

SOCIALEU POLICY BRIEF

Exploring the nexus between Supranational Redistribution and European Solidarity

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NOVEMBER 2023

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The missing pillar. European Social Policy and Eurosceptic Challenges (SOCIALEU)



Funded by the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme of the European Union
under Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions. Grant agreement number 84036

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Introduction

In the wake of unprecedented challenges and an everyday shifting of the social, political and economic landscape throughout the European Union (EU), the concept of solidarity has become an important aspect of its dynamics and overall functioning. It has gained relevancy as a model to be applied in response to the latest crises that have hit the continent, like the Covid-19 pandemic or the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine.

However, it is necessarily linked to a bigger framework that can enable its correct application: the welfare state. Founded on principles of equality of opportunity, equitable redistribution of wealth and public common responsibility, this has been the bedrock of many national states' policies, striving to promote a just society through concepts like "social security" or "worker's protection". The former encompasses a range of measures designed to provide financial support and access to essential services for individuals and groups facing hardships, such as disability, old age, unemployment, widowhood, orphanhood, etc. Meanwhile, the latter ensures that workers' rights are upheld, protecting employees against abuses and ensuring safe and fair working conditions.

In national states, the process of redistribution is implemented through progressive taxation and social spending, aiming to transfer resources from the wealthier segments of society to the more vulnerable. This approach seeks to narrow the wealth gap and create a safety net for deprived individuals and groups, thereby promoting social cohesion and stability.

However, as we face new challenges in the EU, the need for a supranational style of cooperation and redistribution has become increasingly apparent. Currently, the only example of this trend are the NextGenerationEU funds, which were created as an instrument to support the economic recovery after the Covid-19 pandemic, but also as a tool to build a greener, more digital and resilient Europe. Nevertheless, this scheme is based on redistribution between Member States, transcending national borders to tackle common issues collectively, and requiring coordination on a transnational scale. However, it lacks an individual, more personal approach. This can be achieved through the conception of new policies that would ensure that people, regardless of their economic status or nationality, have access to their basic needs and opportunities, while mitigating the risk of social exclusion and economic disparities.

Supranational redistribution, nevertheless, is an objective that is achievable not without hurdles. The rise of Euroscepticism, best defined as the attitude characterized by a critical stance towards the EU, affects not only the policies implemented but the very nature of the institutions, its fundamental principles and objectives. Over the past decade, this phenomenon has witnessed a notable surge, with a shift in public sentiment that has been fueled by a confluence of factors, ranging from economic crises and immigration challenges to concerns about sovereignty and a misperceived democratic deficit in the Union. In this context, far-right populist parties have grown across Europe, exploiting Euroscepticism to advance and normalize their agendas, capitalizing on citizen disenchantment as well as dissatisfaction with the status quo. Brexit epitomizes the grave and enduring repercussions that this phenomenon can have on the European project, and therefore on key aspects like transnational solidarity and redistribution efforts.

Nonetheless, supranational redistribution in the EU can actually counterbalance these Eurosceptic discourses in a successful way. By demonstrating tangible benefits for its citizens, these policies can dispel some of the concerns raised by Eurosceptics, while at the same time enhancing the room for a “silent majority” of Europeans that support this new approach of redistribution and other important measures, based on solidarity.

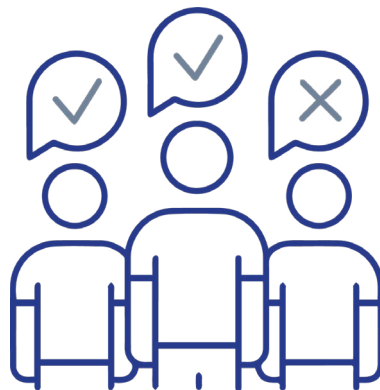
SOCIALEU SUMMARY

The SOCIALEU project inquires into how redistributive policies at the supranational level influence support for the EU. By employing survey experiments in Spain and Italy, the study finds that an European Unemployment Scheme is the most likely to boost support for European integration, especially among the most economically-deprived citizens.

Key Observations

The research regarding the relationship between supranational redistribution and EU support brings forward an answer to a central question in EU studies, being related to the exploration of conditions that can strengthen the legitimacy of the European Union against the forces of Euroscepticism and global inequalities.

By creating a made-up scenario in which the EU proposes the development of new measures for supranational redistribution, SOCIALEU uses a survey experiment to analyze if these initiatives can cause a shift in European public opinion.



The suggested new measures constitute an ESB (European Social Benefit) and a EUB (European Unemployment Benefit), both of them being policies created in an effort to reduce social inequalities and expand the idea of redistribution between individuals.

This would exist in contrast with the existing version of supranational redistribution in the European Union, which nowadays only functions in the form of solidarity between member states, with the example of the NextGenerationEU funds, created in 2020 as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic and following crisis. Nevertheless, the research considers and computes all three programs.

This survey experiment was conducted in the two largest Southern European countries: Spain and Italy. In fact, while having similar socio-economic indicators and welfare regimes, there are differences in their EU economic contributions as well as public and party attitudes towards the EU, among others. These differences facilitate a deeper understanding of how supranational redistribution is shaped.

The SOCIALEU research shows that the general effect of supranational redistribution on people's support for the EU is not significant.

These social policies, according to the analysis, would not necessarily provoke a radical switch in EU support among Europeans, neither in Spain nor in Italy, consequently failing its contribution to integration as previously argued by some theoretical sources.

However, some nuances need to be taken into account. The general explanation is that the evaluation of these new policies and their consequences for the European Union and its citizen support don't manifest in a unified way. In fact, it's important to acknowledge that these findings are diverse, meaning that there may be certain groups whose responses contradict the overall results.

These distinctions are based on two key aspects: economic vulnerability and national identity. The research shows that the relationship between supranational redistribution at the EU level and support for the Union is actually significant among people that are more likely to benefit from redistributive policies (that is, the more economically disadvantaged), and also among people who have exclusive national identities.

Policy Recommendations

In order to bring more light into the topic and its future development at a European level, we've established concrete policy recommendations, relevant for policymakers, as well as other like-minded and willing colleagues.

1 Strengthening supranational redistribution via increased funding.

In order to develop new measures of redistribution at the European Union level, we need to consider exploring new paths that can help increase the EU budget in a manageable, realistic way.

One strategy to contemplate is to engage Member States in new discourses about gradual, progressive increases in their economic contributions to the common budget.

This should be done highlighting the positive impacts of the new redistributive measures, as well as their impact on social cohesion, economic stability and crisis management.

To complete this recommendation, it would be needed for the European Commission to establish a transparent framework for

the allocation of the increased funds to the new supranational redistribution measures and programs.

This would also seek to prioritize citizen engagement in the decision-making processes, involving public participation in the shaping of funding mechanisms that better align with their interests and concerns, and that improve their financial and social well-being.

Communication and transparency are key, and by exploring this strategy, the European Union can ensure a stronger, more resilient economic basis for their new redistributive initiatives, reinforcing unity and solidarity.

2 Creation of a European Supranational Redistribution Advisory Network.

This new web of skilled scholars would be mainly integrated by experts in public policy, economics, sociology and political science, from all over the European Union. It would serve as a center for integrative research, analysis and overall advice regarding the design, implementation and future assessment of the new supranational redistribution initiatives.

The main function of the new network would be to conduct and connect independent evaluations of the proposed redistributive measures (EUB and ESB), estimating their potential effectiveness and challenges while offering insights based on tangible evidence.

For example, and based on this research, economically disadvantaged people and those with exclusive national identities would respond to these new measures in a more positive way than other social groups. These assessments would be able to help both the European Commission and the Member States to make informed decisions regarding supranational redistribution and its future successes.

Also, the advisory network would be able to promote knowledge sharing among researchers, policymakers as well as public and private institutions. This could be completed with the organization of regular workshops, conferences or seminars to discuss research findings and share experiences, ultimately helping the system to improve.

3

Establishment of supranational redistribution task forces to monitor the implementation of both EUB and ESB.

Afterwards, the Commission should begin and develop pilot programs in selected regions in the EU, in order to correctly implement the new redistributive initiatives. These should be directed by dedicated task forces (made of experts, EU policymakers and Member States' representatives), which would oversee the execution and development of the new measures.

These groups would have numerous functions and responsibilities. Firstly, they should evaluate and provide insights of what is specifically needed in those regions, critically analyzing the initiatives' outcomes, reach and alignment with the goals of EU integration. Also, and based on each of the cases' peculiarities, the new task forces should collect data on the citizens' experiences and overall public perceptions of the new measures, while at the same time keeping themselves updated to new socio-economic challenges and dynamics.

Additionally, transparent mechanisms of communication should be put in place as ways to make these processes more accessible and understandable. Therefore, the EU would be promoting accountability and transparency, making sure to its citizens that their interests are being actively defended.

Ultimately, and as emphasized beforehand, the new task forces should promote knowledge sharing as well as best practice exchange between Member States. A collaborative approach would help end the disparities present in the overall capacity for the implementation of supranational redistribution measures.

4

Create a public awareness campaign for the new redistributive policies.

Public understanding and support for the new EUB and ESB measures are key for a successful implementation and outcome. Therefore, the European Union should launch a comprehensive campaign, aiming to educate the citizens about the objectives and future benefits of the new supranational redistribution initiatives. This would highlight a sense of common participation among the population.

The public awareness strategy may use several communication channels, including both social media and traditional media outlets.

With the addition of community events, it should emphasize the importance and positive impacts of these redistributive initiatives on reducing inequality and protecting social cohesion. Real-life stories of individual beneficiaries of both the EUB and the ESB could be highlighted once the processes of implementation are at a functioning stage and can provide actual results.

The campaign should target people of all ages, but especially the younger generations. By creating and promoting a better understanding of these new policies, the EU would be able to communicate with a more informed and engaged citizenry that is able to appreciate and value the importance of supranational collective action and solidarity.

Finally, the success or failure of the campaign can be measured through surveys and other feedback mechanisms, making sure that the strategy reaches its intended audience and can positively influence public perceptions of the new redistributive measures.

5 Expansion of the European Solidarity Corps.

This program, which was launched in December 2016, was designed with the purpose of creating opportunities for young people to participate in volunteering activities, as well as to run solidarity projects for communities all throughout Europe.

We think the European Union should grant additional funding for its expansion (even maybe from the supranational redistribution increase, mentioned in the 1st recommendation), in order to ease the extension of more diverse volunteer opportunities with goals of social justice, inclusion, cohesion, and other ways of community development. By broadening the variety of these activities, the Corps would be able to attract a wider range of participants and increase its diversity to address new challenges.

This expansion would imply new collaborations with more organizations (governmental, non-governmental, private companies, etc.) whose purposes fall under the scope of solidarity. To further encourage participation, the European Union could even offer education incentives, such as traveling opportunities, language courses, or even scholarships.

Increased Erasmus + funding could also be another motivation for participation in the Corps, with the addition of new placements and destinations. This all should be taken into consideration while

acknowledging those with lower socioeconomic status, using a progressive approach in apportionment of funding and resources.

The enlargement of the European Solidarity Corps promotes our common shared values among the European youth, as well as the positive impact and consequences of the measures of supranational redistribution.

Additionally, it emphasizes the tangible connection between citizens of different Member States, reinforcing the concept of European solidarity and unity; not just as theoretical concepts, but as something that individual people can actively contribute to and achieve through meaningful actions.

6 Introduction of a European Social Innovation Fund

This new fund would represent a dedicated financial resource, within the EU budget, that would focus on addressing social inequalities and promoting innovation taking into account the importance of supranational redistribution. The allocation of this fund should prioritize new, innovative projects that target income inequality, social inclusion and access to essential services, by the means of developing creative, sustainable and resilient solutions to questions related to supranational redistribution, among other processes.

The Fund would invite a wide range of stakeholders to contribute with their own ideas and expertise, like NGOs, local organizations and research institutions. All of this would function through an intense cross-country sense of collaboration, highlighting the involvement of volunteers, experts and other participants from different European countries and regions.

The Commission would also need to create an independent evaluation panel, in order to ensure transparency, accountability and impartiality in the allocation of these funds, examining the project proposals and monitoring their progress. Overall, this Social Innovation Fund aligns with the EU's commitment to social justice and solidarity while reinventing itself against newly evolved challenges. Also, it would maximize the impact of the European Union's resources while making sure that the concept of supranational redistribution and its related efforts remain relevant and effective.

Conclusions

This policy brief digs into the complex relationship between supranational redistributive policies and public support for the European Union. Reasoning from experimental data collected in both Spain and Italy, as well as insights from policy feedback effects and other sources, this text offers a versatile perspective on the impact of supranational redistribution on public opinion regarding the EU.

The concept of solidarity in the European Union has become increasingly important due to the last unprecedented challenges for the continent, like the Covid-19 pandemic or the Russian aggression and war in Ukraine.

It therefore articulates a large framework of the welfare state, and emphasizes the importance of equal wealth redistribution and common public responsibility.

In the context of this critical time, also marked by Euroscepticism and its remains after Brexit, the creation of new European instruments for socio-economic redistribution may actually prove to be a turning point in the establishment of a supranational solidarity space.

Furthermore, it also could be a crucial opportunity for “bonding” and policy-building all across the European Union. By demonstrating tangible effects for citizens, the new redistributive measures (ESB & EUB) can address some of the concerns raised by critics, as well as engage the “silent majority” of Europeans that actually support a more solidarity-based approach towards redistribution.

Ultimately, our recommendations aim to promote European solidarity and integration, by the means of strengthening supranational redistribution; increasing transparency, public awareness and accountability; and supporting new solutions to social and economic challenges. Through these new measures, the EU can be able to bridge the gap between its institutions and its citizens, reinforcing the principles, values and morals that it bears.



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