Perceptions of a Shared European Culture Increase the Support for the European Union

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Abstract

There is disagreement amongst political theorists as to whether a European demos based on a culturally grounded identity as a precondition for a stronger integration of the European Union (EU) exists. We study a part of this question from a constructivist perspective by analysing how individuals in Europe perceive European culture and how this perception is related to support for the EU. We focus on the following questions: (a) whether European respondents perceive a shared European culture, (b) whether they consider this culture to be of higher value than other cultures and (c) whether they are proud of European cultures. We study these questions on the basis of a survey conducted in 2021 in nine European countries, including both EU and non-EU countries. Our results show that the perception of a shared European culture and its positive evaluation, both inclusive and exclusive, covary positively with support for the EU.

Keywords: culture; demos; European integration; identity

Introduction

Does the European Union (EU) need a demos based on a culturally grounded European identity as a precondition to be cohesive, democratic and successful? As a result of various treaty reforms since the 1980s and the accelerated European integration process, national polarization over the EU project strongly increased in the 2000s, which has led inter alia to the rise of new right-wing and Eurosceptic political parties. Enlargement processes – be it vertical integration via new treaties and supranational institutions or horizontal integration via the admission of new member states – have been accompanied by crises and various internal and external challenges. To a certain degree, research has found decreasing support for the EU in the last two decades (De Vries, 2013; Eichenberg and Dalton, 2007; Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Kriesi et al., 2012; Yordanova et al., 2020). In this article, we focus on citizens' perception of a shared European culture as a covariate of their support for the EU.

Many scholars see a shared collective identity as a precondition for further European integration and especially for the stronger democratization of the EU (Anderson and Hecht, 2018; Cederman, 2001; Delanty, 2002; Eichenberg and Dalton, 2007; Hooghe and Marks, 2008; Scheuer and Schmitt, 2009). Such a shared identity of a group of people is the precondition for the existence of a European demos (Cederman, 2001) exercising democratic rights based on the attachment of the vast majority to each other, which is also the backbone of the viability of the EU. A lack of such an identity can therefore be detrimental to the contemporary challenges faced by the EU in three major ways. First, if actors have different ideas about the desired economic order, the lack of a common European demos makes it more difficult to reach a consensus on specific economic policy

measures as decision-making processes become complicated and transaction costs rise when majoritarian decisions are not accepted on a regular basis (Hooghe and Marks, 2008). Second, the more people share values with others, the higher the citizens' support for solidarity with other EU citizens and thus the EU, especially in times of crises. Third, the formation of a common identity is also desirable from a democratic perspective – minorities who cannot assert themselves need to accept majority decisions. This process is facilitated if both minority and majority groups perceive themselves as one European demos with a collective identity based on a shared culture (Cederman, 2001; Gerhards and Hoelscher, 2004). Culture refers to the distribution of cognitive and normative beliefs in a geographically or socially demarcated population (Rössel and Weingartner, 2019), including, for example, beliefs about the social groups one belongs to, general values and perceptions of cultural practices and objects like heritage sites. Thus, one major barrier to a collective identity based on a shared European culture is the actual diversity of regional and national cultures in Europe (Cederman, 2001; Delanty, 2002; Smith, 1995). However, collective identities are the result of a process of social construction and discursive framing, and hence, cultural diversity is not simply a given, but the result of individual and collective perceptions and emotional evaluations, shaped by cultural and other policies (Anderson, 1991; Blumer, 1969; Shore, 2004; Tsalikis, 2007). Our constructivist perspective is largely based on the assumption that the existence of a European culture is not something that can simply be objectively measured. Instead, following the Thomas theorem (Thomas and Thomas, 1928), it has to be perceived as shared to be actually shared in its consequences. We do not focus on the historical process of the formation of European culture and its construction as a shared and positively evaluated culture. Instead, we analyse whether Europeans perceive European culture as shared and evaluate it positively and the relation of this perception to support towards the EU. The explanatory chain of our causal argument is that a shared European culture is the necessary basis for a European collective identity, which shapes support for the EU and European integration.

Our analysis is structured as follows. First, we describe the extent to which individuals perceive a shared European culture and whether they evaluate it positively and feel attached to it. Second, we ask whether the perception of a European culture covaries systematically with support for European integration, that is, being a member of the EU as well as support for horizontal integration. Therefore, we directly analyse the covariation between perceived culture and support for the EU, relying on recently collected survey data sampled in 2021.[1] The survey was conducted in nine European countries (Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Serbia, Switzerland and the United Kingdom). The inclusion of both member states of the EU and non-member states allows us to go beyond the methodological EU-ism, prevalent in research on European integration, which usually includes only EU member states. Analysis of the same processes in EU countries, in non-EU countries and in a country that has recently left the EU is conducive to the generalizability of our results. We find strong evidence not only that a sizable proportion of the European population positively evaluates a shared European culture but also that there is a positive relationship between this evaluation and support for the EU. This is remarkable because we control for several important established social

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and cultural covariates of the EU's support. Our results indicate that Europeans' perception of a European demos, that is, a shared, positively evaluated culture, is quite important for supporting the EU.

The rest of the paper is divided into five sections. Sections I and II review existing explanations of support for the EU and outline how we have sought to include perceptions of European culture. Section III discusses the research strategy, whilst Section IV presents the empirical results. Section V concludes by identifying issues for future research on the cultural preconditions for a European demos.

I. The Correlates of Support for the EU and European Integration

What explains different degrees of support for the EU and, more specifically, European integration? The literature can be divided into studies that emphasize a utilitarian rationale versus those that highlight a cultural motivation for supporting the EU project. Utilitarian approaches underline the importance of cost–benefit analyses in socio-economic terms, focusing strongly on individuals' socio-economic positions and resources. Highly educated individuals and those with a higher subjective perception of economic well-being tend to be more supportive of integration than those with lower education and well-being (Fligstein, 2008; Kriesi et al., 2012; McLaren, 2002). Several mechanisms are offered to explain how utilitarian considerations affect opinions about integration. Reducing trade and mobility barriers tends to favour individuals with relatively high incomes, education and occupational skills (Gabel, 1998; Gerhards and Hans, 2011; Hooghe and Marks, 2004; Inglehart, 1970; Karp and Bowler, 2006; Kriesi et al., 2012; Taydas and Kentmen-Cin, 2017). People with higher education and from a higher social class are also in a better position to travel and be mobile within Europe, thus leading to more social relations and experiences within Europe and a more positive evaluation of European integration (Kuhn, 2015; Recchi, 2014). Another economic explanation highlights the issue of finance and funds, or net-receiving countries versus net-contributing ones. Accordingly, citizens in more affluent countries tend to be less supportive of integration than those in less affluent countries (Hooghe and Marks, 2004; Schüssler, 2019). Thus, overall, one can expect European citizens with more socio-economic resources in terms of education, income and occupation to exhibit a higher tendency to support the EU.

In addition to utilitarian explanations of support for the EU, the literature offers cultural approaches that emphasize identity and cultural issues. National attachment coupled with national pride negatively affects support for EU integration (Carey, 2002; Christin and Trechsel, 2002; Hooghe and Marks, 2004). However, this effect is clearly linked to a perceived threat to national identity and national interests (Carey, 2002; Christin and Trechsel, 2002). This comes down to the question of whether people feel culturally enriched or threatened by European integration and its opportunities and challenges (Delanty, 2008; McLaren, 2002). Hooghe and Marks (2009) therefore argue that national identity can both reinforce and undermine support for European integration (see also Diez Medrano, 2003; Helbling et al., 2010; Ray, 2003; Strath and Triandafyllidou, 2003). Whether national identity is positively or negatively linked to EU integration is very much dependent on the characteristics of a given national identity, that is, whether citizens display an exclusive or inclusive national identity. Hooghe and Marks (2009) assume that

individual preferences are constructed through socialization and political conflict. This in turn is very much influenced by political elites and parties – the sharper the divisions amongst political elites on the issue of the EU, the greater the scope for national identity to be mobilized in exclusionary terms (Helbling et al., 2010; Hooghe and Marks, 2009).

Beyond the ideas of cultural enrichment and threat, the empirical literature shows that in general more open and liberal cultural worldviews covary positively with support for the EU. Hooghe and Marks (2004) show that a positive attitude towards multiculturalism is positively correlated with supportive attitudes towards European integration. Similarly, in Boomgaarden et al. (2011), anti-immigration attitudes show the reverse effect, whilst in McLaren's (2002) article, even a general construct like postmaterialism exhibits similar correlations. Thus, one can expect that support for the EU covaries not only with feeling culturally threatened or enriched by the EU but also, more generally, with socially open and liberal attitudes.

II. The Perception of a Common European Identity

Whilst the process of European integration has both reinforced multiculturalism and given rise to nationalist and xenophobic sentiments, political elites interested in further horizontal integration should pay more attention to public support for the EU and the creation of a common identity if they want to facilitate the integration process (Cederman, 2001; Ciaglia et al., 2020; Gerhards and Hoelscher, 2004; Hooghe and Marks, 2008; Scheuer and Schmitt, 2009). Whilst many citizens have gradually developed a sense of 'Europeanness' and a strong attachment to Europe (Westle and Segatti, 2016), it is uncertain whether this European identity is based on a shared European culture. The literature is equivocal on the issue of whether a common European culture exists or whether the diversity of regional and national cultures precludes the formation of one shared European culture (Cederman, 2001; Delanty, 2002; Smith, 1995). However, in a more recent publication, Gerhards et al. (2019) argue that Europeans in different countries exhibit a rather strong solidarity with each other, which would corroborate the existence of a European culture and identity. Still, authors such as Cederman (2001) and Smith (1995) point to the fact that the national and regional cultures in Europe, which have emerged over centuries, exhibit a high degree of 'stickiness' that will not go away soon (cf. Scheuer and Schmitt, 2009; see also Westle and Segatti, 2016).

Regardless of the possibility of objectively measuring empirical indicators of a common European culture, common cultural characteristics must be perceived as such by the people themselves in order to form the basis for a collective identity. Therefore, we set out from the premise that the existence of a European culture (or its absence) is the result of a process of social construction and framing. 'A' culture is not something that is simply objectively given; rather, it is something that is perceived, emotionally evaluated and interpreted by different individuals (Anderson, 1991; Blumer, 1969; Shore, 2004) and is furthermore shaped by national and European policies (Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Tsalikis, 2007). If, on the basis of such processes of perception, Europeans believe that a European culture exists, then it does exist, and this has consequences for the EU (Thomas and Thomas, 1928). We will thus take up this issue empirically, asking whether Europeans perceive European culture as shared and whether they evaluate European culture positively. Based on the discussions of a European demos and European integration

(Cederman, 2001; Delanty, 2002; Gerhards and Hoelscher, 2004; Hooghe and Marks, 2008; Scheuer and Schmitt, 2009), we consider such a shared European culture as a basis for a European collective identity, focusing on the relationship between these perceptions of a shared European culture and support for the EU. Thus, we assume that the more strongly an individual perceives a shared European culture, the greater her or his support for the EU.

> *H1* The more an individual perceives a shared European culture, the greater her or his support for the EU.

However, a collective identity is based not only on the perception that a shared European culture exists but also on its appraisal. We distinguish between two types of evaluation. The idea of an inclusive European culture (Risse, 2010) takes pride in looking beyond national or regional cultures and thus also values its diversity, not devaluing non-European cultures in a Eurocentric way (Delanty, 2002[2]). Such a positive evaluation is obviously connected to a sense of attachment to a European community and thus constitutes a crucial element of the collective identity of a European demos.

> *H2* The more an individual values European culture in an inclusive way, the greater her or his support for the EU.

The second approach to European culture is exclusionary, whereby citizens have developed xenophobic or exclusionary euro-nationalist attitudes since the accelerated process of EU integration, being similar to traditional exclusive national orientations. Studies have found that individuals who hold an exclusive national identity assume that European integration threatens national unity and culture (Christin and Trechsel, 2002; De Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2005). We therefore argue that we must derive two contradictory hypotheses for an exclusionary view of European culture: the first is that citizens who perceive European culture as exclusive and thus superior to other cultures tend to oppose EU integration. We assume that this perception of European culture as superior and exclusive is contrary to the main lines of European policy stances, which present Europe as oriented around human rights, cosmopolitanism and cultural diversity and inclusion (Delanty, 2002; Gerhards and Hoelscher, 2004). This is why an exclusive view is unlikely to be compatible with further integration of the EU in its current form and political orientation. Second, to make an even closer comparison with national identity, an exclusive European identity could in general also lead to stronger support for European integration just as an exclusive national identity leads to support for the nation-state. The assumption would be that exclusive Europeans support European integration, independent of the respective political stances of the EU, which favour an inclusive viewpoint, because they

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[2]We have chosen to use the concept of inclusion (and its counterpart of exclusion) because it plays a central role in the literature on European culture and identity, including at the level of the EU (2009). However, it is important to bear in mind that these concepts overlap with other concepts such as cultural property internationalism (Merryman, 2005), which has, in contrast to our definition of culture, a focus on material culture. There are also some similarities with the concept of cosmopolitanism (Beck, 2005; Rössel and Schroedter, 2015). In contrast to our juxtaposition of the national and European levels, cosmopolitanism is clearly located on a supranational level and related to ideas of global identity and world citizenship (Wardle, 2015).

are proud of European culture and perceive it as superior to other cultures. Therefore, regarding an exclusive European identity, we formulate two contrasting hypotheses.

H3a The more an individual values European culture in an exclusionary way, the weaker her or his support for the EU.

H3b The more an individual values European culture in an exclusionary way, the stronger her or his support for the EU.

III. Data and Methods

To address the above-mentioned questions, we rely on original survey data collected in 2021. In total, 14,384 respondents from nine different European countries participated in the survey. These countries are Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Serbia, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (UK). The sampling procedure differed by country, each sample relying on a specific combination of online participation, computer-assisted telephone interviews and computer-assisted personal interviews. All samples include only the population aged 18 years or older. This made it possible to obtain samples that are nationally representative along different dimensions. To ensure reliability, the survey was translated into all national languages by applying a context-sensitive procedure including several rounds of feedback within and between teams as well as extensive pre-testing (see Harkness, 2003). For the following analyses, all cases with missing values in any of the variables described below were filtered out. This did not significantly affect the distribution of any variable used here, however. The final sample thus consists of 10,391 respondents in total. The national samples sizes range from 933 (Croatia) to 1743 (UK). In addition to a model with pooled data, we also ran separate regression models for each country (reported in Appendix B). Overall, the two analytic strategies did not yield differing results.

Dependent Variable

Our dependent variable measures the support for the EU. Survey participants were asked whether they think 'it is good for [their home country] to be part of the European Union'. Respondents in countries that do not belong to the EU were asked whether they think 'it would be good to be part of the European Union' (Switzerland) or whether they think 'it is bad that [their home country] is not part of the European Union' (UK, Serbia).

Answers were given on a 5-point scale, ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. In the following analyses, the variables were recoded consistently so that higher values represent greater support for the EU.

Independent Variables

We focus on the perception and evaluation of European culture as (1) shared, (2) inclusive and (3) exclusive as main covariates of the support for EU integration. Thus, in line with a constructivist approach, we are not measuring the objective existence of a European

culture, but the perception and evaluation of what the interviewees denote as European culture (Blumer, 1969; Thomas and Thomas, 1928). Respondents were asked to what extent they agree with the following statements.

1. There is no common European culture because European countries are too different from one another.
2. I take pride in historical monuments, places, works of art and/or traditions from other European countries.
3. European culture is superior to other cultures.

The first statement clearly represents the dichotomy also found in the scholarly literature, juxtaposing the idea of a shared European culture with the belief that Europeans are too different from each other and that European culture is hence mainly characterized by diversity. Although, strictly speaking, the question is not formulated as a juxtaposition of these two options, this was interpreted as such by respondents according to our extensive pre-testing. The second statement measures whether respondents are proud of European culture beyond their own national culture. Thus, this item indicates an openness towards other European cultures, but also a positive attachment to them. This item was thus designed to measure the inclusive perception of European culture without touching the issue of whether a common European culture exists or not. For clarity, however, it should be noted that this item refers only to a summary measure of culture (cultural heritage, values, arts, traditions) serving as a proxy for a more general understanding of culture, as all of the aspects of culture mentioned tend to represent specific core cultural beliefs. Optimally, one would of course want to measure all different aspects individually, to get an encompassing view of respondents' perception of European culture. Finally, the third statement has a formal similarity to classical measures of exclusive nationalism, whereby one's own national culture is evaluated as superior to other national cultures. Thus, we take this item to operationalize the perception of an exclusive European culture that is seen as superior to other, non-European cultures. Although one might assume that agreeing with this item presupposes the existence of a common European culture, this is not the case according to our data. Thus, many respondents think that European culture is superior to other cultures even if they do not perceive a *common* European culture.

Again, all answers could be given on a 5-point scale, ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. The variables are recoded so that higher values indicate the presence of a common, inclusive or exclusive perception and evaluation of European culture.

Controls 1: Other Cultural Factors

We control for several additional variables in our statistical models. We include a variable measuring people's support for same-sex marriages, which can be interpreted as a proxy for socially liberal and open attitudes, which were positively related to support for the EU in previous studies. Additionally, the EU has very strong liberal positions on homosexuality; thus, there is a clear link between this specific measurement of liberal positions and the political stance of the EU (Gerhards, 2010; Swimelar, 2019). Two other variables directly measure respondents' attitudes towards the cultural impact of Europeanization. One of them asks whether people think that 'our way of life is threatened by foreign cultures',

the other whether 'the increased presence of different cultures in [country] has enriched people's lives'. Thus, these two items measure precisely the core idea of cultural threat or opportunity. Individuals who consider their way of life threatened by foreign cultures can therefore be expected to oppose any process of Europeanization due to its positive effect on intra-European migration and cultural exchange. The contrary should be true for those people who consider their lives enriched by the presence of different cultures. These variables are coded so that higher values mean greater support for same-sex marriages, greater perceived threat or greater perceived enrichment by foreign cultures. We thus include three very strong measurements of cultural factors influencing the support for the EU in our statistical models. Because we include six variables capturing cultural factors in our models, we have checked possible collinearities, which are not present in the data.

In addition to these variables, we also included a variable that positions respondents on the left–right scale on the basis of their support for certain political parties. We coded these parties on a left–right scale according to the information from the Manifesto Project.[3] As suggested in the state of the literature section, politically left-leaning attitudes tend to covary with higher levels of support for EU integration. However, because this variable displays many missing values, we exclude it from our main analyses and report only the corresponding results in Appendix A as a robustness check. The inclusion of this left–right scale does not change the results of our main analysis.

Controls 2: Socio-economic Factors

To test the arguments presented by the literature focusing on utilitarian and socio-economic factors, we also include several variables that measure an individual's social position, such as education, income and general affluence. Education is measured by three categories based on ISCED 2011 codes. The highest category represents tertiary education (ISCED Levels 6–8), the middle category secondary education (ISCED Levels 3–5) and the lowest category anything below that (ISCED Levels 0–2). The categorization of all educational qualifications follows the official national guidelines (where available) or established surveys such as the European Social Survey. Income is measured consistently across countries because it is measured by national deciles. Finally, we assess the general subjective affluence of respondents by asking them how satisfied they are with their current financial situation. This variable offers a 7-point scale in which higher values mean greater satisfaction.

Other Control Variables

Finally, the association between change in the independent variables of interest and support for the EU may be spurious due to other underlying contextual factors that may drive change both in the structures and in the level of support for the EU. Therefore, we also included the usual socio-demographic variables such as age, gender, migration background and religiosity to capture the social diversity of contemporary societies (McLaren, 2002; Boomgaarden et al., 2011; Datler et al., 2021). Whilst age is measured in years, gender, migrant background and religiousness are all measured dichotomously (male/female and yes/no). We also include dummy variables for all countries in the

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[3] https://wzb.eu/en/research/dynamics-of-political-systems/center-for-civil-society-research/projects/the-manifesto-project

pooled regression model to control for national differences in the base level of support for European integration.

IV. Results

Figure 1 depicts the descriptive results for our dependent variable and the three independent variables that are relevant for our hypotheses. Results are displayed by country, and the two positive and the two negative answer categories for each variable are combined into one negative and one positive category to make the presentation clearer. First, we find

Figure 1: Attitudes Towards European Integration and European Culture.
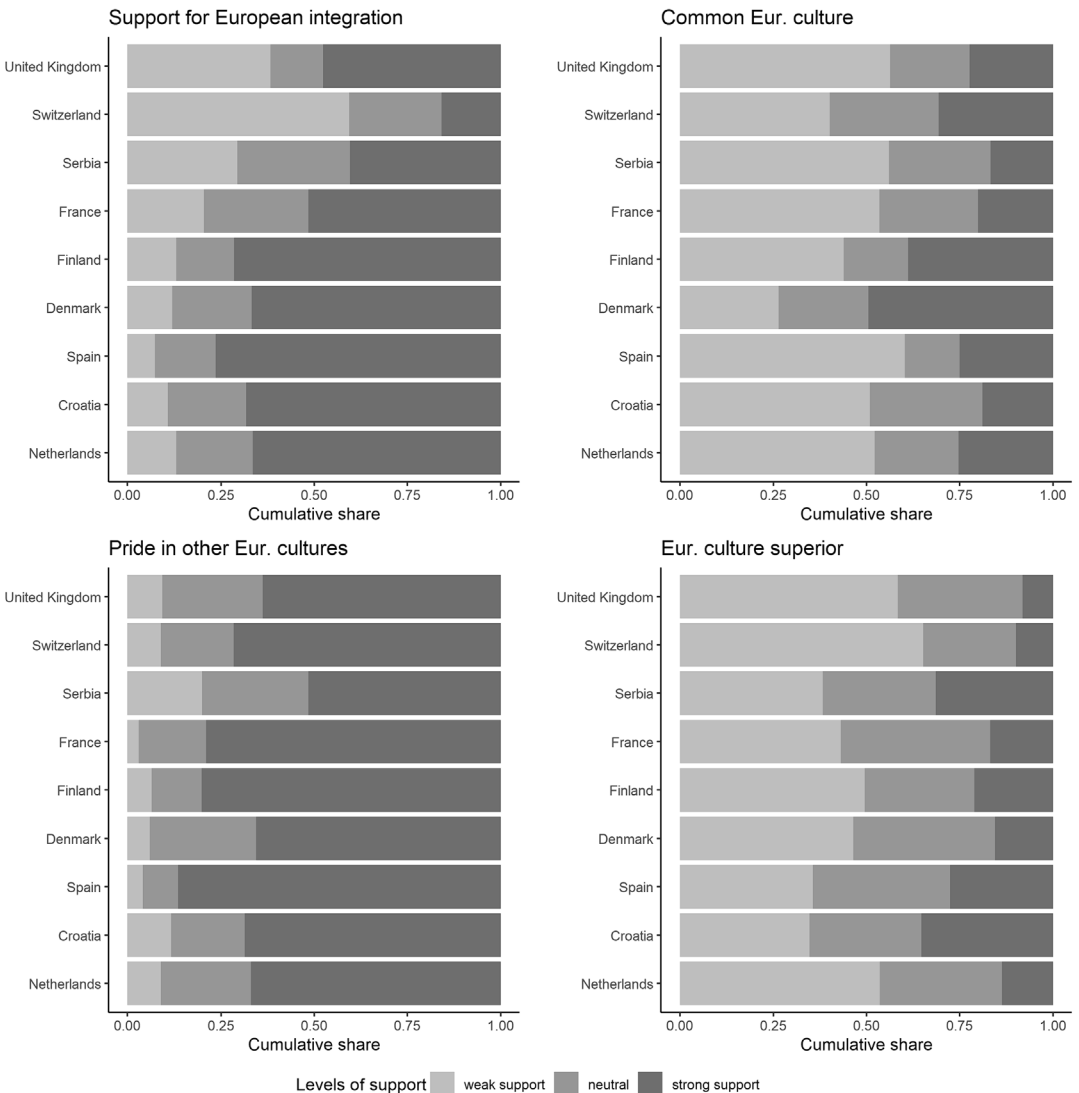
that on average non-EU countries (Switzerland, Serbia and the UK) display relatively low levels of support for EU membership. Amongst these countries, Switzerland stands out as the country with by far the lowest levels of support. This reflects the long-debated Euroscepticism of the Swiss population (Sarasin et al., 2018). All EU countries, on the other hand, show relatively strong support for the EU, with Spain displaying the highest. On the basis of social–constructivist approaches to collective identity (Blumer, 1969; Anderson, 1991; Cederman, 2001), one could have expected a pattern of support along the timeline of EU membership, that is, the long-time members being more supportive than the more recent members. Because political and social institutions shape collective identities and the perceptions of culture according to a social–constructivist approach, a country's level of support and its duration of membership should covary. This is, however, not the case. The supportive countries are, overall, more recent members compared to the less supportive countries, which are long-standing members of the Union. This is more in line with a socio-economic explanation focusing on the receipt of transfer payments, which are higher in the more recent, southern European countries compared to the long-term members of the EU and, of course, compared to the non-EU countries (Hooghe and Marks, 2009).

The independent variables, however, are not as clearly structured by EU membership, which shows that the perception and evaluation of European culture are not mainly shaped by EU institutions. For example, the perception of a common European culture is relatively strong in Switzerland and surpassed only by Denmark and Finland, where nearly half of the population believes that a shared European culture exists. All other countries display rather similar levels of agreement with this item, with about 25% of the population assuming a shared European culture exists. In contrast, around 50% of Europeans clearly do not believe that a shared European culture exists. The next chart portrays the results for an inclusive European culture. Around two thirds of Europeans are proud of cultural items from other European countries. The results are strongest in Spain, France and Finland and weakest by far in Serbia. Only a minority does not evaluate culture from other European countries positively. Looking at the next part of Figure 1, we find that around 15% of Europeans share an exclusive understanding of European culture, with the highest values of this variable found in Croatia and Serbia, two countries on the south-eastern periphery of Europe, and in Spain. In contrast to support for EU integration, there is no obviously visible difference between EU countries and non-EU countries in the perception and evaluation of European culture. Overall, the descriptive results show that a substantial percentage of all Europeans, but clearly a minority, believes in a shared European culture. In contrast, a sizable majority of Europeans takes pride in cultural items from other European countries, thus supporting an inclusive model of European culture. An exclusive model of European culture is supported only by a rather small minority of 15% of Europeans. Thus, the social–constructivist perspective on European culture does not lead to coherent results. This may be summarized as follows: most Europeans are clearly proud of their culture, but not in an exclusive way. At the same time, the respondents do not believe in a shared European culture.

To test our hypotheses, we estimate different linear regression models with robust standard errors to account for the clustering of cases within countries. In Table 1, we report the results for seven different linear regression models including different sets of explanatory variables for the pooled data set.

Table 1: Regression Coefficients, Pooled Models (Nine Countries).

	Support for European integration						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Common Eur. culture	0.162***		0.093***		0.094***		0.086***
Pride in other Eur. cultures	0.200***		0.094***		0.107*		0.081***
Eur. culture superior	0.007		0.049*		0.124*		0.058**
Support for same-sex marriage			0.114***		0.111***		0.121***
Threatened by foreign cultures			−0.157***		−0.178***		−0.150***
Enriched by different cultures			0.315***		0.303***		0.306***
Education (ref: low)							
Middle				0.133		0.071	0.098
High				0.480**		0.463*	0.265***
Income				0.020***		0.033*	0.013
Financial situation				0.039		0.017	0.017
Age							0.003
Gender (ref: female)							
Male							0.087*
Migrant background: yes							0.172
Religious: yes							−0.010
Country (ref: Netherlands)							
Croatia		0.006***	0.117***	0.147***			0.242***
Spain		0.362***	0.243***	0.375***			0.286***
Denmark		0.036***	−0.023*	0.040**			0.010
Finland		0.125***	0.086***	0.135***			0.144***
France		−0.388***	−0.249***	−0.305***			−0.172***
Serbia		−0.732***	−0.246***	−0.580***			−0.127*
Switzerland		−1.537***	−1.584***	−1.518***			−1.572***
United Kingdom		−0.666***	−0.648***	−0.632***			−0.595***
Constant	2.267***	3.818***	1.895***	3.200***	1.494***	3.009***	1.352***
N	10,391	10,391	10,391	10,391	10,391	10,391	10,391
R^2	0.047	0.158	0.342	0.188	0.202	0.035	0.354
Adjusted R^2	0.047	0.158	0.341	0.187	0.202	0.035	0.352

Note: Standard errors are clustered by country. * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$.

First, we find that the perception of a shared European culture is significantly associated with support for the EU in the expected direction. Thus, people who think that there is a common European culture are more likely to support the EU. This supports Hypothesis H1 stated above. The variable is statistically significant in all models. Second, we find that taking pride in other European cultures is positively associated with support for the EU, too. Again, this result is statistically significant at the highest level and in combination with all control variables. Hypothesis H2 is therefore also supported by this model. Finally, we find that perceiving European culture as superior is positively associated with support for the EU, thus speaking for Hypothesis H3b and against Hypothesis H3a. However, this result is significant only at the 1% and 5% levels of significance and only in the models that control for other sets of variables. Together with the lower values of the regression coefficients, this indicates that an exclusive understanding of European culture is not as relevant to support for the EU as the other two perceptions of European culture. These results are strikingly robust in the pooled models. Moreover, the covariations remain significant once we control for the country dummies, other cultural factors, utilitarian and socio-economic factors and the socio-demographic composition of the sample. Mainly, the inclusion of three additional cultural factors turns our statistical analysis into a very strong test of our hypotheses.

When interpreting the control variables, we find that cultural factors, such as support for same-sex marriage, perceived threat by other cultures and perceived enrichment by other cultures, are all clearly associated with support for the EU at the highest levels of statistical significance. All coefficients display the direction expected, based on previous research summarized in our literature review. Mainly, the items measuring the perceived threat by foreign cultures and the enrichment by the presence of different cultures are strongly related to support for the EU. This clearly confirms the importance of cultural factors explaining support for the EU. Amongst the utilitarian/socio-economic factors, however, only education displays a significant effect across all models. Here, we find that respondents with a higher level of education are more likely to support European integration than those with a lower level of education. Income shows statistical significance only in some of the models. In addition, men are generally more in favour of the EU compared with women. These results are in line with previous literature reviewed above, showing a general but not very strong covariance between socio-economic position and support for the EU. Age, migration background and religiousness exhibit no covariation with support for the EU.

Overall, our model is able to explain support for the EU reasonably well, which is demonstrated by the fit (adjusted R^2) of 0.35 in the full model. In fact, the cultural factors, including the three items on perception and evaluation of European culture, exhibit a higher statistical explanatory power compared to utilitarian/socio-economic and socio-demographic factors and the country dummies. As shown in Appendix A, including a left–right scale in the model does not affect our results in important ways: the added variable itself does not show a significant effect. Furthermore, our findings are also supported by the country-specific models in Appendix B, which are, overall, quite similar to the pooled model.

Country Fixed Effects

In addition to individual characteristics, support for the EU may also be influenced by country-specific factors. To account for this, the pooled model described above includes dummy variables for all countries (except for the Netherlands, which is the reference category). The observed effects at the individual level are therefore controlled for the mean level of support in the respondents' home country. However, to establish a comprehensive picture of support for the EU, it is important to examine the coefficients of these country dummies in more detail. Thus, Figure 2 displays the coefficients of all countries that were produced by the fully specified Model 7 depicted in Table 1. In addition, it also displays the coefficients from Model 2, which includes only these country dummies and none of the other independent variables. This way, we can assess to what extent the differences between countries can be explained by the variables at the individual level.

Figure 2 shows that the pattern of support for the EU in the regression models does not differ very much from the descriptive results in Figure 1 – which is also true for the differences between EU countries and non-EU countries. Furthermore, one notices that the results for the model with country dummies only and the full model are quite similar for most countries. This means that most country differences in the support for the EU cannot be explained by individuals' social and cultural attributes in each country's population, even for most of the non-member states of the EU. That also explains the similarity between the descriptive results in Figure 1 and the results in Figure 2, which are based on the regression analyses. Only for Croatia, France and Serbia are significant differences apparent. For Serbia, for example, we find the largest gap between the results for the dummies-only model and the full model. Thus, including the control variables moves

Figure 2: Country Fixed Effects With 95% Confidence Intervals.
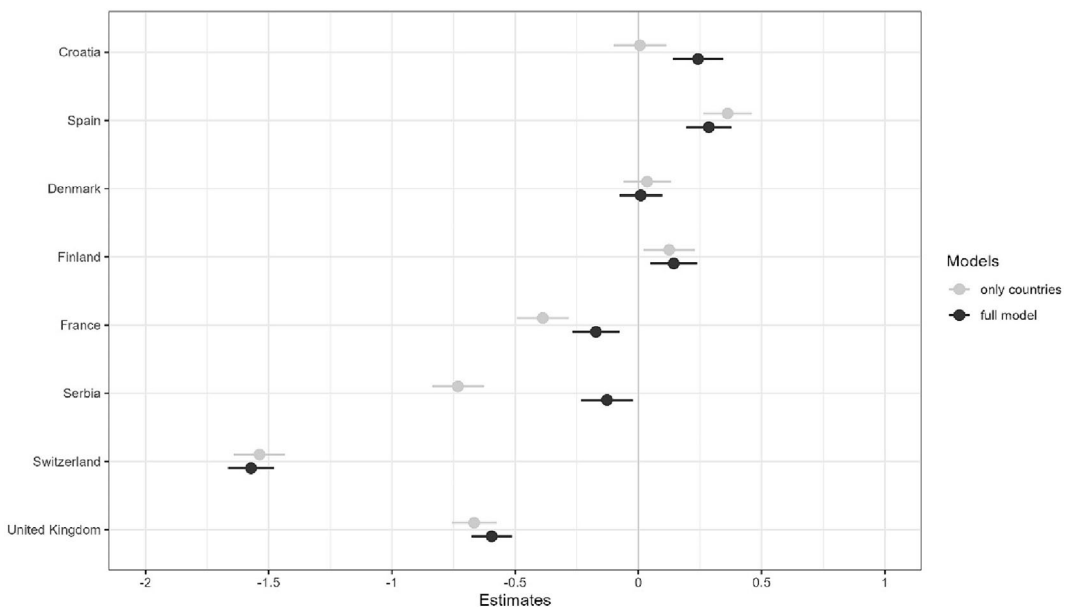
the country coefficient very close to 0. This can be explained by Serbian respondents' relatively low levels of pride in other European cultures (see Figure 1), their weak support for same-sex marriage, high perception of threat from other cultures and low perception of being enriched by other cultures (see Appendix C). In all these variables, Serbia takes an extreme position amongst the other countries in our sample. In a similar way, the coefficient for France moves closer to 0 when control variables are included, which means that the difference between the reference category (Netherlands) and France can be explained to some extent by the composition of France's population. For Croatia, on the other hand, the coefficient moves further away from 0 when the control variables are included. This means that although the Netherlands and Croatia display similar levels of support for European integration, the individual-level characteristics of the Croatian sample would suggest lower levels of support.

These country-level differences may be explained by country-level characteristics (Przeworski and Teune, 1970). Appendix D therefore shows some correlations between potentially relevant country-level characteristics and the country fixed effects from Model 7. Although none of the correlations are statistically significant according to standard levels of significance due to the low number of countries, our data offer tentative support for an explanation based on socio-economic differences. Thus, a higher GDP p.c. (purchasing power parity, PPP) and a higher median household income are both strongly associated with lower support for the EU. A more conclusive analysis should, however, be based on a more complete set of EU and non-EU countries.

V. Summary and Discussion

There is almost unanimous consensus amongst scholars that further integration and democratization of the EU depend on the existence of a collective European identity amongst the majority of citizens of the EU based on a shared European culture. However, opinions clearly diverge when it comes to the nature of this collective identity and its relationship to European culture. Especially amongst political theorists, normative and political arguments support collective identities based on ideas of human rights, constitutional patriotism and cosmopolitanism (Delanty, 2002). Amongst more empirically inclined scholars, the debate is mainly focused on the existence of a shared European culture, which could be the backbone of a collective identity of a European demos. On the basis of the social–constructivist assumption laid out in the introduction, we studied empirically how European culture is perceived and evaluated by Europeans themselves. As part of the INVENT project, we conducted a survey in nine European countries, including member and non-member states of the EU.[4] With regard to our descriptive question, it is quite clear that substantial minorities of Europeans perceive European culture as a shared culture, whilst significant majorities are proud of this culture. A clearly smaller minority has an exclusive understanding of European culture, perceiving it as superior to non-European cultures. Thus, most Europeans would agree with the sceptical perspective on a common European culture, whereas a sizeable minority is more optimistic about its

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[4]Taking countries and their cultures as a unit of analysis might seem to contradict this argument (see the discussion on methodological nationalism, Rössel, 2012). However, countries are still empirically characterized by the idea of a national culture, as our discussion in Section II indicates. Furthermore, we solve this problem empirically, by doing an individual-level analysis. This analysis could, in principle, also lead to the result that empirically no country differences exist.

existence and a clear majority evaluates European culture positively, without considering it superior to non-European cultures. Therefore, our empirical results converge with Gerhards and Hoelscher (2004), who find that the outlook for a shared European culture is not as bleak as predicted by some political theorists. This is true even for the non-member states of the EU included in our survey, which do not show obvious differences in the perception and evaluation of European culture compared to member states. However, it is noteworthy that people with quite different views on the question of a shared European culture are proud of culture from other European countries. This means that pride in European culture may result both from the idea that a common European culture exists and from the idea that there is a diversity of valuable European cultures. This interpretation could also be important for political discussions on this question, which should take into account the diversity of sources of pride in a European culture.

Concerning the relationship between the perception of European culture and support for the EU, our results clearly show that the perception of a shared European culture and its evaluation, both inclusive and exclusive, covary positively with support for the EU. This does not, however, explain the striking differences between EU member and non-member states in support for the EU. These results are highly stable and do not change when our models include variables that control for factors such as cultural threat, cultural enrichment and a liberal and open view on social issues. This indicates that people's perception of European culture does matter. However, the R^2 of our three items accounts for about 5% of the explained variance. Obviously, this is overall good news for those scholars (and politicians) who argue for more political and social measures to foster a shared European culture and a collective European identity, not neglecting the importance of other variables when discussing widening integration as indicated by our models. Nevertheless, a common and positively valued European culture is not so influential that it outweighs the more general level of support for the EU in a country. This is especially true for the UK and Switzerland as non-member states of the EU, where the overall level of country support for the EU is not affected by variables at the individual level.

A surprising finding of our study concerns the country differences. They show no clear patterns varying, for example, according to the timeline of EU membership. Based on social–constructivist approaches to collective identity (Anderson, 1991; Blumer, 1969; Cederman, 2001), one could have expected such a pattern of support, with the long-time members being more supportive than the more recent members. Because – according to the social–constructivist approach – political and social institutions shape perceptions of culture, collective identities, support and time of membership should covary, which is not the case on the aggregate level. Overall, the supportive countries are more recent and less wealthy members, whereas the less supportive countries are long-standing members of the Union and in general more affluent countries. In addition, the non-member states show a strikingly lower level of support for the EU. This tends to support a socio-economic explanation of country differences that focus on the patterns of contributions and receipt of transfer payment from the EU. However, because only six of our country cases are actually EU members and our analysis includes only nine cases, this result has to be interpreted very cautiously.

There are three clear limitations to our empirical analysis. Our theoretical outline focused on the causal chain running from a positively evaluated shared European culture through a European collective identity to support for the EU. However, in our empirical

study, we have tested only the relationship between the first and third constructs in this causal chain, leaving identity out due to the lack of data. Future research should study the full causal chain. Additionally, the three survey items present only a rather thin account of what European culture means to the respondents. Research based on qualitative data would be important to generate a richer description of what people consider as European culture. This could then lead to further quantitative research. Another obvious limitation of our study is the fact that we are relying on cross-sectional data, and thus, the covariation between the perception of European culture and support for the EU cannot be interpreted in a causal way. In addition, this also means that our results are only a one-timepoint snapshot of EU support, which changes over time in response to crises, but with an overall declining tendency (Anderson and Hecht, 2018; Eichenberg and Dalton, 2007). As an example, in May 2021, Switzerland broke off negotiations with the EU on the conclusion of an institutional framework agreement, which is likely to influence citizens' support for the EU. However, we think that the mere existence of the covariation we found is of substantial importance. Given the strong positions in the literature, which argue against the possibility of a shared European culture as the background to a collective European identity, a null correlation should have been expected. Thus, the mere syndrome of the correlations between support for European integration and the three perceptions and evaluations of European culture represents a substantial contribution to the discussion, showing that perceptions of a shared culture and support for the EU are clearly related. Therefore, our bottom-up approach to the role of a shared European culture shifts the discussion in a more empirical direction, taking social–constructivist arguments seriously.

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Appendix A: Regression Coefficients, Pooled Model With Left–Right Scale (Nine Countries)

	Support for European integration
Common Eur. culture	0.083[***]
Pride in other Eur. cultures	0.075[***]
Eur. culture superior	0.059[*]
Left–right scale	−0.008
Support for same-sex marriage	0.121[***]
Threatened by foreign cultures	−0.146[***]
Enriched by different cultures	0.291[***]
Education: middle	0.120
Education: high	0.296[**]
Income	0.016[*]
Financial situation	0.028
Age	0.003
Gender: male	0.082
Migrant background: yes	0.107
Religious: yes	−0.031
Constant	1.324[***]
Country fixed effects	Yes
N	7403
R^2	0.386
Adjusted R^2	0.384

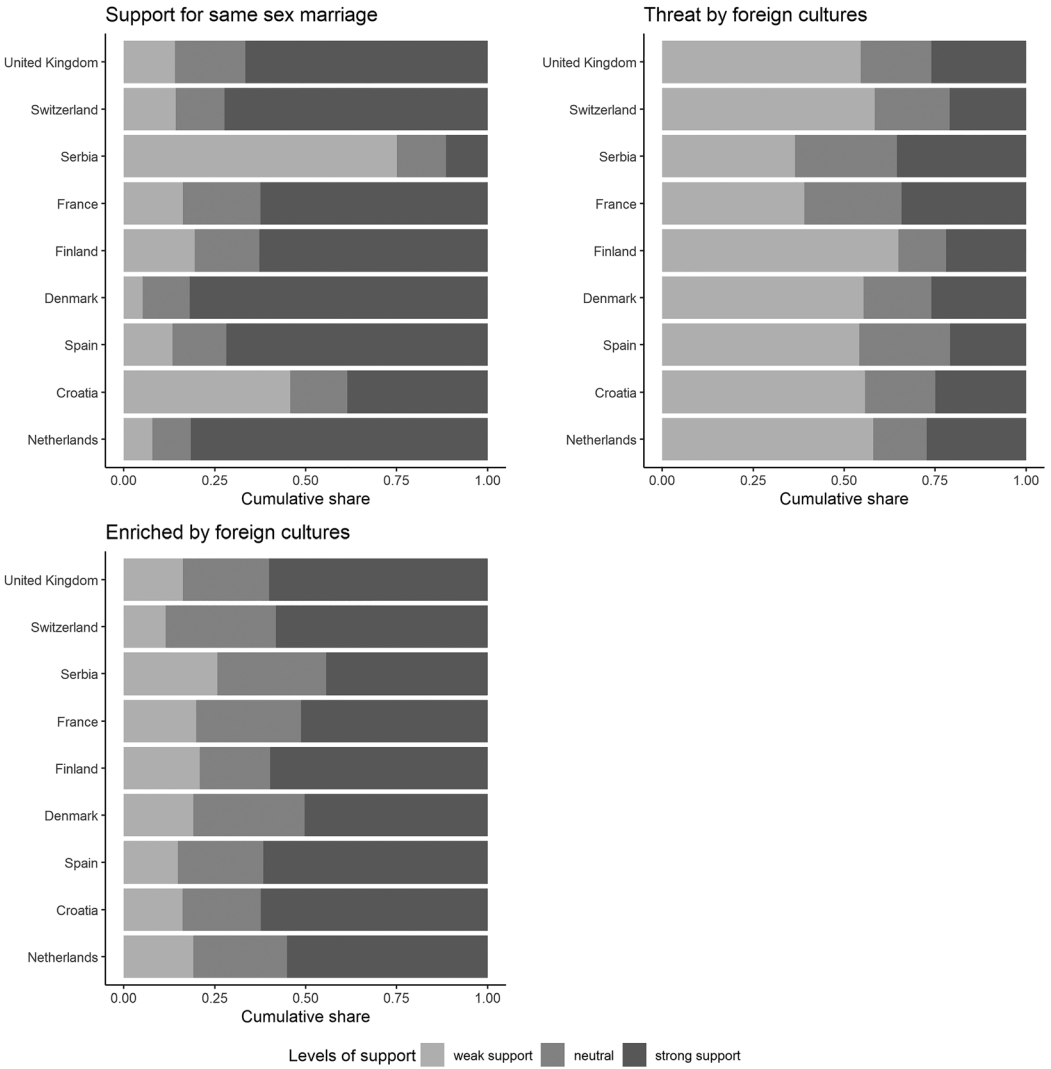*Note*: Standard errors are clustered by country.
[*]$p < 0.05$. [**]$p < 0.01$. [***]$p < 0.001$.

Appendix B: Regression Coefficients, Country-Specific Models

	Support for European integration								
	Croatia	Denmark	Finland	France	Netherlands	Serbia	Spain	Switzerland	UK
Common Eur. culture	-0.006	0.045	0.030	0.160***	0.096***	0.073*	0.076***	0.115***	0.115***
Pride in other Eur. cultures	0.142***	0.079**	0.109**	0.166***	0.022	0.086*	0.191***	-0.008	0.035
Eur. culture superior	0.045	0.005	-0.017	0.078**	0.004	0.107**	0.034	0.033	0.130***
Support for same-sex marriage	0.074**	0.089**	0.140***	0.144***	0.152***	0.144***	0.071**	0.084**	0.131***
Threatened by foreign cultures	-0.091***	-0.164***	-0.077*	-0.102***	-0.081**	-0.143***	-0.027	-0.124***	-0.298***
Enriched by different cultures	0.247***	0.230***	0.288***	0.384***	0.327***	0.272***	0.129***	0.285***	0.384***
Education: middle	0.041	-0.055	-0.186	0.216*	0.235**	-0.252**	0.158	-0.084	0.160
Education: high	0.049	0.126	0.023	0.292***	0.497***	-0.038	0.116	-0.071	0.420***
Income	-0.018	-0.001	0.022	0.013	0.011	0.059**	0.016	0.028	-0.003
Financial situation	0.059**	0.058*	0.090***	0.105***	0.080***	-0.068**	0.041*	-0.042	-0.053*
Age	0.006**	0.003	0.004*	0.006**	0.008***	-0.004	0.008***	0.012***	-0.007**
Gender: male	0.192**	0.162***	0.181**	0.228***	0.124*	0.002	0.025	-0.085	0.014
Migrant background: yes	-0.076	0.276***	0.231	0.147	-0.101	-0.041	0.495***	0.186*	0.253**
Religious: yes	-0.099	0.018	0.014	0.029	-0.093	0.181	0.024	-0.056	-0.087
Constant	1.788***	1.942***	1.207***	-0.563*	0.684***	1.796***	1.462***	0.414	1.612***
N	933	1350	993	960	1224	967	1198	1023	1743
R^2	0.164	0.201	0.277	0.359	0.314	0.202	0.161	0.184	0.404
Adjusted R^2	0.151	0.192	0.266	0.349	0.306	0.190	0.152	0.173	0.400

* $p < 0.05$.   ** $p < 0.01$.   *** $p < 0.001$.

Appendix C: Distribution of Three Control Variables by Country

Support for same sex marriage

Threat by foreign cultures

Enriched by foreign cultures

Levels of support: weak support   neutral   strong support

Appendix D: Correlations Between Country Fixed Effects and Country-Level Characteristics

	GDP p. c. (PPP)	Educational attainment (% tertiary)	Gini index	Poverty rate (absolute)	Poverty rate (relative)	HDI	Household income (PPP)
Country fixed effect	−0.42	−0.35	−0.28	0.1	0.08	−0.3	−0.49

Note: Country fixed effects are taken from Model 7 in Table 1. GDP=Gross Domestic Product, HDI= Human Development Index, PPP=Purchasing Power Parity.

Sources of country-level characteristics: OECD (2023), Eurostat (2023a, 2023b, 2023c), World Bank (2022, 2023), UNDP (2022).

[*]$p < 0.05$. [**]$p < 0.01$. [***]$p < 0.001$.