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## The Dynamics of Public Opinion toward European Integration, 1973-93

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What are the aggregate dynamics of public support for European integration in the 12 EU member states? And how can they be explained? Given that mass support for integration varies both across time and across countries, the article tests the proposition that both types of variation can be explained with the help of national economic conditions, timing of entry into the Union, and length of membership in it. Using aggregate Eurobarometer polls for the period between 1973 and 1993, we find that all three factors have significant impacts on support for a united Europe. However, the results also indicate that length of membership in the EU is somewhat more important than economic performance. The paper spells out some of the possible ramifications of these results.

Public support for European integration has been in decline since 1991. It dropped from a high of 81% among EU<sup>1</sup> citizens in favor of efforts to unify Europe in 1991 to 73% in the spring of 1994; from a high of 72% who thought their country's membership in the EU was a good thing, to only 54% who still agreed in the spring of 1994; and from a high of 59% in 1991 who would regret the dissolution of the EU, to a mere 40% who still thought so in the fall of 1993 (Commission of the European Communities, 1993, 1994). This decline in enthusiasm for the integration process manifested itself on other fronts as well, as the Danes voted against the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty in a referendum in June of 1992, and in France — one of the founding members of the European Union — less than 51% of the voters approved of ratifying the Maastricht Treaty in October of 1992.<sup>2</sup>

European mass publics have become increasingly cognizant of the domestic consequences resulting from the European integration process (see, e.g. Janssen, 1991). As new policy initiatives have led to greater levels of involvement by the European Union (EU) in the way national governments formulate policy, the decisions made in Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg have started to affect the lives of ordinary citizens to an ever more direct and significant degree. Consequently, the EU has become a more important and salient issue on the domestic public agendas of the member states. Such changes are particularly serious because popular support has been crucial for the implementation of the far-reaching initiatives embodied in the Single European Act (SEA) signed in 1985 and the Maastricht Treaty signed in 1991. In fact, as the referenda on the SEA and on Maastricht held in Ireland, Denmark and France show, citizens have the ability and willingness to constrain, modify, or eventually forestall, the integration process. More generally, these developments seem to indicate that domestic politics and public opinion play a crucial role in the contemporary debate about the future of the Union on the eve of the intergovernmental conference scheduled for 1996 (van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996).

#### *Time, Timing and Domestic Economic Performance*

Although we have long known that there are significant variations in citizen support for European integration both across time and across countries, scholars have only recently begun to examine the determinants of public support in a more systematic fashion. Furthermore, for those interested in pushing European integration forward, it is important to take into account that Europe is difficult to unify if citizen support for integration is low or decreasing in some of the member states. What accounts for variations in popular support for European integration? This article seeks to answer this question by analyzing public support for the European unification process in general and public support for a country's membership in the European Union more specifically. We argue that temporal and cross-national variations in support for European integration are primarily influenced by three factors — domestic economic performance, time and circumstances surrounding a state's entry into the Union, and the length of time a country has been a member of the EU.

One of the prime selling points of European integration has been that membership will make the member states better off economically. After all, one of the major motivations for organizing the European Coal and Steel Community was the perceived economic benefits that could be derived from integrating industrial sectors crucial to a country's long-term economic

success. We posit that citizens weigh the benefits of the integration process in terms of how it will aid their own economy. Simply put, if the domestic economy is doing well, citizens look favorably upon the integration process. If it is doing poorly, they will view European integration in a more negative light, wondering why it is not improving their country's economic performance.

We also contend that the time a state enters the European integration process is a valuable predictor of support for European integration. We believe that those countries that joined the Union earliest had publics which were supportive of the integration process. This 'permissive consensus' allowed elites in these countries to create the European Community in the first place and push it forward from there on out (Rabier, 1989). In contrast, public opinion was negatively predisposed to integration in countries that joined in the mid-1970s, thus constraining elites' aspirations to join early with the original six. The countries joining in the 1980s are different still: they entered the Union late not because of a lack of enthusiasm for the EU as an organization, but because their membership was precluded by the other member states for political reasons. Below, we show that the original six have the highest consistent level of support for European integration, that the middle joiners have the lowest level of support and that the late joiners occupy an intermediate position.

Finally, we argue that joining the EU starts a domestic socialization process, which leads to greater awareness and appreciation of the benefits derived from integration, and the set of institutions making up the EU more generally, among the citizens of the European Union member states. Thus, we believe that as a result of such a socialization process in the EU member states, higher levels of support can be observed over time.

Following this introduction, we discuss why we believe aggregate trends in public opinion matter to understanding the European integration process. Next, we explore the work that has looked at public support for the European integration process. The article then examines the dynamics of public support for European integration across time and across countries on the basis of the most complete time-series examined to date. Subsequently, we test propositions about how domestic economic performance and time matter for the dynamics of public support for integration. Finally, we assess the significance of our findings in light of theories of integration and suggest avenues for future research.

#### *Public Opinion and European Integration*

Early functionalist theory, aimed at explaining and predicting the European integration process, did not consider public opinion a crucial ingredient

because the integration process was seen as an elite-driven venture in which popular opinion played only a minor role:

It is as impracticable as it is unnecessary to have recourse to general public opinion surveys, or even to surveys of specifically interested groups. . . . It suffices to single out and define the political elites in the participating countries, to study their reactions to integration and to assess changes in attitude on their part. (Haas, 1958: 17)

While this view sees public opinion as largely inconsequential to the integration process, other scholars go even further by challenging the notion that mass publics have meaningful attitudes toward the EU in the first place. Thus, it has been argued, for example, that citizens generally do not have consistent beliefs on policy issues in general, and on foreign policy in particular (Converse, 1964; Rosenau, 1960). With regard to public opinion toward European integration, this view would imply that the EU publics do not have consistent attitudes on EU matters, and thus should be disregarded altogether (Slater, 1983; see also Gaubatz, 1995).

Such perspectives greatly underestimate the importance of European publics in the integration process. Although public opinion may not be the driving force behind the integration process, it can affect its direction, speed and continuity as the referenda on Maastricht and among the new member states have shown. Yet, public opinion regarding European integration does not matter only by way of referenda. Elites' calculations about the potential gains and costs of integration must take public opinion into consideration at all times, unless the EU is not perceived as an issue by the public at all. In our view, no elite decision-maker is going to push integration if it means a domestic backlash that could push them from office. Thus, we would argue that mass opinion matters to the integration process, and that it matters in the aggregate.<sup>3</sup>

Useful, and therefore consequential, opinion is aggregate. Politicians care about the views of states, districts, areas, cities, what-have-you. Individual opinion is useful only as an indicator of the aggregate. For a politician to pay attention to individual views is to miss the main game. . . . The politician must, as a matter of image, appear to be concerned about individuals, but aggregate opinion is what matters. (Stimson, 1991: 12)<sup>4</sup>

Public opinion has served as an important constraint on European policymakers from the start of the integration process. In the case of the original six EU members, public opinion was predisposed toward accepting the idea of European integration. This was the 'permissive consensus' described by Lindberg and Scheingold (1970) that allowed elites to take steps toward building the foundations of the EU. This permissive consensus did not exist

in Britain, Denmark, Norway or Ireland, where public opinion was skeptical of the integration process, and even led to the rejection of membership status in the Norwegian case (Rabier, 1989). This accounts for the lack of consensus among these countries' elites about joining the common market.

We are not alone in arguing that public support for the integration process has played an important role. A number of students of the integration process did not regard the integration process exclusively as an elite-driven phenomenon for which citizens' involvement was inconsequential. The work of both Deutsch and Inglehart, for example, stressed the importance of public opinion for the integration process. Others emphasized the importance of developing a popular consensus towards pan-European institutions as well as an overall 'sense of community' (Deutsch et al., 1957; Deutsch et al., 1967; Inglehart, 1970, 1971, 1977). According to Inglehart, public opinion plays an important role for the study of European integration because it exerts considerable influence on the decisions taken by national governments, and because policies, in turn, have measurable effects on mass attitudes themselves (Inglehart, 1970). Put simply, European integration, pushed forward at the elite level, cannot progress without public support. Moreover, a deepening or widening of the Union requires the active tolerance, understanding and support of mass publics, in particular as European integration focuses more on the positive and less on the negative dimensions of unification.<sup>5</sup>

### *The Long-Run Dynamics of Support*

How, then, has public support for European integration developed over the past two decades? Fortunately, the Commission of the European Communities has conducted public opinion surveys on matters dealing with the EU and European integration since the early 1970s. These so-called Eurobarometer polls are conducted twice-yearly in each of the member states of the European Community and include a set of identical questions in each survey. Since questions concerning European integration have been included in each survey since 1973, we can track levels of support over time and across countries in a very systematic and comprehensive fashion. For the purposes of this article we make use of the most comprehensive data set assembled to date. It includes data on public support for integration for all member states and covers the entire 1973 to 1993 period.

The battery of questions that has been consistently asked since the inception of the Eurobarometer polls includes items that tap two different dimensions of support for European integration: diffuse/affective and evaluative/utilitarian (Lindberg and Scheingold, 1970; Handley, 1981; Feld

Support for European Integration, 1973-93  
Average Support in %

Country	European Integration <sup>1</sup>	European Community <sup>2</sup>	Sorry if EC was scrapped <sup>3</sup>	Avg. Rank
Luxembourg	79.5	2	60.1	1.7
Italy	83.2	1	50.4	2.3
The Netherlands	76.8	4	51.9	2.3
France	78.3	3	46.9	4.3
Germany	76.6	5	48.7	5.3
Belgium	72.6	6	37.9	6.7
Spain	71.8	7	43.1	6.7
Ireland	65.1	9	44.3	7.7
Greece	69.7	8	38.8	8.3
Portugal	63.4	10	38.8	9.3
Denmark	48.3	12	30.4	11.3
Britain	62.8	11	26.0	11.7
Avg.	76.6	2	60.1	
Avg.	76.6	2	48.7	
Avg.	62.8	4	37.9	
Avg.	59.1	6	43.1	
Avg.	58.1	8	44.3	
Avg.	55.3	9	38.8	
Avg.	48.9	10	38.8	
Avg.	39.9	11	30.4	
Avg.	38.1	12	26.0	
Rank				
Rank				

<sup>1</sup> 'In general, are you for or against efforts being made to unify Europe?' Percentage of respondents answering 'for'.

<sup>2</sup> 'Generally speaking, do you think that (your country's) membership of the European Community (Common Market) is a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad?' Percentage of respondents answering 'good thing'.

<sup>3</sup> 'If you were told tomorrow that the European Community had been scrapped, would you be very sorry, indifferent, relieved?' Percentage of respondents answering 'very sorry'.

Source: Eurobarometer.

and Wildgen, 1976). The diffuse/affective dimension of support is expected to measure 'the contemporary vision of the "idea of Europe", without tying answers to any specific political or economic institutions' (Hewstone, 1986: 24). The evaluative/utilitarian conceptualization of support, on the other hand, involves the 'calculated appraisal of the immediate costs and benefits of membership in the Community' (Inglehart and Reif, 1991: 7). This article examines the dynamics of responses to three questions that tap both the affective and utilitarian dimensions of support for European integration.<sup>6</sup>

- (1) 'In general, are you for or against efforts being made to unify Western Europe?'
- (2) 'Generally speaking, do you think that (your country's) membership of the Common Market is a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad?'
- (3) 'If you were to be told tomorrow that the European Community (Common Market) had been scrapped, would you be . . . very sorry, indifferent, relieved?'

Table 1 provides the average levels of integration support in the EU member states over the 1973-93 period as well as the rank of the individual countries in terms of support (1 means the country has the highest support, 12 means it displays the lowest average level of support).

Overall, mean levels of support for the ideal of European integration are high, ranging from an average of 83% in Italy to 48% in Denmark, with most countries lying somewhere in the 65-75% range. Moreover, support for the (least utilitarian) European integration ideal is highest, followed by support for a country's EU membership, where the range spans from 78% support for EU membership in The Netherlands to 38% in Britain.<sup>8</sup> Regret scores if the Union were dissolved are lowest across the board; here Luxembourg has the highest average support with 60% and Britain is again lowest, with a mere 26% saying they would be very sorry if the Union were dissolved.

The following pattern emerges from these numbers. With regard to both integration in general and EU membership more specifically, the original six members of the EU (France, Germany, Italy and the Benelux countries) have higher support scores than the rest of the Union. However, there is an exception. Spain ranges ahead of Germany on EU membership. The general pattern also holds on the most specific measure of EU membership and EU cooperation — regret if the EU were dissolved. Here, the only exception among the original six is Belgium, which ranks 10 out of 12 on this measure. Mass publics in Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Italy, Germany and France would most regret the dissolution of the EU, while the Belgian public displays less regret than Spain, Ireland, Portugal and Greece.

The results of average levels reported here are mostly in line with conventional wisdom that the original six display higher levels of support for Europe; the only deviations from the pattern are the generally high level of Spanish support for EU membership and the low level of regret of the Belgians if the EU were to be dissolved. Conversely, British and Danish mass publics are consistently the lowest supporters of integration; Ireland (which joined the EU with Denmark and Britain in 1973) ranks higher than Denmark and Britain, as do the newer members Portugal and Greece. The average support scores for European integration between 1973 and 1993 show that there are three distinct groupings with regard to the levels of support for European integration — first, the original six; second, Spain, Portugal, Greece and Ireland; and third, Denmark and Britain.

However, averages can only tell part of the story of public support for a unified Europe, especially when these averages are calculated over a 20-year time span. Though averages are good summary indicators, they do not describe the ups and downs of public support. What, then, are the long-term trends? Figure 1 graphs responses to the three questions for each country over the 20-year span.

The one feature that stands out most prominently from the graphs is the clear difference in the levels of the three series in almost every country. This indicates that respondents are less likely to support integration the more a question requires respondents to calculate the trade-offs of integration and EU membership. Put differently — when citizens are prompted to reflect on the costs and benefits of EU membership, they are more critical of the integration project.

Another prominent feature that stands out on simple visual inspection of the graphs are the fluctuations in support within countries, although support trends also differ across countries. The graphs show upward trends in support for EU membership in the EU member states, but also significant local irregularities. Especially in France, Ireland, Denmark and Britain, support for EU membership drops significantly in the early 1980s after which it rises again. Countries that have a more linear upward trend include Portugal and Greece, while support in Germany, Luxembourg, The Netherlands and Italy is more stationary. In large measure, though, the three series do appear to move together most of the time in most of the countries. This is reflected in the average Pearson correlation between the three series, which is  $r = 0.68$ .

Overall, the results of average support scores and trends in support show fairly consistent patterns across time and across space. The publics of the original six member states are most favorably disposed toward European integration, while British and Danish publics consistently show the lowest level of support. Moreover, support for integration in general (the ideal) is

almost uniformly higher than more specific measures of support for EU membership. There is an upward trend in support for integration in a number of countries, but this trend also seems to have levelled out in some of the oldest member states (e.g. Germany, Luxembourg). With regard to the cross-temporal fluctuations, increases in support during the 1970s are slowed and even slightly reversed in several countries during the early 1980s, after which support increased again. How can these cross-national and cross-temporal differences in support for European integration be explained?

### *A Macro-Level Account of Support for Integration*

As suggested at the outset, we perceive three factors to be crucial to understanding variations in mass support for integration across countries and across time — timing of entry into the Union, length of membership in the EU and domestic economic performance. The timing of a country's entry into the Union should be an important factor predicting the level of public support for integration because it is — at least partially — a reflection of that country's enthusiasm for the integration process. The early joiners in the Union (Belgium, The Netherlands, Luxembourg, France, Germany, Italy) had publics that were convinced of the benefits — economic and otherwise — of the integration project. Those countries that joined in the mid-1970s (Britain, Denmark and Ireland) had publics that were reluctant vis-a-vis the idea of European unification. Such publics would thus start their membership in the EU at a lower level of support. The late joiners, that is those that joined in the 1980s (Greece, Portugal and Spain), had been kept out of the EU because of their recent history of undemocratic governments, not necessarily because of their unwillingness to consider membership. One would expect the publics in those countries to have a fairly low level of support, but not quite as low as the notoriously critical middle joiners.

Length of membership should matter in the following way. The longer a country is an active participant in the common market, the more likely it is that its public support will increase. We thus contend there is a rise in the level of support for integration, which is due to the process of education about the benefits of membership and familiarization with the Union's institutions. Thus, following Inglehart (1977) and Inglehart and Rabier (1978), we argue that a sort of diffuse domestic socialization process occurs over time.<sup>9</sup> Member publics are informed by domestic elites and the European Commission about how European integration enhances peace and stability in Europe (something that was particularly appealing to the publics of the original six), how it strengthens Europe's economic and political position internationally, and how it improves the European economy both as an aggregate and for the individual member states. The longer a country

Figure 1  
Support for European Integration, 1973-93

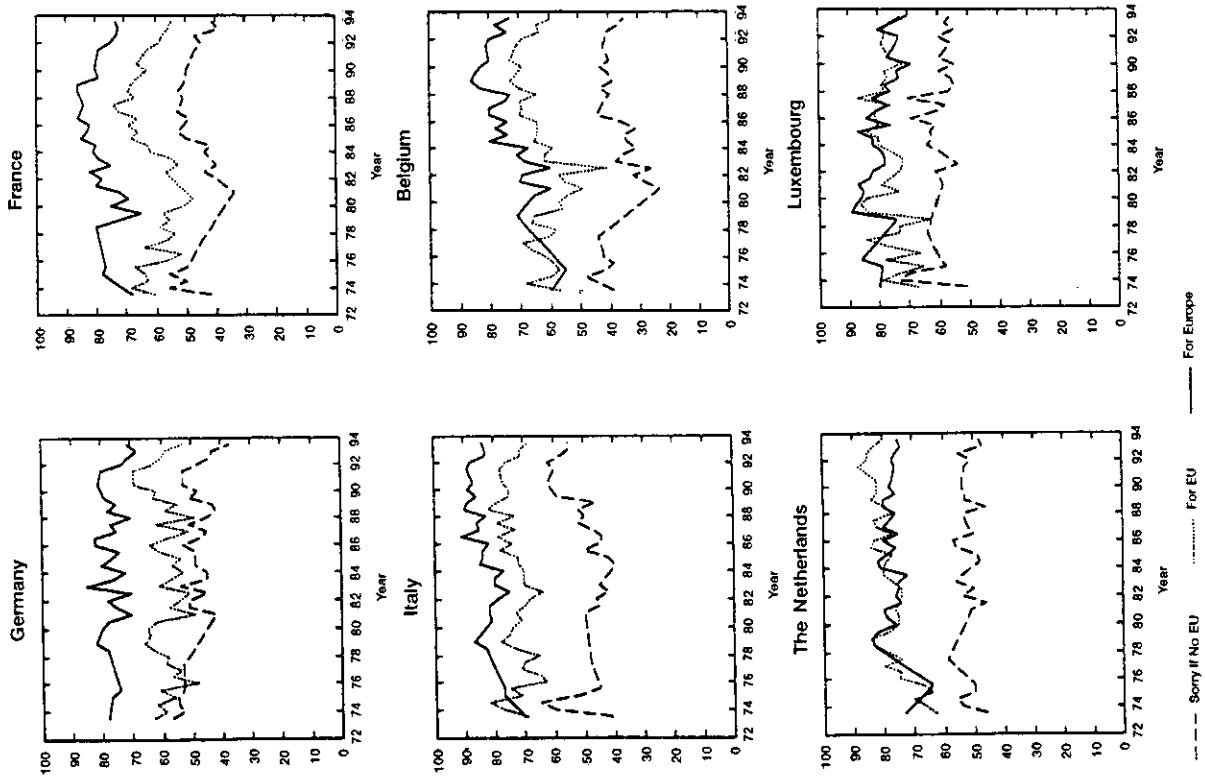
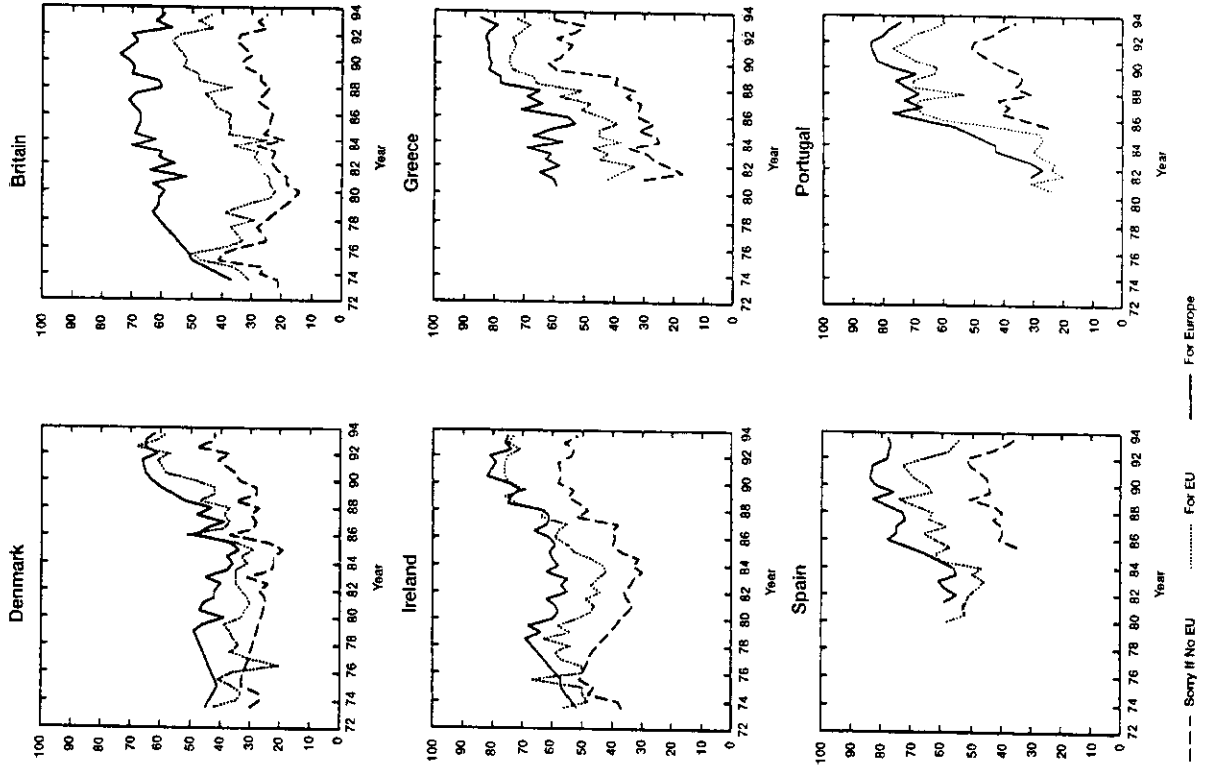


Figure 1 - continued



stays in the EU, the more the member states' publics will hear that the EU is trying to improve their lot. Thus, while analysts would point to how the integration process reduces transaction costs inherent in the European economic exchange (Swann, 1992; Tsoukalis, 1993), Europe's citizens can see the concrete benefits of the integration process in the form of billboards extolling EU-sponsored infrastructure projects, or government claims of how the EU is beneficial to the domestic economy. In effect, then, we believe that European publics become socialized into becoming EU supporters, or, at the least, less critical of the integration project over time.

Although timing of entry and length of time in the EU play an important part in determining levels and trends in citizen support for the integration process, the Union's ability to make good on its promises will also affect public attitudes toward the integration project. The promised economic benefits of EU membership give rise to expectations on the part of citizens regarding national economic performance. Citizens will expect that their national economy will improve once their country joins the EU, because of the perceived benefits of a common market for goods, services, labour and capital. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that citizens will frame their support for integration in reference to how the national economy is performing (although the Union itself does not make macro-economic policy).<sup>10</sup> One would expect, then, that support increases when the national economy is performing well, while support should decrease during times of economic downturn.

To sum up, in our view variations in support for European integration both across space and across time can be accounted for by looking at the timing (and its underlying reasons) of entry, length of time a country has belonged to the Union, as well as domestic economic performance. Next, we test how successfully these variables account for cross-national and cross-temporal variations in support for the integration process.

### Data and Measures

Analyzing the effects of economic performance, timing of entry and length of Union membership on support for integration on the basis of aggregate data such as the Eurobarometer surveys across space and across time requires a pooled time-series approach (Stimson, 1985).<sup>11</sup> When we look at the patterns of support over time in each country, we may surmise that each of the factors we have mentioned (time, economic performance) has an impact on support for integration. However, it is important that we establish the relative importance of each. This has practical implications — if, for example, economic performance matters more for integration support than, say,

familiarity with EU institutions, policy-makers have to be careful about attempting integration initiatives during periods of (national) economic downturn. Superior economic performance at the national level would conversely help if national elites want integration to proceed with the support of the mass public. If, on the other hand, timing of entry and length of membership have independent effects on support for integration, regardless of economic performance, policy-makers may, for example, be more confident that institutional performance at the level of the EU matters to citizens, and that citizens become more favorably disposed toward integration with time.

Consistent with our theoretical proposition, timing of entry effects are measured by a categorical variable which groups countries as follows — the original six are assigned values of 3, the late joiners (Greece, Spain and Portugal) take on values of 2, and the middle joiners are coded 1. Thus we presume that, at any given point in time, support levels are highest among the original six, somewhat lower among the most recent members and lowest among those countries that joined in the 1970s.

The presumed upward trend in support is measured by a continuous variable that starts with 1973 and increases by 0.5 with each subsequent Eurobarometer survey. If there is a global upward trend in integration support within countries as a result of the socialization process we posit above, it should be picked up by the trend variable.

Domestic economic conditions are measured by GDP growth rates during the 12 months prior to the month the Eurobarometer surveys were conducted, as well as by the average unemployment and inflation rates during these same periods. These data are taken from various years of the OECD's *Economic Outlook: Historical Statistics and Main Economic Indicators*. If fluctuations in economic performance are associated with changes in integration support, we would expect the relationship between GDP growth and support to be significant and positive, and between unemployment/inflation and support to be significant and negative. Because the present analysis is more inclusive in terms of the number of countries and number of years analyzed than any previous ones, the statistical analysis provides a particularly stringent test of the propositions we outlined above.<sup>12</sup>

Given the large number of time points in the data set, there is a considerable chance that autocorrelation, that is, serially correlated errors, is present when analyzing support for European integration over time. Under conditions of autocorrelation, Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) is no longer an appropriate estimation technique. Simply put, when autocorrelation is present, the coefficients obtained with OLS are no longer the most efficient unbiased estimates.

For the purposes of this analysis we control for serially correlated errors with the help of Generalized Least Squares estimations (Hanushek and Jackson, 1977). The essential difference between the present approach and others (such as Koyck distributed lag models, or ARIMA techniques) is the way in which it takes autocorrelation into account. GLS estimates the magnitude of autocorrelation first and then adjusts the parameter estimates for any first-order autocorrelation bias in the data (ARI processes). If there is no autocorrelation, GLS estimates are identical to OLS estimates; if there is autocorrelation, GLS provides an estimate of its strength ( $\rho$ ), but takes it into account.

The GLS approach is employed here not only because it is useful in order to overcome problems of autocorrelation, but also because it is singularly well suited for pooled cross-sectional time-series research designs. As Beck and Katz (1995) have shown, GLS is a particularly appropriate estimation technique for pooled cross-sectional time-series analyses like the one attempted here, which have a greater number of time points than country cases (Beck and Katz, 1995).<sup>13</sup>

In order to distinguish the effects of the independent variables on public support for integration, we estimated three different models with a generalized least squares (GLS) procedure. The dependent variables are support for unifying Europe, a country's EU membership and regret if the Union was scrapped. Note that we did not include dummy variables for each individual country because these variables would be perfectly collinear with the categorical variable for timing of entry membership in the EU. The claim we make with the model at hand is that the *general* phenomenon of EU membership can be used to explain aggregate support dynamics, without knowing much about the peculiarities of public opinion in individual member states.<sup>14</sup>

### Results

Overall, the results of the pooled time-series regression reveal that there is considerable evidence for our explanations of public support for European integration across countries and over time. Moreover, we find evidence for our propositions with regard to all three measures of public support for integration. The weakest economic variable is GDP growth. It has significant and positive effects only on support for integration in general, but no significant effects on support for a country's membership in the EU and regret if the Union were scrapped. However, the other economic variables perform admirably. Unemployment is significantly and negatively related to support for all three measures of integration support, and inflation is negatively associated with public support for EU membership and European

Table 2

Generalized Least Squares (GLS) Estimates of the Effects of Time and Economic Conditions on Public Support for European Integration in the Member States of the EU, 1973-93

Variable	Integration	EU Membership	Regret if Scrapped
Intercept	16.73 (1.60)	14.51 (1.23)	25.15** (2.38)
GDP	0.33*** (2.89)	-0.08 (0.76)	-0.06 (0.50)
Unemployment	-0.41** (2.14)	-0.92*** (3.73)	-0.99*** (5.02)
Inflation	-0.28*** (2.78)	-0.40*** (3.35)	-0.05 (0.38)
Timing of Entry	7.97*** (7.25)	5.27*** (3.92)	3.06*** (2.53)
Length of Membership	0.68*** (5.49)	0.68*** (4.66)	0.55*** (4.30)
R <sup>2</sup> :	0.53	0.50	0.38
Durbin-Watson	2.42	2.41	2.35
Rho	0.81	0.87	0.85
N:	367	437	341

\* significant at the 0.10 level — one-tailed; \*\* significant at the 0.05 level — one-tailed; \*\*\* significant at the 0.01 level — one-tailed.

Dependent variable: public support; *t*-values in parentheses.

unification in general. These results stand in contrast to findings reported by Eichenberg and Dalton (1993) in their analysis of a shorter time period (1973-88) and a smaller number of countries (eight). Their results indicated only significant effects of inflation, but not unemployment. Thus, the results clearly indicate that support for integration waxes and wanes with the business cycle, measured broadly (see Table 2).<sup>15</sup> Considering the substantive effects of the economic variables, we find that the effects are strongest for unemployment on support for EU membership and scrapping the EU. Moreover, inflation has the most significant effects on EU membership support. The evaluation of membership in the EU is thus much more subject to fluctuations in economic performance than support for the project in general.

Timing of entry and length of membership have the most significant effects on support for integration. Both are highly significant and positive

across all three support measures. Thus, whether a country joined early, late or in the middle matters for its level of support. Moreover, as time continues to pass, support for integration increases — independent of current economic performance or timing of entry. It is interesting to note that the timing of entry effects are greatest on support for integration in general and weakest on regret if the EU were scrapped. This seems to indicate that there are greater differences between the publics of the original six and the other member states with regard to integration in general, whereas those dissimilarities are attenuated when publics are asked explicitly about scrapping the EU as an organization. The effects of the trend variable are similar across the different measures of support, thus indicating that there has been a secular trend toward increasing support that can be identified among different support dimensions of the European integration process.

Given the distinction that scholars have made between diffuse and utilitarian support for European integration, one may have expected the economic effects to be stronger the more specific the question wording regarding the EU. However, this is not uniformly the case, although unemployment has the most significant effects on regret, followed by EU membership, and integration in general, and despite the fact that inflation affects EU membership to a greater extent than the ideal of a unified Europe. Overall, though, it would be an exaggeration to claim that domestic economic conditions affect the different dimensions of support in different ways, whereas it is true that there are definite distinctions between diffuse and evaluative support at the aggregate level as evidenced in Figure 1.

The conclusion that time and the timing of entry has somewhat more significant effects, and thus is more important in the long-run than economics with regard to public support for integration, is important (see Inglehart and Rabier, 1978). Yet, there is a serious problem with conceiving of public support for integration to be ever increasing with time and to be higher in the 'oldest' EU member states: There is a ceiling of 100% of support for integration. If — all else equal — support for integration is higher in the older member states, and if there is an upward trend in support, some states will reach this ceiling faster than others, unless the upward trend is much steeper in the newer member states.

The existence of a ceiling for support is far from trivial because reaching or approaching it may have significant implications for the nature of the integration process. It may result in a changed relationship between national elites and mass publics as dealing with a public whose support for integration is steeply increasing is different than managing public opinion under conditions of high support. In the latter case support can only hold steady or decline. Such a decline would be particularly problematic if it occurred first among the publics of those countries that traditionally have been the

strongest proponents of integration, such as the original six member states.

The fact that there is a ceiling may then have an impact on the nature of the trend observed in the EU member states. A good way to establish the nature of the upward trends in public support for European integration in the EU member states is to calculate the trend in support between 1973 and 1993. It can be calculated using OLS regression techniques with the help of the following model:

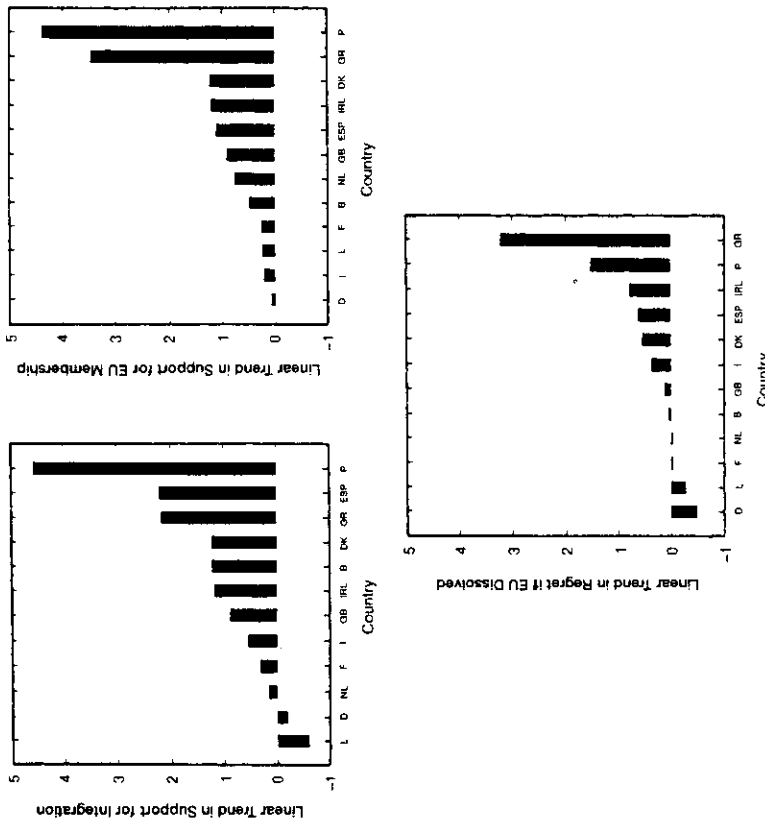
$$\text{Support}_t = \alpha + \beta * \text{Time} + \epsilon_t \quad (1)$$

where  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  are constants and  $\epsilon_t$  denotes a random error with zero mean. The trend is given by  $\beta$ , indicating the change in the mean level per unit time, in this case the periods between two consecutive Eurobarometers (see Chatfield, 1989). The trend provides a measure of (a) whether the trend has indeed been upward, and, if so, (b) how steep it has been. We can thus calculate in which countries the movement toward greater levels of support has been strongest. Figure 2 plots the trends — expressed by the coefficient  $\beta$  — of the three series for each of the EU member states.<sup>16</sup>

The plots display a very consistent and illuminating configuration with regard to the rate of increase over time — increases in support for integration are steeper the more recently a country has become a member of the EU. Conversely, the longer a country has been a member of the EU, the less steep the increases in integration support. The results point to a leveling off phenomenon with regard to support for European integration. In fact, increases in support appear to have come to a standstill or have been reversed in two countries of the original six: Luxembourg and Germany both have slightly negative trends in support for integration in general, and Germany, Luxembourg, France and The Netherlands all display a negative trend in regret if the EU were dissolved. Furthermore, not only are the rates of increase over time smallest in the other member states of the original six, but the rates of increase in support also are highest in the three newest members of the Community, with Ireland, Denmark and Britain somewhere in the middle.

This finding does not necessarily come as a surprise. Longer membership in the EU may indeed lead to higher levels of support for integration as Inglehart and others had predicted. However, we may have reached the ceiling of possible support for integration in some of the older EU member states. And this ceiling effect may have important consequences for efforts aimed at deepening European integration. If the effects of the trend disappear over time because the publics of the member states reach this ceiling, there is little reason to doubt that the effects of the domestic economy would become even stronger.

Figure 2  
Linear Trend in Support for European Integration (1973-93) by Country



Conclusion

As public support for integration has come to play an increasingly important role in the European integration process over the past decade, it also has become critically important to understand the factors that drive public opinion toward the integration process and the European Union. And although it is widely known that support varies considerably across countries and over time, there have been only few attempts to model the dynamics of support in a systematic fashion.

This article examined the dynamics of support for European integration in the 12 member states between 1973 and 1993. On the one hand, we find that there has been an upward trend in support for integration efforts. On

the other hand, this upward trend has at times been tempered, especially during times of economic hardship. Moreover, support is consistently lower in some countries than in others. Britain and Denmark display significantly lower levels of support than the countries of the original six member states of the European Coal and Steel Community.

This article has been an attempt to describe and explain such differences and aggregate movements in support for European integration across countries and across time. Thus, it sought to supply a systematic and broad model for general processes that underlie the fluctuations and differences in levels of support for integration. The article does not — and cannot — account for ‘individual country’ stories of variations in support; instead, it focuses on the general phenomena of time and economic performance that presumably impact on mass publics in general.

When we consider different dimensions of support for integration — support for efforts made to unify Europe, support for a country’s membership in the Union, and regret if the EU was scrapped tomorrow — we find that publics are less supportive, the more questions require them to calculate the trade-offs of membership. Although overall levels of support are generally high across Europe, mass publics are consistently more supportive of the ideal of integration, less supportive of their country’s membership in the EU and least supportive when it comes to regret regarding the possible scrapping of the organization altogether. On the face of it, this leads us to believe that it is plausible that European publics approach the integration process with somewhat of a cost-benefit calculus in mind.

Evidence for this is found in a multivariate analysis of domestic economic performance and support for integration. We found that support for European integration increases with favorable economic performance and decreases during times of economic hardship. In particular, levels of unemployment and inflation are negatively related to a country’s support for the integration process. The robustness of these findings is confirmed by the fact that all three dimensions of support are affected by changing economic conditions. These findings are somewhat in contrast to the study conducted by Eichenberg and Dalton (1993) which, on the basis of a more limited data set, finds that only inflation appears to be a significant determinant of public opinion toward the integration process.

We also found that levels of support for integration are highest among the original six members of the Union and lowest among those countries that joined during the times of economic crisis in the 1970s. This accounts for differences in the levels of support for integration across countries. However, it is also true that a country’s support levels increase significantly, the longer a country is a member of the EU, irrespective of domestic

economy or timing of entry. This explains the changes we see in support over time, and indicates that there is a socialization process taking place among European publics. These results thus confirm the early findings by Inglehart and Rabier (1978) about public opinion during the early days of the integration process.

When we compare the impact of time and economic performance, we find that time has a greater substantive impact on support for integration. But there is a catch — support can only rise so high, and upward trends in support for European integration are slowed over time or even reversed. Given the database and the approach used here, we account for changes in support for European integration with the help of a retrospective view of citizens' evaluations. Thus we view European mass publics as assessing economic and institutional performance subsequent to a country's membership in the EU and economic performance. Whether or not prospective judgments matter for the dynamics of integration support cannot be answered with the data at hand. Thus, it is difficult to gauge whether citizens in different countries support integration at varying levels because they have different expectations of costs and benefits resulting from EU membership.

What do these results mean for the connection between European publics and the integration process? On the one hand, the significant impact of national economic performance on public support for integration indicates that the public's approval of the EU project is subject to national economic conditions. We conclude that favorable national economic and political circumstances are needed for the integration project to proceed with the support of European mass publics. Similarly, we have known for a long time that national politics has played an important role in referenda on EU measures. The recent referenda on the Maastricht treaty are but the latest examples (McLaren et al., 1994). This part of our analysis echoes the perspective of researchers who emphasize the impact of national politics on the integration process (see Feld and Wildgen, 1976; Caporaso, 1974).

But public opinion and public involvement in the integration process need not be obstacles to the completion of a project that was initially based on elite action and consensus (see Haas, 1958; Sandholtz and Zysman, 1989). In fact, the results of our analysis would suggest that European publics have become more supportive of the integration process the more familiar they have become with the workings of European institutions and the consequences of EU membership. Naturally, the immediate prospects for the integration process are unfavorable if European economies continue to slump. But the impact of economic conditions is relatively unrelated to citizens' experiences with the EU as shown by the effects of the length of EU membership variable. This means that national politics and national

economic performance are *not* the only factors affecting public support for integration. In fact, our analyses demonstrate that experience in terms of EU membership plays an important and independent role. Put simply, both national and supra-national politics matter to European mass publics.

We would like to suggest that there are two important issues that remain unresolved with regard to the analysis of public opinion dynamics regarding European integration — first, subsequent work needs to establish more systematically the role that public opinion plays in the integration process as a whole. And second, and most fundamentally, the issue of whether attitudes toward the European Community are meaningful, remains unanswered. It is possible, if not likely, that the extent to which European publics are able to make sense of the integration process has changed over time. This would mean that there has been a trend toward greater awareness and attitude consistency over time aside from the upward trend in levels of public support. As the results in this article demonstrate, studies of regional integration in Europe must examine the effects of domestic polity and economy on public opinion toward the EU. Although European publics today may be more supportive of the integration process than they were 20 years ago, it is also clear that they will be considerably more receptive toward efforts aimed at further integration if and when the economies of the member states improve in the years to come.

### Notes

We would like to thank Walter Carlsnaes, the anonymous reviewers, Dan Ward and Ric Stoll for providing helpful hints and suggestions. Thanks also to Michelle Primack for valuable research assistance. We are responsible for any errors that remain.

1. Because the European Community recently changed its name to European Union, we refer to the new name throughout in order to avoid unnecessary confusion.
2. Ireland also held a referendum on the Maastricht treaty. It easily passed the ratification of the treaty in June 1992 by a vote of 64% to 36%. Denmark voted a second time in the spring of 1993 and finally also ratified the treaty.
3. See also the studies by Inglehart and Rabier (1978), Eichenberg and Dalton (1993), Gabel and Palmer (1995) and Handley (1981).
4. Naturally, public opinion can be aggregated in different ways. One might think, for example, that supporters of the government should be aggregated separately, given that most European governments support — at least in principle — the EU and the idea of integration. However, analyses of support for integration that take partisanship into account have been singularly unsuccessful at identifying significant effects for partisanship and government support (Duch and Taylor, 1995).

5. Scholars have frequently conceived of the integration process as involving a negative and a positive dimension. Negative integration refers to the process of tearing down trade barriers, i.e. the abolition of restraints on the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital (Shepherd, 1975; Pinder, 1989). With the incorporation of new policy areas in the 1992 project and the Maastricht Treaty, however, integration has entered a period of positive integration that involves the creation of a more clearly defined political role and authority for the Union and active efforts to define a European policy agenda.
6. Note that these are also the questions most frequently analyzed by others and for which the most complete data series are available.
7. One can think of these questions requiring respondents to evaluate the EU and integration in a more or less utilitarian fashion. Question 3 requires respondents to calculate specific trade-offs between EU membership and non-membership, question 2 requires less of such a specific calculus, and question 1 requires little to no cost-benefit analysis with regard to EU membership or integration. Put differently — question 3 is the most utilitarian, question 1 is the least utilitarian and question 2 is somewhere in the middle.
8. The only exception is The Netherlands where the scores for integration in general and EU membership are approximately equal.
9. For a discussion of the individual-level behavior, see Inglehart (1977) and Inglehart and Rabier (1978).
10. Handley (1981) found, for example, that support for European integration declined in the late 1970s and early 1980s as the European economies worsened.
11. This is not the place to discuss the modeling issues involved in such a design. A good and thorough discussion is provided by Stimson (1985).
12. The cross-correlation matrix of the variables used in the analysis shows no signs of multicollinearity among the independent variables. The highest correlation exists between inflation and the trend variable. The coefficient is  $-0.43$ , indicating a downward trend for inflation between 1973 and 1993.
13. In addition, it is the technique employed by Eichenberg and Dalton (1993). Thus, the approach taken here facilitates comparison between our research and theirs.
14. Naturally, it would be preferable to control for national idiosyncracies while accounting for the suspected general phenomenon. However, this is — unfortunately — impractical because of the aforementioned collinearity problem. We tested the model together with incomplete sets of dummies for the individual countries in order to see whether any problems emerged when some or most of the country dummies are included. The results of the general model presented in the article turn out to be extremely robust.
15. Moreover, the results are an important check on their analysis as their dependent variable is somewhat different than the one used here: Eichenberg and Dalton (1993) measure support by subtracting the percentage of citizens who claim that their country's membership in the EU is a 'bad thing' from those that say it is

a 'good thing.' It is important to note, however, that this operationalization completely leaves out those respondents who believe that EU membership is neither good nor bad. In an extreme case, this means that a country whose citizens are divided between 20% saying 'good thing' and 10% saying 'bad thing' (with 70% in the middle) would receive the same value as a country where 50% say their country's membership is a 'good thing', 40% say it is a 'bad thing' and only 10% not indicating an attitude either way. In order to avoid such mismatching, we decided to use only the positive responses as dependent variables because they are much more readily comparable across countries.

16. The actual numbers that this figure is based on are provided in the Appendix.

Appendix 1

Linear Trends in Support for European Integration, 1973-93

Based on: Support<sub>t</sub> =  $\alpha + \beta t + \epsilon_t$  (t = time). Values shown are for the slope  $\beta$ .

Country	European Integration <sup>1</sup>	European Community <sup>2</sup>	Sorry if EC was scrapped <sup>3</sup>
	Trend	Trend	Trend
Germany	-0.19	0.08	-0.48
Netherlands	0.16	0.75	-0.03
Luxembourg	-0.59	0.24	-0.27
Belgium	1.22	0.48	0.04
France	0.32	0.26	-0.04
Italy	0.55	0.21	0.37
Britain	0.88	0.90	0.12
Denmark	1.22	1.23	0.54
Ireland	1.18	1.19	0.78
Greece	2.17	3.46	3.21
Spain	2.21	1.10	0.62
Portugal	4.56	4.38	1.52

<sup>1</sup> In general, are you for or against efforts being made to unify Europe? Percentage of respondents answering 'for'.

<sup>2</sup> Generally speaking, do you think that (your country's) membership of the European Community (Common Market) is a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad? Percentage of respondents answering 'good thing'.

<sup>3</sup> If you were told tomorrow that the European Community had been scrapped, would you be very sorry, indifferent, relieved? Percentage of respondents answering 'very sorry'.

Source: Eurobarometer

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