This is not a time for Euroscepticism

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In times of crisis, underlying feelings emerge more clearly than in normal times. These corona weeks show a curious attitude from the Dutch government and government agencies: their scepticism towards their fellow EU member states, in this case especially Italy. There has barely been a word of solidarity, mainly derogatory statements, for example about hygiene in Italian schools. Beyond the fact that these statements are unpleasant – to say the least – they are also expressions of what in political science is sometimes called horizontal Euroscepticism. This is not equivalent to a hostile attitude to the EU in itself, nor is it limited to those parties that are usually labelled populists. On the contrary, horizontal Euroscepticism regularly appears in the statements of large government parties, and is usually used to justify unpopular measures and EU agreements towards voters: there is nothing wrong with government decisions or with EU agreements, there are just many countries in the Union that do many things wrongly. In these statements, the wrongdoers are mostly Southern European countries. These statements bring understanding among large parts of the electorate about the difficult compromises that the government in the EU has to make. However, they do not benefit the European project.

As a result of the many crises of recent years, mistrust between southern and northern countries has increased sharply. This distrust grows on the basis of mutual accusations and stereotypes. If the EU is truly a community, mutual scepticism must make way for mutual support.