

Abstract

The EU's decade of crises has brought home an important fact: The EU, far from being an 'ever closer union among the peoples of Europe', is at a crossroads. It is faced with a choice between retaining a commitment to legal uniformity or to politically accepting that member states may have very different conceptions about what the future EU should be. An important question is thus what its citizens prefer.

This thesis investigates the relationship between differentiation and public opinion along two lines: It first investigates whether the pattern of support that citizens express for EU integration of particularly salient policies map onto the patterns of differentiated integration of the same policies. Second, it analyses support for differentiated integration as a legal mechanism and how exposure to past differentiation helps predict support for it: I first test whether support for differentiated integration among those identifying exclusively with their nation-state is greater than for the population as a whole, and if the effect of identity varies according to the goal of differentiation. It also tests whether the effect of historical differentiated integration on future support for it varies by citizens' Eurosceptic attitudes or national identities.

My first article finds highly ambivalent attitudes towards policy integration even where we would theoretically expect them to cohere. The second of my articles show that those who identify solely with their nation-states are likely to favour legal mechanisms allowing for the differentiated integration that is a reality of today's EU, as long as these mechanisms allow countries to permanently opt out of unwanted integration. My third article finds that previous exposure to the differentiated integration that has long characterized the EU is associated with less support for the EU's future legal uniformity, and that this effect is particularly prominent among Eurosceptics and those who identify solely with their nation-states. I thus answer my overarching research question, "How is support for European integration differentiated?", by finding that there are incongruent and differentiated attitudes towards both EU policy and polity integration.

Together, the three articles found in this thesis shine a light on popular perceptions of what the future EU should be. These questions matter not only to theorists of European integration, but also to policy-makers debating the union's future. The papers thus give rise to important secondary questions not only about what citizens believe about the EU, but also what role these beliefs should play in the normative justification of European integration.