

EU Solidarity in Times of Covid-19

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Abstract

European solidarity is in high demand as the Covid-19 pandemic delivers a deep and asymmetric shock to EU economies and societies. Will there be sufficient supply? Using new EUI survey evidence on attitudes towards European solidarity, conducted by YouGov in 13 EU member states and the UK (April 2020), this paper explores the determinants of public support for common sharing and explores viable strategies for leveraging them. Our analysis reveals a number of important findings: solidarity is national first, to neighbours next, and only distantly European. Still, European solidarity is more than skin-deep. It varies by crisis type, with strong solidarity in case of exogenous shocks like a pandemic and weak solidarity in case of endogenously created problems such as, potentially, debt crises. By and large, European citizens' view solidarity as a reciprocal benefit rather than a moral or identity-based obligation. In terms of instrumentation, they prefer permanent arrangements of risk and burden sharing to ad hoc mutual assistance. While support for European solidarity tends to be associated with the perception of the own country being a net beneficiary of EU support, there is no clear evidence of a clear North-West versus South-East cleavage, as the common narrative of Northern creditors and Southern debtors implies. Our findings suggest a series of political recommendations to policy makers who wish to increase the supply of European solidarity today: emphasize reciprocity rather than identity; underscore the exogenous 'natural disaster-type' quality

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of the pandemic, rather than national differences in coping with it; focus on the common interest in a broad recovery rather than past debt dynamics. And, finally, ‘talk tough’ to the ‘frugal four’ (Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden). As our findings reveal, these small open economies are unlikely to leave the European Union.

1. Solidarity in Times of Covid-19 in High Demand but Short Supply

What’s new? Once again, in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, European solidarity is in high demand, bringing back haunting memories – a *déjà vu* if there ever was one – from the 2010-2015 eurozone sovereign debt crisis and the 2015-2016 migration crisis, when the supply of solidarity remained meagre at best. Practically overnight, European institutions, from the Schengen open border agreement to the single market came under siege. The freedom of movement was suspended, first by Austria and then by 21 more EU member states. The geographical spread of the pandemic, bringing havoc first to Italy and Spain and later to Germany and the Netherlands, exposed economic divergences that had been hidden behind the veil of a timid recovery in recent years. Some member states were much better placed to fight the downturn with discretionary fiscal measures than others, thus reinforcing the contentious quest for European solidarity.

Trying times are surely ahead for EU solidarity, but there are silver linings too. Compared to the global financial crisis, when EU leaders wavered to do the bare minimum to keep the EU together and to save the euro, the coronavirus crisis response proved more expedite and better coordinated. The ECB moved fast to contain interest rate spreads in the Eurozone in March. The member states agreed on a loan-based first aid package of 540 billion Euros in April. But will they also be able to agree on the largely grants-based 750 million euros recovery fund proposed by the European Commission? Germany’s U-turn augurs well. But the ‘frugal four’ (the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark and Sweden) still resist. Will the European Council be able to strike a grand bargain on Covid-19 solidarity?

The answer depends to a large extent on the domestic politics of the member states as the heads of state and government assembled in the European Council are ultimately accountable to their national voters. Our analysis, based on the third iteration of the EUI-YouGov survey on Solidarity in Europe, provides key insights into voters’ willingness to support, accept, or reject cross-border risk and burden sharing in the EU. The survey covers 13 EU member states and the UK³. It was conducted in April 2020. In earlier (2018, 2019) renditions of the survey, attitudes toward European solidarity were explored in 11 member states, for which we were able to explore how support for European solidarity varied with issues (solidarity for what?), instruments (solidarity how?) and by member state (solidarity by whom for whom?). In the expanded 2020 survey, we have been able to better prod national and EU identity markers, with questions on the ‘kind of society’ and the ‘kind of Europe’ citizens wish to live in, together with the dimension of geography, before (re-)exploring questions of issue- and instrument-linkage afresh. The 2020 survey dataset is available for download in Open Access from EUI’s research repository [through this link](#). The success of this partnership led to the establishment of a larger and ongoing research project between the European University Institute (EUI) and YouGov, which will trace European solidarity on a yearly basis according to an agreed format of the EUI-YouGov survey, updated every year to tackle the most pressing issues of EU solidarity and beyond.

3. The 2020 survey covers 13 EU member states and the UK. Total sample size was 21779 adult respondents (2151 from the UK, 2014 from Denmark, 1005 from Finland, 2033 from France, 2004 from Sweden, 1007 from Greece, 1032 from Hungary, 2021 from Italy, 1013 from Lithuania, 1136 from the Netherlands, 1012 from Poland, 1017 from Romania, 2281 from Spain). Fieldwork was undertaken between 17th and 29th April 2020. The survey was carried out online. All figures are based on data taken from the YouGov survey.



2. The Multi-Dimensional Political Space of (European) Solidarity

Organized solidarity provides the members of a community with an insurance mechanism against ‘bad risks’. This allows individual members to accept more risk, thereby enabling the group as a whole to pursue more ambitious goals and to more effectively defend its community cohesion under conditions of adversity. That is the overriding advantage of solidarity. Yet, there are also disadvantages (as highlighted in the [2018 report](#)):

1. Solidarity is *costly*. It requires that group members pass some of their own physical, financial, human or organizational resources to other members of the community in order to improve the well-being, or reduce the suffering of these other members. Solidarity involves sharing in a real, that is material sense.
2. Solidarity is *uneven*. Solidarity involves transfers from better-off to less well-off members of the community. The transfers are zero-sum, at least in the short term. They flow from good risks to bad risks, from givers to takers, from net-contributors to net-beneficiaries with no immediate compensation.
3. Solidarity breeds *moral hazard*. Solidarity unburdens actors from the need to self-protect against bad risks. This may induce careless or even openly exploitative and fraudulent behaviour that elicits unnecessary bad risks, i.e. risks that could have been avoided through appropriate self-protection, and this further increases the costs of solidarity.

There are solutions to each of these problems but they are ambiguous. To reduce the costs of solidarity, risk should be put on many shoulders. Hence, the risk pool should be relatively large. To avoid the same actors always ending up at the paying-end of the solidarity relation, the risk pool should also be heterogeneous so as to increase the chances of turn-taking in solidary giving and taking. Yet, to reduce moral hazard, the risk pool should be small and homogeneous. People tend to trust people who are like them because they have more scruples before betraying their own kind. The EU is large and its societies are diverse. This makes European solidarity potentially very rewarding for all, but also very fragile. Does European solidarity exist?

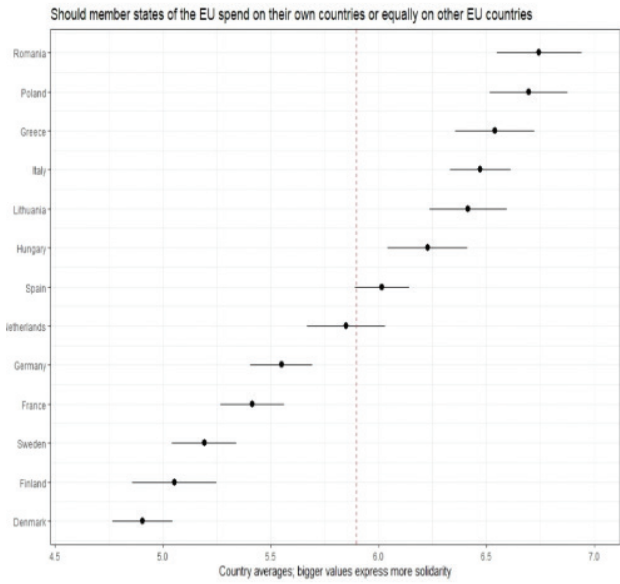
Take Away

- Support to other EU Member States is fairly high and with little variance across countries; however, Europeans prefer their taxes to be spent on helping country nationals before others.
- European solidarity is higher towards countries of geographical proximity, excluding the UK which suffers from a ‘Brexit-punishment’ effect
- Natural disasters and pandemics elicit the strongest support while national debt crises and high unemployment receive the least support; there is considerable support on the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change and technological change

European solidarity is real. In the survey, we ask respondents on a 0-10 scale whether they think national governments should spend national resources only on their own country and the welfare of their own people or also on other EU countries and other people. We summarize the answers to this question in Figure 1. The figure shows the country averages (left-panel) and maps these averages geographically (right-panel). A well-established regional cluster seems to emerge: the least resourceful SE bloc of countries shows more willingness to pay for others, whereas the more resourceful NW bloc shows less willingness to pay. Support levels in the NW group fall well below the European average (represented by the vertical dashed line) whereas the seven SE countries included in our sample are above average. Note, however, that the European average is fairly high and the spread around the average is fairly compressed. General support for solidarity varies from moderate (an average of 5 for Denmark) to moderately-high (average 7 for Romania). Hence, the overall picture is quite positive.



Figure 1 – Support for spending national resources on other countries. Country averages with 95% confidence intervals (above); European map, darker colours = higher values (below)



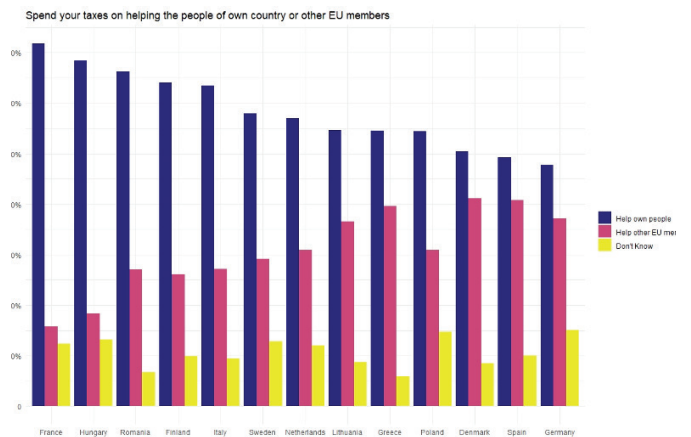
European Solidarity
Darker colors express more willingness to spend country's resources on other EU members



Solidarity is national first. In addition to the previous question, we ask respondents whether they prefer their taxes to be spent on helping country nationals or also on helping other European citizens. Here, a different picture emerges: There is not a single member state, in which a majority of respondents supports to spend national tax revenue also on the citizens of other EU member states.

Apparently, respondents are more willing to share with other European countries if asked about government resources in general (as in the previous question) than if asked about taxes more specifically (as in the present question). In the tax frame, respondents favour solidarity with country nationals first. Other Europeans come second, as figure 2 shows.

Figure 2 – Spending taxes to help other countries. % by country, including 'don't know'



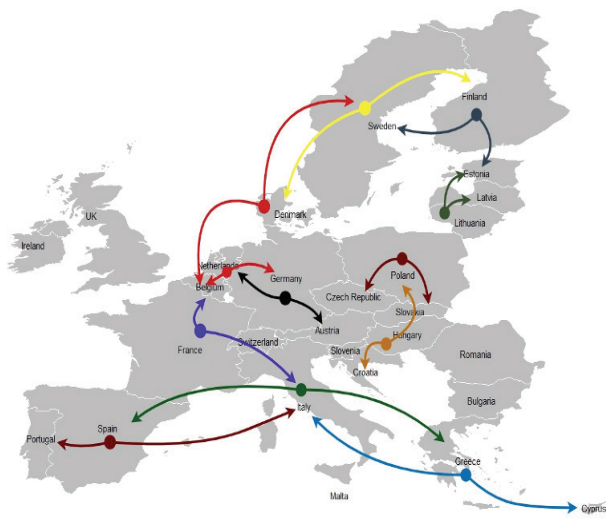
Interestingly, the top five countries in terms of support for spending tax revenue outside national borders are Denmark, Spain, Greece, Germany (also with the highest level of undecided respondents) and Lithuania – all coming from different regions. On the 'selfish' extreme, we find France, Hungary, Romania, Finland and Italy. Again, this is a mixed group. This finding is at odds with the common Northern creditors v. Southern debtors narrative. Apparently, the NW and SE are less cohesive groups than this narrative implies. We come back to this.

European solidarity increases with geographical proximity. In the survey, we also investigate which countries respondents are most willing to help: do Europeans feel more solidaristic with those who are most in need of assistance or with those closer to their own national borders? To find out, we listed 33 countries – from Europe and beyond – and asked respondents about their willingness to offer them financial assistance in case of a major crisis. Clearly, figure 3 below shows a distinct *proximity* bias: Europeans are most willing to help adjacent rather than distant EU member states. Take for example the three Scandinavian countries. Swedish respondents are



more willingness to help Finland (first) and Denmark (second) than any other country on the list. In return, Danes support Swedes (second) and Fins (third). By the same token, Finnish respondents are willing to help Sweden (second) and Denmark (third) after the less-resourceful neighbouring Estonians. A regional solidarity pattern can also be observed in Southern Europe: Italian, Spanish, and Greek respondents show strong preferences for helping each other than to support distant Sweden or Denmark for example.

Figure 3 – Solidarity for neighbours (top two choices of a sample of 12 EU countries). The figure shows the top 2 choices of all countries except the UK and Romania, to avoid overlaps and confusion

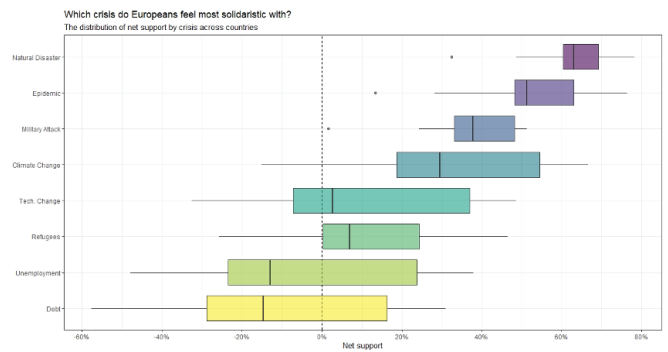


Another conspicuous finding is a negative Brexit-effect for the UK. The willingness to render financial assistance to the UK is very low in a large number of EU member states in our sample. For example, the UK comes last for Spanish and Greek respondents, even after non-European countries like Tunisia, Columbia, and Vietnam. Likewise, the UK comes as the second-to-last option for Italian and German respondents, third-to-last for France, fourth-to-last for Finland, and fifth-to-last for Romania. Interestingly, Britons are more willing to help non-European Canada and distant Malta and Cyprus over France or Ireland.

European solidarity is strongest for exogenous shocks. Which type of crisis elicits the strongest feeling of European solidarity? We ask respondents whether or not their

own home state should help other EU member states suffering from eight different types of crises. Would respondents support or oppose financial solidarity in case of natural disaster, pandemic, military attack, climate change, technological backwardness, refugee inflows, high unemployment, and high debt? Figure 4 below summarizes the results. As it shows, Europeans are more prepared to help others deal with ‘exogenous’ shocks than with ‘endogenous’ problems of the national economy. Natural disasters and pandemics elicit the strongest support while national debt crises and high unemployment receive the least support (see also the [2018 report](#)). The findings suggest that there is considerable support for European solidarity on a couple of salient issue, including the Covid-19 pandemic (note that they survey was conducted in April 2020 at the height of this pandemic), climate change and technological change. This is good news given that upcoming challenges facing Europe – the entire globe really – will inescapably involve Covid-19, the environment and technology.

Figure 4: net support by crisis. Net support (horizontal axis) is the difference between the % of respondents willing and not willing to help





3. The ‘Moral Hazard’ Conundrum in Perspective

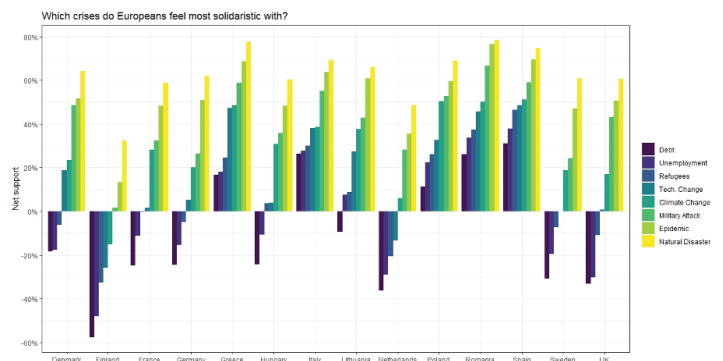
It is often taken for granted that the main obstacle to effective EU solidarity is the deep divide between a reform-oriented bloc of North-Western member states, including Scandinavian Denmark, Sweden, Finland, alongside Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK, and the reform-lagging South-Eastern member states, Italy, Spain, Greece, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Hungary. Recently, the so-called ‘frugal four’ country alliance of the eurozone members states Austria and the Netherlands, and non-euro Denmark and Sweden, have been particularly vocal in their advocacy for a leaner EU-budget, a less ambitious Covid-19 recovery fund, based mostly on loans (rather than grants), and conditional on overdue structural reform, especially but not exclusively in Southern Eurozone economies. Ever since the eurocrisis, ‘frugal’ governments, irrespective of political colour, have invoked the risk of moral hazard to justify their opposition to financial solidarity with EU-countries in fiscal trouble. The social democratic former Dutch finance minister and president of the Eurogroup Jeroen Dijsselbloem epitomized this moral hazard angst by his infamous warning that “you cannot spend all the money on drinks and women and then ask help” (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 20 March 2017). The problem with such gags is that they take on a life of their own, stereotyping European regions. Surely on alcohol consumption, Northerners drink more.

Our survey reveals a number of telling country-level peculiarities that nuance common stereotypes. As figure 5 shows, substantive differences exist between countries belonging to the same grouping. If anything, figure 5 shows, that while the NW is indeed less solidaristic (in terms of the number crisis for which they offer net support) than the SE, three rather than two groups shine through. First, an all-out solidarity group solidaristic group consisting of Greece, Italy, Poland, Romania and Spain. Second, a group of staunch opponents: Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK. Finally, an intermediate group, including Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary and Lithuania. The intermediate group is a mixed sample and contains the largest member states (Germany and France).

Take Away

- The number of crises for which European citizens offer net support provides a more nuanced picture that contrasts the oft-repeated claim of a stark divide between North-Western and South-Eastern member states.
- Still, respondents tend to support cross-border debt-relief if they believe their own home country do be a winner of EU solidarity, and oppose it if they believe to be net-losers.
- With the exception of Italy, no country is willing to leave the EU and certainly not the ‘frugal four’ who generally resist European solidarity.

Figure 5 – Net support per country & crisis. Net support is calculated as the difference between the % of respondents who agree and disagree to help with each crisis. Positive % means that respondent who agree > respondents who disagree to help, and vice versa



Solidarity and fiscal pockets to contribute. The moral hazard narrative suggests that citizens are more supportive of European solidarity, if they expect their own country to be a net-winner of solidarity transfers. In figures 6 and 7, we compare respondents’ perceptions their own country’s net-position (as winner or loser of an



EU emergency fund) to their net support for European solidarity in two different crisis scenarios: debt and pandemic. Figure 7 is consistent with an opportunistic moral hazard account of solidarity: Respondents support cross-border debt-relief if they believe their own home country do be a potential winner of EU solidarity (upper-right quadrant), and they oppose debt-solidarity if they believe their own country to be a net-loser of solidarity (lower-left quadrant). Only two countries don't fit the pattern. Respondents in Lithuania and Hungary tend to oppose assistance to indebted member states even though they perceive their own countries as net-winners of solidarity.

Figure 6 – Net support for debt crisis by perceived net position. Y-axis represents net support for debt crisis; X-axis represents respondent's perception of being a winner or loser of a potential EU emergency fund. The shades represent 95% confidence intervals

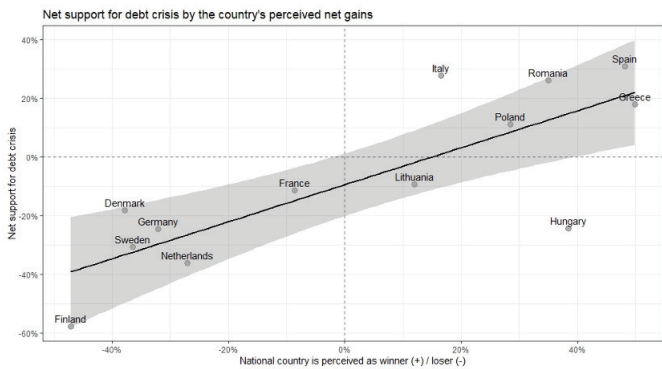
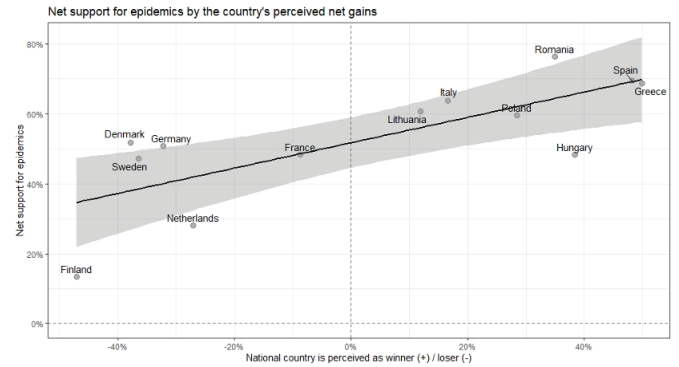


Figure 7 presents a much more benign picture. To be sure, solidarity with pandemic-stricken member states also increases with perceived net-gain of the own country. Yet the slope of the curve is less pronounced and the general level of support is much higher. All member states are located in the two upper quadrants indicating positive net-support regardless of whether the country is perceived as winner or loser.

Figure 7 – Net support for epidemics by perceived net position. Y-axis represents net support for epidemic crisis; X-axis represents respondent's perception of being a winner or loser of a potential EU emergency fund. The shades represent 95% confidence intervals



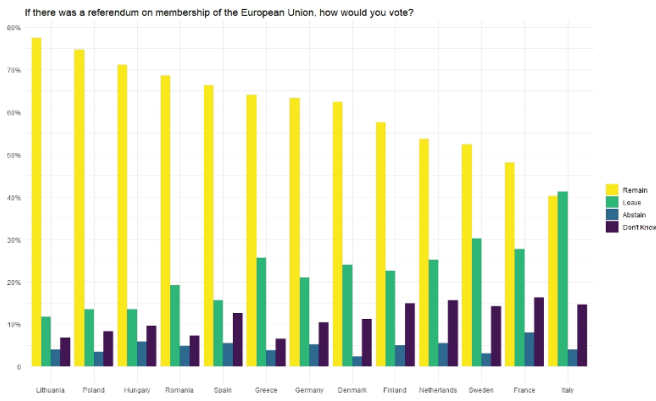
The difference between figures 6 and 7 reinforces the argument that support for solidarity varies with the type of crisis: if the causes of a crisis are endogenous, as potentially in debt crises, the winners of solidarity will support it and the losers will oppose it. If, however, the causes of the crisis are exogenous, as presumably in the case of pandemics, everyone supports solidarity, regardless of its net-gain or loss. However, despite this variation by level of support, the positive correlation between these two values show that the more a country believes to be benefiting from European solidarity, the more it will be in favour of it (or less against it). EU solidarity is issue-specific and reciprocal.

Particularly relevant for the moral hazard conundrum is whether countries with deep fiscal pockets will follow the UK and leave the EU before contributing to EU solidarity? Interestingly, the data suggests that it is precisely the 'frugals' who are least willing to leave the EU. The percentage of those who answered, in a hypothetical referendum on EU membership, to leave, the 'frugals' are on a par with Greece (with 20 to 25% willing to leave compared to around 60% (or more) vouching to remain). In thus hypothetical referendum remain trumps leave in all 27 countries – with one notable exception, Italy (figure 8). To be sure, the 'frugal four' are generally opposed to fiscal solidarity, but their electorates are highly likely to



leave the EU, from which small open economies, obviously, profit the most. A token of small open economy member state's "wisdom of the crowds", if there ever was one. The Italian picture is truly more bleak, especially when we look at voting intentions by party affiliation, with PD coming forth as the only large party with consistent support for EU membership. All other Italian parties favour leaving the EU by large margins (as discussed in [another study](#) based on the EU-YouGov 2020 data). This element should not be underestimated, but it needs to be considered that this survey took place in the most heated moment when the 'frugal four' were still five, with Germany continuing to veto fiscal burden-sharing to mitigate Covid-19 social and economic aftershocks.

Figure 8 - Remain or leave? % of respondents by country, including 'abstain' and 'don't know'

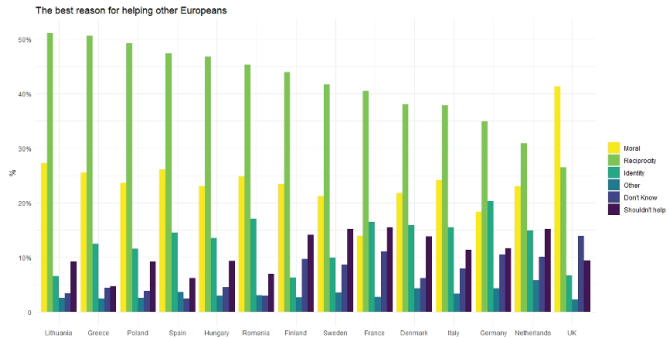


The evidence shown so far demonstrates that European solidarity exists, yet only as a 'second order' solidarity after national solidarity is secured for; that it is bound to geographical proximity; that it varies substantially across issues, despite being generally correlated with perceptions of being on the recipient or donor side of EU solidarity. To be sure, EU solidarity is constrained. However, our survey also allows for some silver linings.

4. The Silver Linings for EU Solidarity

We also delved into the 'drivers' of solidarity. Why would a nation decide to share resources with another without immediate returns? We allow three options for respondents: we help other Europeans because it is the right thing to do (i.e., morality), or because we might ourselves need help in the future (i.e., reciprocity), or because we share a common identity (i.e., identity). Figure 9 presents the answers. It shows a general preference among Europeans for reciprocal solidarity: 40% of respondents are motivated by reciprocity, whereas 24% think it is morally the right thing to do. Only 13% believe European solidarity is a matter of shared identity.

Figure 9 – Why helping other Europeans. Columns represent the % of respondents' top choice of reason why Europeans should help each other, including 'don't know' and those who believe European shouldn't help any other country



Interestingly, the two countries where the third option ('Because we have a shared identity with them') ranks among the top two are France and Germany. The residual answer category 'we shouldn't help other Europeans', showing no willingness to support, never really adds up to 15% (for France, the Netherlands and Sweden). The UK marks the only deviation from the general pattern: Britons seem to believe more in morality than in reciprocity as a driver of helping other Europeans. There is some variation for those who prefer not to help, a variation that ranges from 5% in Greece to 15% France, Sweden, and the Netherlands, with other countries falling



Take Away

- Europeans believe the best reason to help other EU countries is reciprocity, rather than morality or a shared identity.
- Once European solidarity is provided for, respondents prefer pan-EU organization of solidarity over uni- or bilateral agreements, and permanent instruments rather than case-by-case support.
- Europeans have a strong preference for a more protective and global Europe, rather than a market Europe

in between. For all intents and purposes, in a large heterogeneous union, reciprocity is a far sounder basis for solidarity than moral or identity.

Once the Rubicon is crossed, solidarity is best coordinated by the EU. We asked the following question: if national governments decided to help with our eight crisis types, how would respondents prefer to support other Europeans? Support could be channelled bilaterally from one national government to another, or through EU coordination. The two-fold figure below summarize respondents' answers to this question, across crises and across countries (figure 10). Generally, this figure shows that Europeans prefer collective support through EU coordination over uni- or bilateral support between individual governments. This general preference holds both for all countries and in regard to all crises. Similarly, once the Rubicon of (conditional) solidarity is crossed, European publics prefer a pan-EU organization of solidarity rather than ad-hoc, case-by-case, support.

Figure 10 – Level of support: unilateral or collective? Vertical bars represent the % of net supporters for helping other European countries on their own, or through a joint EU effort, including 'don't know', by crisis (above) and by country (below)



In addition to variation by level, there are several instruments to help on offer. The 2020 survey displays two options: helping on case-by-case basis or by creating a permanent system of support. Figure 11 summarises responses to this question: Europeans generally prefer permanent systems of support over ad-hoc solutions. In effect, this applies to all issues, ranging from exogenous epidemics and more endogenous unemployment and public debt predicaments. If there is to be EU solidarity, it has to be EU-based and on a permanent basis. Europeans trust more the EU to do this better on a permanent basis, instead of ad-hoc, bilateral, and temporal agreements.



Figure 11: help on permanent vs case-by case basis by crisis. Vertical bars represent the % of net supporters for helping other European countries on a case-by-case, or permanent basis, including 'don't know', by crisis (above) and by country (below)

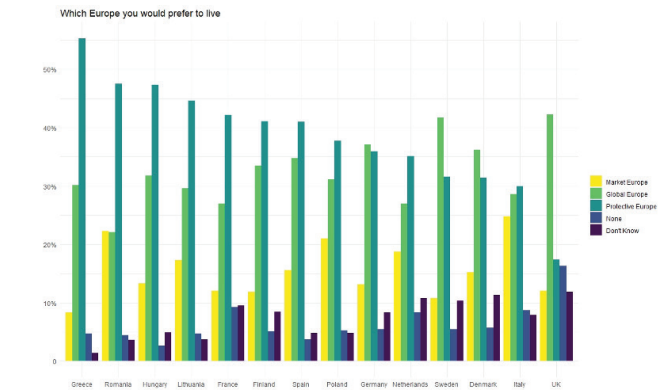


It is particularly interesting to see how, from previous figures, variation between issues remains extremely high. In case of instrument preference, by contrast, the permanent solidarity mechanism trumps the case-by-case option in all cases, from endogenous (debt) to moral hazard-free shocks (epidemic and natural disasters). This also holds across countries, with the exceptions of UK and Sweden where case-by-case is slightly higher or close to permanent mechanism. In short, once the Rubicon of (conditional) EU solidarity is crossed, European publics trust pan-EU organization, instrumentation and coordination of solidarity more than ad-hoc, case-by-case, uni- and bilateral country-level support.

Finally, the 2020 EUI-YouGov survey was enriched by more specific questions on 'what kind of society' and 'what kind of Europe' citizens wish to live in.

Europeans have a strong preference for a more protective and global Europe. For the 2020 rendition of the survey, respondents were asked in which Europe they would like to live: a market Europe that stresses economic integration, market competition and fiscal discipline; a global Europe that acts as a leader on climate, human rights and global peace; or a protective Europe that defends the European way of life and welfare against internal and external threats (figure 12). All in all, a protective Europe came out first (37%) with Global Europe as a close second (33%), with a market Europe far behind in third place (15%).

Figure 12 – What Europe would you prefer to live in? % of respondents by country, including 'none' and 'don't know'



Evidently, there is a family resemblance between reciprocity, protection and insurance. Post-Brexit UK respondents are particularly keen in looking at the EU from the global perspective. Interestingly, the UK is the country where most respondents see moral obligation as the most important reason to help others. Some other belonging the North-Western stereotype are torn between a protective and a global Europe, including Germany, Sweden and Denmark. Beyond country-level specificities, the purely economic construction of Europe, based on open market liberalism, is not what the European *demos* aspire to.



5. A Confined Political Space for Solidarity with Covid-19 Leeway

Not electorates, but member governments (and EU institutions such as the ECB) decide on the future of Europe together. However, at the current political juncture, national electorates are, more than ever, conspicuous about what prime ministers and cabinet members agree to at marathon meetings of the European Council. Leaders feel the popular pressure and this influences inter-governmental joint-decision making. National publics may sometimes be more supportive of European solidarity than their governments (Denmark) and vice versa (Finland). Our 2020 survey reveals five important political lessons for domestic and EU-level policy-makers in fighting the Covid-19 pandemic and its economic and social aftershocks. We extract four lessons for policy-makers from the EUI YouGov.

European solidarity is hard to come by, yet more than skin-deep

Overall support for European solidarity is positive, ranging from moderate to moderately-high. However, the scope for European solidarity is constrained by distributive conflict between net-contributors to the EU-budget in the North and net-recipients in the South and the East. Yet, there is no evident cleavage between rich nay-sayers and poor Samaritans. Strong opposition against European solidarity from the smaller member states of Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden is not really trailed by other small state electorates from Denmark, Hungary and Lithuania together with the largest countries of the EU, Germany and France.

European solidarity is second best, issue-specific and reciprocal

Unsurprisingly, solidarity is national first and decreases with geographical remoteness (as also stereotypes come into political purview). By and large, European citizens' view solidarity as an issue-specific and reciprocal benefit rather than a moral or identity-based obligation. Our findings suggest considerable support for European solidarity on salient issues of exogenous nature, including the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change and technolog-

ical change. Consistent with reciprocity and exogenous salience, Europeans fancy a more protective and global Europe.

European solidarity best executed by the EU on a permanent basis

Quite surprisingly, when national governments do engage in European solidarity, their electorates have a strong preference for permanent EU-instrumentation, above and beyond ad-hoc, case-by-case, uni- and bilateral support. In other words, a comprehensive European-Commission-led Covid-19 recovery strategy is likely to receive ample public backing across Europe.

European solidarity dissent strongest in small member states unlikely to leave the EU

Like their respective governments, electorates in Sweden and the Netherlands, are most apprehensive about European solidarity. Yet, at the same time, in case of a referendum on the EU, Dutch and Swedish publics are most hesitant to leave the EU by a large margin. This finding reflects the 'wisdom of the crowds' that small open economies do well under conditions of open markets and international trade, the substantive basis upon which the EU was founded. Now that the German government has come round in support of fiscal solidarity (grants) for the countries hardest hit by the Coronavirus pandemic – an exogenous shock par excellence –, there is arguably some leverage to 'talk tough' to the leaders of the 'frugal four', including that corporate tax regimes. What future is there for small open economies on a continent that allows large economies like Italy and Spain to default on austerity and opt for populist protectionism? The common interest surely is a real recovery from Covid-19 and obviously not a muted one frustrated by diverging debt dynamics.

European solidarity is amenable to narrative vindication and feedback

Covid-19 European solidarity, coming out of cumulative European Council negotiations over the summer of 2020, will combine different instruments, many issues, and varying timelines, in order to satisfy member states governments and electorates. Any alignment of issues (health and economics), instruments (grants and loans) and time (reforms and rebates fading in and out) that enter the



EU Covid-19 recovery strategy will not be self-evident (equally) to national electorates. The EUI-YouGov survey brought to fore how geographically proximate sentiments of solidarity really are. The flip-side is that stereotyping (drinks/women) transpire in public debates about distant regions on the continent. In Northern Europe, few people know that Italy, at low levels of growth, has been running primary surpluses to contain its high level of public debt for more than a decade. Yet, it is not easy for government leaders in (self-perceived) net-contributor countries to explain that European solidarity today is in the long-term national interest even if it involves short-run costs. Today Angela Merkel is the exception. In a similar fashion, it is not politically opportune for leaders of countries in dire straits to explain to their national constituencies that reform conditionality and external discipline are justifiable in exchange for robust fiscal support. Perhaps, a more politically astute European Commission should take on a stronger role in the narrative brokering of the Covid-19 recovery strategy, on the basis of a reciprocal insurance logic, for which there is widespread support, and take political credit for this.



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