AC37387935E9F2D37995D3C5E0D6E758AA0405A666985A23DF646493A092C0&originRegion=eu-west-1&originCreation=20220529154930>.

- Cunico, Giovanni, Aivazidou, Eirini & Mollona, Edoardo. *European Journal of Operational Research, Volume 289, Issue 2*. “Building a Dynamic Theory of Citizens’ Awareness of European Cohesion Policy Interventions”. Published: July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Available at: <https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S0377221720306287?token=626FD18306DCFC814D956F4E94D2592D0E36E0823A061A18A859B2BF4AF7FAC75A9035F8B518168F171025C85D2EF2B3&originRegion=eu-west-1&originCreation=20220728190618>.
- Dabrowski, Marcin, Stead, Dominic & Mashhoodi, Bardia. *Regional Science Policy & Practice, Volume 11, Issue 4*, “EU Cohesion Policy Can’t Buy Me Love? Exploring the Regional Determinants of EU Image”. Published: August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Available at: <https://rsaiconnect.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/rsp3.12237>
- Darvas, Zsolt, Collin, Antoine Mathieu, Mazza, Jan & Midoes, Catarina. *Policy Department Director General for Budgetary Affairs*. “Effectiveness of Cohesion Policy: Learning from the Project Characteristics that Produce the Best Results”. Published: April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Available at: <https://www.bruegel.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/cohesionpolicyep.pdf>.
- De Vries, Catherine, Eunice. *Eurocepticism and the Future of European Integration*. (2018). Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- De Vries, Catherine, Eunice & Hoffman, Isabel. *Eupinions*. “The Eurobarometer Controversy: EU Popularity, Response Rates and One Journalist’s Critique”. Published: January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Available at: <https://eupinions.eu/de/blog/the-eurobarometer-controversy>.
- Di Cairo, Paolo & Fratesi, Ugo. *Journey of Regional Science*. “One Policy, Different Effects: Estimating the Region-Specific Impacts of EU Cohesion Policy”. Published: August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/jors.12566>.
- Di Matteo, Dante & Mariotti, Ilaria. *Regional Science Policy and Practice, Volume 13, Issue 2*. “Italian Discontent and Right-Wing Populism: Determinants, Geographies, Patterns”. Published: September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Available at: [https://rsaiconnect.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/rsp3.12350?saml\\_referre](https://rsaiconnect.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/rsp3.12350?saml_referre)  
r.
- Diamanti, Ilvo. *La Repubblica*. “L’Euroscetticismo Italiano”. Published: October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Available at: [https://www.repubblica.it/commenti/2021/10/25/news/l\\_euroscetticismo\\_italiano-323635667/](https://www.repubblica.it/commenti/2021/10/25/news/l_euroscetticismo_italiano-323635667/).
- Dijkstra, Lewis & Rodríguez-Pose, Andrés. *Regional Studies, Volume 55, Issue 2*, “Does Cohesion Policy Reduce EU Discontent and Eurocepticism?”. (2020). Taylor & Francis Group, London, UK.
- Dijkstra, Lewis, Poelman, Hugo & Rodríguez-Pose, Andrés. *Regional Studies, Volume 54*, “The Geography of EU Discontent”. (2019). Taylor & Francis Group, London, UK.

- Draghi, Mario. *Youtube*. “Il Presidente Draghi Illustra le Risorse Destinate al Sud”. Uploaded by: Ufficiostampa Carfagna on April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1AU6Pt1PD8>.
- Erlanger, Steven. *The New York Times*. “Europe Looks at Italy and Meloni with Caution and Trepidation”. Published: September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/26/world/europe/european-union-italy-meloni.html>.
- European Commission. “Available Budget of Cohesion Policy 2021-2027”. Published: 2021. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/funding/available-budget/](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/available-budget/).
- European Commission. “Flash Eurobarometer 497: Citizens’ Awareness and Perception of EU Regional Policy”. Published: October, 2021. Available at: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2286>.
- European Commission. “Communicating Cohesion Policy in 2021-2027”. Published: December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/informing/communicating\\_cohesion\\_policy\\_2127\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/informing/communicating_cohesion_policy_2127_en.pdf).
- European Commission. “EU Cohesion Policy: €42.7 Billion for Italy to Support Sustainable Growth, Employment and Modernization While Reducing Regional Disparities”. Published: July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/newsroom/news/2022/07/19-07-2022-eu-cohesion-policy-eur42-7-billion-for-italy-to-support-sustainable-growth-employment-and-modernisation-while-reducing-regional-disparities](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/news/2022/07/19-07-2022-eu-cohesion-policy-eur42-7-billion-for-italy-to-support-sustainable-growth-employment-and-modernisation-while-reducing-regional-disparities).
- European Commission. “Europe for Citizens Infographic”. Published: February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/infographics\\_final\\_04102019.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/infographics_final_04102019.pdf).
- European Commission. “European Structural and Investment Funds, Country Data for: Italy”. Published: January, 2022. Available at: <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/countries/IT>.
- European Commission. “Public Fibre Network Brings High-Speed Internet to Sicily”. Published: September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/projects/europe/public-fiber-network-brings-high-speed-internet-to-sicily](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/projects/europe/public-fiber-network-brings-high-speed-internet-to-sicily).
- European Commission. “ROP Puglia ERDF ESF”. Published: 2014. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/atlas/programmes/2014-2020/italy/2014it16m2op002](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/atlas/programmes/2014-2020/italy/2014it16m2op002).
- European Commission. “Statistical Regions in the European Union and Partner Countries: NUTS and Statistical Regions 2021”. Published: June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3859598/10967554/KS-GQ-20-092-EN-N.pdf/9d57ae79-3ee7-3c14-da3e-34726da385cf?t=1591285035000>.

- Eurostat. “Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at Current Market Prices by NUTS 2 Regions”. Published: April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Available at: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=nama\\_10r\\_2gdp](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=nama_10r_2gdp).
- Fidrmuc, Jan, Hulényi, Martin & Tunali, Çigdem Börke. *European Journal of Political Economy, Volume 60*. “Can Money Buy EU Love?”. Published: December 2019. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0176268018304555>
- Ed. Fitzgibbon, John, Leruth, Benjamin & Startin, Nick. *Euroscepticism as a Transnational and Pan-European Phenomenon: the Emergence of a New Sphere of Opposition*. (2017). New York, USA: Routledge.
- Fligstein, Neil. *Euro-Clash: The EU, European Identity and the Future of Europe*. (2008). New York, USA: Oxford University Press.
- Gomez, Peter & Pretini, Diego. *Youtube*. “Elezioni Politiche, i Dati Definitivi: l’Analisi di Peter Gomez”. Uploaded by: Il Fatto Quotidiano. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Btr116tADzQ>.
- Ed. Harsen, Robert & Spiering, Menno. *Euroscepticism: Party Politics, National Identity and European Integration*. (2004). New York, USA: Rodopi.
- Hobolt, Sara, Binzer & De Vries, Catherine, Eunice. *Annual Review of Political Science, Volume 19*. “Public Support for European Integration”. Published: March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016. Available at: <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev-polisci-042214-044157>.
- Iglesias, Pablo. Translation: Fox, Lorna, Scott. *Politics in a Time of Crisis: Podemos and the Future of European Democracy*. (2015). London, UK: Verso.
- Ispettorato Generale per i Rapporti Finanziari con l’Unione Europea. “Monitoraggio Politiche di Coesione Programmazione 2014-2020”. Published: October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021. Available at: [https://www.rgs.mef.gov.it/\\_Documenti/VERSIONE-I/attivita\\_istituzionali/monitoraggio/rapporti\\_finanziari\\_ue/monitoraggio\\_politiche\\_di\\_coesione\\_2014-2020/2021-10-31/Bollettino-Monitoraggio-Politica-di-Coesione\\_Situazione-al-31-ottobre-2021f](https://www.rgs.mef.gov.it/_Documenti/VERSIONE-I/attivita_istituzionali/monitoraggio/rapporti_finanziari_ue/monitoraggio_politiche_di_coesione_2014-2020/2021-10-31/Bollettino-Monitoraggio-Politica-di-Coesione_Situazione-al-31-ottobre-2021f).
- Ed. Jessoula, Matteo, Magni, Beatrice, Riva, Nicola & Ferrera, Maurizio. *Right Wing Populism and the Welfare State: a Five Countries Comparison*. (2019). Torino, Italy: Centro Einaudi.
- Krausova, Tereza & Walsh, John. *European Commission*. “2021-2027 Cohesion Policy EU Budget Allocations”. Published: July 2021. Available at: <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/stories/s/2021-2027-EU-allocations-available-for-programming/2w8s-ci3y>.
- La Repubblica. *Elezioni Europee 2019*. “Elezioni Europee – Risultati – Regione Puglia”. Accessed: March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Available at: <https://elezioni.repubblica.it/2019/europee/italia/italia-meridionale/puglia/>.



- Leonardi, Robert. *Cohesion Policy in the European Union: the Building of Europe*. (2005). New York, USA: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Ed. Leruth, Benjamin, Startin, Nicholas & Usherwood, Simon. *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*. (2018). New York, USA: Routledge.
- Leydesdorff, Loet. *The Evolutionary Dynamics of Discursive Knowledge: Communication-Theoretical Perspectives of an Empirical Philosophy of Science*. (2021). Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Magnani, Alberto. *Il Sole 24 Ore*. “Da Vox a Morawiecki, chi sono gli Alleati in Europa di Meloni”. Published: September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Available at: <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/da-vox-morawiecki-chi-sono-alleati-europa-meloni-AEEjdL3B>.
- Medve, Flora. *Statista*. “Poll on Familiarity with EU Co-Financed Projects in Hungarians’ Own Living Area 2021”. Published: October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1272640/hungary-familiarity-with-eu-co-financed-projects-improving-own-living-area/>.
- Minister for Southern Italy and Territorial Cohesion. “European Structural Funds, the 2021-2027 Programming Cycle in Italy”. Published: July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Available at: <https://www.ministroperilsud.gov.it/en/news/european-structural-funds-the-2021-2027-programming-cycle-in-italy/>.
- Ministero delle Politiche Agricole Alimentari e Forestali. “CLLD – Community Led Local Development”. Published: 2016. Available at: <https://www.politicheagricole.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/8740>.
- Molle, William. *European Cohesion Policy*. (2008). New York, USA: Routledge.
- Ed. Musialkowska, Ida, Potluka, Oto & Piotr, Idczak. *Successes & Failures in EU Cohesion Policy: An Introduction to EU Cohesion Policy in Eastern, Central and Southern Europe*. (2020). Warsaw, Poland: De Gruyter.
- Panorama Stories from Regional and Urban Policy. “Interview with Marc Lemaître”. Published October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/newsroom/panorama/2021/10/13-10-2021-i-am-very-happy-to-say-cohesion-policy-was-one-of-europe-s-first-responders-to-the-crisis-and-it-is-now-a-driver-of-recovery](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/panorama/2021/10/13-10-2021-i-am-very-happy-to-say-cohesion-policy-was-one-of-europe-s-first-responders-to-the-crisis-and-it-is-now-a-driver-of-recovery).
- Ed. Piattoni, Simona & Polverari, Laura. *Handbook on Cohesion Policy in the EU*. (2016). Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Pinto, Luca. *Italian Political Science Review, Volume 50, Issue 2*. “The 2018 Italian General Election: a ‘New Italy’ or a ‘Dead End’”. (2020). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

- Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri. “Il Presidente Draghi Incontra la Presidente della Commissione UE Von der Leyden”. Published: June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021. Available at: <https://www.governo.it/it/media/il-presidente-draghi-incontra-la-presidente-della-commissione-ue-von-der-leyen/17233>.
- Quintieri, Beniamino & Stamato, Giovanni. *Regional Economy, Voume 5, Issue 3*. “Qualità delle Istituzioni e Politiche di Coesione nel Mezzogiorno”. Published: September 2021. Available at: [https://www.regionaleconomy.eu/RePEc/pdf/5Q3/q5\\_3\\_2021\\_3-13.pdf](https://www.regionaleconomy.eu/RePEc/pdf/5Q3/q5_3_2021_3-13.pdf).
- Rai Play. *Porta a Porta*. “Politiche ‘22”. Broadcast: September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022. Available at: <https://www.raiplay.it/video/2022/09/Porta-a-Porta-Politiche-22----22092022-22d15dec-6f11-4843-8f5d-c8d087a7c318.html>.
- Redazione ANSA. “Dall’UE 42,7 Miliardi all’Italia per 2021-2027”. Published: 28<sup>th</sup> of July 2022. Available at: [https://www.ansa.it/europa/notizie/la\\_tua\\_europa/notizie/2022/07/19/da-ue-427-miliardi-a-italia-per-politica-di-coesione-2021-2027\\_5e8a9f79-9f8b-436e-b8c5-afe0f58e40b0.html](https://www.ansa.it/europa/notizie/la_tua_europa/notizie/2022/07/19/da-ue-427-miliardi-a-italia-per-politica-di-coesione-2021-2027_5e8a9f79-9f8b-436e-b8c5-afe0f58e40b0.html).
- Romano, Beda. *Notre Europe*. “Italy’s Euroscepticism: a Case of Victimhood and a Tale of Missed Opportunity”. Published: March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Available at: <https://institutdelors.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ItalysEuroscepticism-Romano-March18-1-1.pdf>.
- Serricchio, Fabio, Tsakatika, Myrto & Quaglia, Luca. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies, Volume 51, Issue 1*. “Euroscepticism and the Global Financial Crisis”. (2012). Oxford, United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Sky TG 24. “Elezioni, la Ripartizione dei Seggi alle Camere e al Senato”. Published: September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Available at: <https://tg24.sky.it/politica/2022/09/26/risultati-elezioni-ripartizione-seggi-camera-senato#05>.
- Suanzes, Pablo, Rodríguez. *El Mundo*. “La Derecha Dura de Meloni Vence en Italia y Sacude la Unión Europea”. Published: September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Available at: <https://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2022/09/25/6330b752fc6c8362268b4575.html>.
- Taggart, Paul. *European Journal of Political Research, Vol. 33, Issue 3*. “A Touchstone of Dissent: Euroscepticism in Contemporary Western European Party Systems”. (1998). New York, USA: Springer.
- Terracciano, Brian & Graziano, Paolo Roberto. *Regional & Federal Studies, Volume 26, Issue 3*. “EU Cohesion Policy Implementation and Administrative Capacities: Insights from Italian Regions”. (2016). Taylor & Francis Online.
- Tito, Claudio. *La Repubblica*. “Quei Cinque no di Fratelli d’Italia al Recovery che l’Europa non Dimentica”. Published: August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Available at: [https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2022/08/03/news/quei\\_cinque\\_no\\_di\\_fratelli\\_ditalia\\_al\\_recovery\\_che\\_leuropa\\_non\\_dimentica-360315028/](https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2022/08/03/news/quei_cinque_no_di_fratelli_ditalia_al_recovery_che_leuropa_non_dimentica-360315028/).



Vasquez, Eleonora. *EURACTIV*. “Italy’s Right Dials Down Anti-EU Rhetoric as they Prepare for Power”. Published: September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Available at: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/elections/news/italys-right-dials-down-anti-eu-rhetoric-as-they-prepare-for-power/>.

Von Der Leyden, Ursula. *Youtube*. “Keynote Address at Princeton University by President Von Der Leyden – UNGA”. Uploaded by: European Commission on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2022. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bKUB-oafe9E>.

Westphal, Kerstin. *European Parliament Report 2016/2326 (INI)*, “REPORT on Building Blocks for a Post-2020 EU Cohesion Policy”. Published: May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2017-0202\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2017-0202_EN.html).