

Who Wants a United Europe? Interests, Identities, and the Prospects for Future European Union Enlargement

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Introduction

The fifth wave of European Union (EU) enlargement shifted the borders of the bloc significantly towards the East in what can be considered a symbolic unification of the continent, as the EU grew from 15 to 28 member states between 2004 and 2013. However, even after such substantial expansion of its borders, several candidates remain in the pipeline of accession to the Union. While the contentious issue of Turkey's membership is unlikely to be resolved any time soon, the hopes for a swift accession of at least some of the Western Balkan countries vanished as Jean-Claude Juncker officially put enlargement on hold during his tenure as the President of the Commission (2014-2019). However, by the end of the Juncker Commission's term, the debate over welcoming new members is likely to re-emerge, especially with regard to those Western Balkan countries which have already opened the accession negotiation process. But how much public support in Europe is there for further extending the membership of the Union?

The question of public support for enlargement is more relevant than ever, as public opinion has become an increasingly important element for understanding the dynamics of current European Union politics (Hobolt and Vries 2016). The simultaneous processes of widening and deepening of the European Union over the last two decades have dramatically shifted the internal and external limits of the community, thereby contributing to the politicisation of the process and scope of European integration (Hooghe and Marks 2009). The current level of politicisation of European policies and the degree of public opinion contestation of some of its main tenets could not be further from the so-called "permissive consensus" of the early decades of European integration,

when decisions regarding its development were taken by the national elites, while ordinary citizens remained largely uninterested in European affairs (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970). Since the creation of the European Union with the Maastricht Treaty, but especially in the aftermath of the more recent economic recession, with its ramifications in the Eurozone, and as a consequence of the so-called migrant and refugee crisis of recent years, European integration in general, and specific EU policies in particular, have become part of national political debates. Overall, the deepening of integration over the last decades has brought the EU closer to its citizens in many respects. However, this change has not generated a greater attachment of the people, but rather has triggered more resistance and contestation. Such growing public and party-based contestation of EU politics is rooted in the transformations of territorial boundaries taking place with the deepening of European integration, and which have profoundly restructured European societies and reconfigured the lines of national political conflict (Conti 2014). The politicisation of EU integration means much more public opinion scrutiny over any new developments in the Union, a change which will also affect any future enlargements, not least because EU citizens could determine the outcome of the process by voting on the issue in public referenda.

Moreover, the crisis mode of EU politics in the last decade has meant the Union becoming more inward-looking and remaining focused on solving internal crises. The question of further expanding its borders has therefore remained outside of the first line of political urgency. However, some of those internal challenges can be directly linked to the most recent wave of enlargement. On the one hand, the ongoing process of the exit of Great Britain was triggered to a great extent by a populist backlash over an increase in intra-European mobility following Eastern enlargement. On the other hand, problems of democratic backsliding in several of the more recently admitted member states (most importantly, Poland and Hungary), as well as the ongoing conflict over solutions to the refugee crisis, constitute a reminder that every expansion of the Union transforms it deeply and can yield very long-term and unforeseen consequences for the community. The ongoing debates related to all these issues suggest a rather hostile environment for taking even more members on board.

In this context, the aim of this chapter is to assess the state of current public opinion on the topic of further EU enlargement and explore the factors which contribute to the current substantial opposition to such future development. In what follows, I present the general model of EU attitude formation, review and critically reflect upon the most important approaches (the utilitarian model and the affective framework), and discuss their impact on the specific dimension of enlargement. I then move on to explore the empirical results of a descriptive and explanatory analysis of contemporary attitudes towards EU enlargement. I close the chapter with a discussion of the repercussions of the findings for the future of EU widening.

Opposition to enlargement in the context of research on EU attitudes

As public opinion gained importance in European Union politics, the determinants of European attitudes have been taken up as an important topic of research. If we approach the EU as a political system (Easton 1979), these attitudes can best be analysed with the help of the theoretical tools of political support and democratic legitimacy. Consequently, most empirical studies of attitudes towards the European Union draw on the Eastonian framework of political support, even if scholars have often found it hard to distinguish empirically between specific and diffuse support for the EU (Hobolt 2014). In any case, attitudes towards enlargement can best be approached as a separate dimension of EU support, one that indicates EU citizens' view of the Union as closed/delimited by current borders or open, with boundaries in flux. In particular, the rejection of keeping the community borders open to allow further unification of the continent is of interest here, in line with research on popular Euroscepticism, a strand of public opinion research focused on analysing the determinants of discontent and negative attitudes towards the EU (McLaren 2007; Boomgaarden et al. 2011). Previous studies indicate that two main explanatory frameworks of such opposition can be distinguished: utilitarian calculations and affective factors.

Since the European Union originated in a process of economic integration, it comes as no surprise that the first and one of the most widely acknowledged approaches to explaining attitudes towards it is the utilitarian model, which relies on perceived gains and losses from the process of integration as determinants of European attitudes. The instrumental rationality approach rests on the assumption that economic conditions and specific outcomes of trade liberalisation and other integration policies influence support for the EU, as citizens make rational calculations about the benefits they accrue from European integration (Gabel 1998). We can distinguish two levels of such calculations – the “sociotropic” utilitarian perspective emphasises the impact of perceived and real national material benefits from integration at the collective level, while the “egocentric” utilitarian approach focuses on perceived gains from membership and the integration process at the individual level. In both cases, winners of European integration – those who benefit materially from the process, or perceive it as favourable to them or their country – are expected to become more supportive of the EU. Both individual human capital (education, sector of occupation, level of income) and perceptions of personal situation and national economy have been used to determine whether individuals benefit from the opportunities created by the common market, and, as a consequence, become more supportive of further integration.

In this context, opinions regarding further enlargement stand out from other EU policies, which might be analysed from the point of view of citizens' perception of cost and benefit. This is due to the fact that enlargement does not concern EU citizens' rights

or benefit them directly, but rather its impact can be more diffused (a country paying more into the EU budget to accommodate more spending on regional policy, relocation of companies, intra-European mobility). Still, these possible outcomes are not considered inconsequential, as we have seen in debates over previous enlargements. Sociotropic (country-level) utilitarian factors seem especially relevant, in terms of subjective perceptions of national economy or fear of paying more into the EU budget as a result of enlargement (Taydas and Kentmen-Cin 2017), as well as in terms of the objective costs of membership as reflected in the division between net contributors and beneficiaries of the EU budget (Hobolt 2014). Moreover, in the light of previous research, this specific dimension of EU attitudes merits a separate analysis because such utilitarian calculations could potentially function quite differently than in the case of support for the deepening of integration. Specifically, a significant portion of citizens who can be considered as “winners of integration” (better-educated, more knowledgeable about the EU, in countries that are net contributors to the budget) and thus tend to be supportive of the EU and its policies in general, can single out enlargement as undesirable if it is perceived as costly for them and their countries (Hobolt 2014).

While rational calculations remain one of the most widely acknowledged predictors of European attitudes, in recent years the importance of affective determinants has been emphasised (Hooghe and Marks 2005, 2009; Van Klingeren, Boomgaarden, and De Vreese 2013). Identities – both national and European – as determinants of European attitude formation have received increasing attention from scholars of EU public opinion. This development mirrors the changes in the focus of European politics at large, which have shifted from strictly economic integration to a much wider spectrum of policies. This is especially relevant for enlargement attitudes, since welcoming new members to the community stirs debate related not only to its economic effects but also, and sometimes more importantly, to the notions of community, culture, and identity. This has been especially true for the accession of Turkey, which constitutes one of the most contentious issues in current EU politics, with much of the debate surrounding it related to issues of cultural and religious difference. In fact, existing research on public opinion opposition to Turkish membership in the EU has shown that “soft” identity-related factors could actually be more relevant to understanding these attitudes than “hard” utilitarian factors (McLaren 2007; Vreese, Boomgaarden, and Semetko 2008), and studies have singled out determinants related to migration and symbolic threat (McLaren 2007), perceptions of out-group (Azrout, van Spanje, and de Vreese 2011), as well as religious affiliation (Taydas and Kentmen-Cin 2017) and perceived religious threat (Azrout, Spanje, and Vreese 2013). Moreover, while presence of migrants in a country in general does not seem to be relevant to opinions on enlargement, the presence of Muslim migrants has been found to be a relevant contextual factor in explaining opposition to Turkey’s accession (Azrout, Spanje, and Vreese 2013).

To summarise the theoretical model to be tested below, attitude formation is a complex and multidimensional process, which is not easily explained by one set of factors. Both sets of explanations, utilitarian as well as affective, have been previously found to constitute relevant determinants of support for and opposition to further enlargement, with more importance attached to individual-level factors (Taydas and Kentmen-Cin 2017). However, in the context of a public opinion which is highly polarised over issues of EU integration as a result of the economic recession and the migrant and refugee crisis, depending which set of factors turns out to be more significant, we could expect different scenarios for the future of enlargement. If utilitarian factors have a higher explanatory power, improving economic conditions are likely to reduce current opposition to enlargement. On the other hand, if identity-related factors turn out to be the most relevant explanatory dimension, this would suggest a more deeply entrenched opposition, in terms of how national and European communities are defined. The high impact of identity threat would indicate that citizens are inclined to fix the borders of the Union because they see it as a distinctive community, and candidate countries are not perceived as part of it, but rather as an out-group and a threat. On the other hand, European identity that correlates with significantly stronger support for enlargement would indicate that the notion of European collective identity remains open to its redefinition through the extension of the borders of the EU. Finally, the question remains whether the determinants of opposition vary across different European countries. In what follows, I explore current levels of support for and opposition to enlargement in the descriptive analysis of recent data for the EU-28, before turning to the explanatory model of opposition to address these questions.

Empirical analysis

Descriptive analysis: State of current European public opinion on enlargement

In order to capture the current state of public opinion in Europe regarding the possibility of further enlargement of the Union, we can turn to Eurobarometer data. The Eurobarometer has served to gauge the European public mood since the 1970s, and continues to offer a vantage point for exploring the state of public opinion on a variety of issues related to European integration, including the prospects of enlargement. The survey is carried out regularly in all member states, as well as in candidate countries. For over a decade now, its standard biannual studies have included a question regarding support for further enlargement, and, from time to time, also asked about EU citizens' opinion regarding the accession of particular candidate countries. Several previous analyses on the topic have focused on attitudes towards the accession of specific countries (Taydas and Kentmen-Cin 2017), especially in relation to the controversy over Turkish membership (Vreese, Boomgaarden, and Semetko 2008; Azrout, van Spanje, and de Vreese 2011;

Azrout, Spanje, and Vreese 2013; Erisen and Erisen 2014). In this paper, however, I will focus on attitudes towards the general idea of enlargement, in order to explore the notion of the EU as an open/closed community, as well as to analyse the factors associated with a rejection of the efforts for uniting the continent.

Before examining the state of public opinion on EU enlargement, I will briefly trace the development of such attitudes over time, to put the current situation into a broader context. In a time-series of Eurobarometer data, we observe how the mood in relation to further EU enlargement has changed since the “Big Bang” expansion to include 12 new members between 2004 and 2006. In the wake of the first stage of this wave of enlargements (early 2004), the majority of Europeans were in favour of welcoming other countries into the Union (53% in favour), while a little over a third opposed this idea. Even in 2004, therefore, we find that there was no overwhelming public opinion support for extending the membership of the Union to more countries beyond the EU-15. This hardly comes as a surprise, given the controversies surrounding the Eastward enlargement, especially those related to economic migration from the new member states.

<Figure 1 about here>

Opposition to enlargement gained momentum in the years following the Eastward enlargement, and by the time the economic crisis struck Europe a majority of European citizens declared a negative view of further enlargements of the Union (52%). The height of the opposition to enlargement coincided with the economic crisis as well as the moment when the latest member, Croatia, was added to the club in 2013. Currently, those who are against admitting new members in the future clearly outnumber those in favour of it, even if this number has been slightly reduced and now remains short of an absolute majority in the most recent surveys (49% against in 2017).

Such development over time suggests that opposition to enlargement could be related to the perceived and real impact of adding 12 new members to the Union over the 2004–2006 period, illustrating a persistent public opinion enlargement fatigue in the EU, in addition to that of the elites. Changes in the distribution of the EU budget to accommodate the relatively less well-off new member states, and the impact of large numbers of Central and Eastern European workers who moved westward are the two most contentious issues among the results of the latest wave of enlargement which could further contribute to such decline in support of further accessions. Moreover, the peak of anti-enlargement sentiment coincides with the impact of the economic crisis, which could point us in the direction of utilitarian calculations and a perception that further enlargement would be costly, and thus untenable under present economic circumstances in the Union, especially among countries which are net contributors to the EU budget. Also, in the context of the economic downturn and the impact of austerity policies which ensued, more vulnerable EU citizens (for instance those unemployed or in precarious

employment) could be more worried that workers from potential new member states might undermine their labour market position.

While support for enlargement has diminished, and currently on average more European citizens oppose (49%) than support extending membership to new countries (40%), there are important differences in levels of support and opposition among EU member states. One way to assess these differences is to look at the support for further accessions among the different enlargement waves (see Figure 2).

<Figure 2 about here>

We observe stark differences in enlargement attitudes among the different groups of countries. The level of support for enlargement remains relatively high in those countries that could benefit from the policy as new members. On average, two thirds of citizens in candidate countries remain in favour of further enlargement, while around one in four opposes it. On the other hand, precisely the inverse situation is visible among the six EU founding states where we find the highest proportion of citizens who oppose admitting new members (66%), with less than 30% of citizens in favour of the idea. Similar proportions of support and opposition can be observed among the countries of Northern Europe that joined the EU in 1995. In both groups, any further enlargement seems out of the question for the citizens.

In countries which joined the EU in 1973, the opposition is more moderate; overall it is short of an absolute majority (49% against), while one in three citizens support this idea. Here, Denmark stands out as the country with public opinion starkly opposed to further enlargement (see Figure 3 for country-level data), while in the UK we find the highest level of ambivalent attitudes regarding enlargement. This is perhaps unsurprising given the fact that this country faces a reverse procedure (exit from the EU), and thus at this point seem unlikely to be affected by the process. Therefore, almost 1 in 5 British citizens feels ambivalent about enlargement, a number that has almost doubled since the Brexit referendum in 2016.

<Figure 3 about here >

We find a somewhat more positive mood in the Southern and Eastern periphery of the Union. In the Southern European member countries there is no majority in favour of EU enlargement either, but overall still slightly more people support such an idea (46%) than oppose it (41%). But it is clearly some of the most recently admitted countries that stand out as the most optimistic about the possibility that more members should be accepted into the Union. On average, 52% of the citizens in these member states still consider further enlargement to be a good idea, while a little over one third are opposed to extending membership. In spite of the overall more positive mood in Central and Eastern Europe, a straightforward division between “new” (and supportive of enlargement) and “old” (and opposed to it) member states might be too simplistic. Ireland and Spain stand out as significantly more supportive of future enlargements than

the rest of EU-15, while in the Czech Republic we find one of the highest levels of opposition to the idea.

To sum up, even though currently overall there are more EU citizens who oppose further enlargement than those in favour of it, the variation in attitudes between countries is very significant. According to the most recent data available, there are currently eight member states where the majority of citizens would approve of further enlargement, while in 11 countries the majority are opposed to it. The original members and Northern European countries largely reject the idea, while citizens in Southern and Central and Eastern European countries (with some exceptions) remain more favourable to welcoming new members. Two interpretations of this divide emerge. One could be that especially in those countries where memories of the accession process are fresh and the benefits of membership easy to perceive, citizens feel sympathetic to the idea of extending those benefits to the remaining candidate countries. On the other hand, it is also possible that citizens in countries which are net contributors to the budget see further enlargement as costly, while those in net beneficiary countries are not afraid of the possible costs associated with the extension of the membership of the Union. In any case, such stark cross-country variation warrants analysis that would account for the differences within, as well as between countries.

Finally, in order to assess correctly the level of opposition and support for enlargement, it is necessary to put it into the context of the broader European public mood and compare it to the attitudes regarding other European policies. In the last decade, support for European integration has been undermined by the prolonged economic crisis, the problems of the Eurozone, issues of democratic legitimacy, as well as the slow and contested reaction to the more recent migrant and refugee crisis. Therefore, it is possible that other EU policies are also increasingly contested by the public. In order to put the public opinion enlargement fatigue into context, we can compare the level of support for it with support for common European solutions in other areas of key EU interest.

<Figure 4 about here>

We observe that, when analysed in a comparative perspective, enlargement clearly stands out as the area of EU policy which is the most contested by European public opinion; in fact, it is the only EU policy area with less than half of European citizens in favour of community action. Free movement of citizens to live, work, and study anywhere in the Union is the undisputed winner, with a support level over 80% across the EU. Common European action is also positively viewed in such strategic areas as defence and security policy as well as energy policy (both over 70% in favour, with some outliers among the Scandinavian members). A common migration policy and foreign policy are slightly more contested, but nevertheless receive the support of a clear

majority of Europeans. The common currency seems to be the relatively most controversial idea, but still has the backing of a solid majority of Europeans (over 60%), with significantly higher levels of support among current members of the Eurozone.

In sum, public opinion opposition to EU enlargement has been on the rise since the Union expanded to the East. Over the last decade, EU citizens have become more and more in favour of fixing the EU's boundaries and closing it off to any new members. Moreover, such strong opposition to widening currently stands out sharply when compared with other EU policies for which we find significantly more potential support, in all aspects of deepening of European integration. Enlargement is the only EU proposal among major policy areas without a majority of citizens backing it, and also the one where we find the biggest variation among states, with countries admitted in the last wave of enlargement significantly more in favour of keeping the Union open to new members. What drives such strong opposition and explains such variation? These questions are tackled in the following sections.

Research design

In order to answer the question of what drives the opposition to further EU enlargement among EU citizens, I developed a multilevel logit regression analysis of the 2017 Eurobarometer data (study 87.3, May 2017). The multilevel approach responds to the previously observed heterogeneity at the level of different EU countries¹ and allows us to account for the effect of contextual factors on individual attitudes, as well as to explore the possibility of causal heterogeneity between groups of countries.

Our dependent variable is *opposition to further EU enlargement*. The measure used for the purpose of this study is one of the items which gauge support for different EU proposals, routinely included in the standard EB studies, with the following question:

“What is your opinion on each of the following statements? Please tell me for each statement whether you are for it or against it. Further enlargement of the EU to include other countries in future years.”

The variable is recoded (1) if the respondent opposes further enlargement, and (0) if she is in favour or ambivalent about it. Given that the dependent variable is a binary, a logit model is appropriate to analyse the data at hand.

In terms of independent variables, in general, existing research indicates that attitudes of citizens towards the EU at the individual level are formed with intervening factors which include socio-economic characteristics, domestic proxies, economic expectations, values, and political identities (Hobolt and Vries 2016). This paper's focus is on a specific dimension of EU attitudes, and thus it explores – within the limits of the

¹ The significant variability between EU countries is confirmed by the ICC.

dataset at hand – the effects of factors which could potentially be most relevant to that dimension. Therefore, the proposed explanatory models focus on the impact of identity factors as compared to that of instrumental rationality, while controlling for the impact of political cues and socio-economic characteristics.

The *utilitarian dimension* includes several predictors which operationalise the assumption that individuals view European integration mostly in terms of its economic costs and benefits, as explained previously. To explore the effect of egocentric (individual level) and sociotropic (national level) perceptions of the economy on opposition to enlargement, the model includes negative perceptions of both *household economy and national economy*, measured on a four-point scale. Here the assumption is that those who view either their personal or national economy negatively could be more opposed to enlargement due to its potential costs for the current member states. In addition, the dummy variables *unemployed* and *negative future expectations (job)* account for the possibility that enlargement will be assessed differently by citizens depending on their specific position on the labour market. EU citizens who remain unemployed or who fear losing their job in the future could feel especially threatened by the accession of new countries, since opening the labour market to potential migrant workers from less economically developed countries and the relocation of businesses to countries with lower wages could make their situation even more precarious.

In terms of the impact of *political identities* on attitudes to EU enlargement, there are four elements at the individual level which operationalise the previously discussed theoretical possibilities of how identity factors could influence the EU attitude formation in this aspect. The impact of national identity is accounted for with the inclusion of a variable which refers to attachment to one’s country measured on a four-point scale (*attachment to country*). European identification is similarly operationalised as *Attachment to Europe* and is measured on a four-point scale. These variables refer to the affective aspect of identification, based on evaluative attitudes and positive distinction in relation to one’s country and Europe. The outcome of the latter is expected to be positive, since a stronger identification with Europe usually correlates with higher levels of support for EU policies. The variable *exclusive national identity*, on the other hand, refers to the cognitive aspect of the relationship between European and national identification and denotes holding an identity which does not incorporate the identification as European (coded 1), in comparison to identification inclusive of the European element (coded 0). Previous research has shown that exclusive national identification is one of the strongest predictors of opposition to EU policies (Hooghe and Marks 2005). Finally, the effect of *identity threat* is operationalised as the perception that EU integration equals a loss of national identity. Here the expectation is that perceived identity threat will be significantly associated with a rejection of further enlargement.

The *control variables* include *age* (coded as six age cohorts), *sex* (reference category: woman), and *habitat* (reference category: rural). Moreover, I account for the effect

of *political cues*, since previous research indicates that political ideology has a significant effect on attitudes to further enlargement (Dixon and Fullerton 2014).

In terms of the *contextual level variables*, previous research provides empirical evidence on the relationship between national economic characteristics – such as macro-level indicators of the national economy and whether a state is a net beneficiary of the EU budget – and support for integration in general (Dalton and Eichenberg 1991). Moreover, in the descriptive analysis, significant cross-country heterogeneity can be observed in levels of support for enlargement. Previous research has shown that contextual factors such as the EU budget balance (Hobolt 2014) and presence of migrants (Azrout, Spanje, and Vreese 2013) are both consequential for enlargement attitudes. Thus, in the explanatory analysis, I include the effect of both macroeconomic factors, as well as country characteristics which could have an effect on the perception of identity threat. To explore the contextual aspect of utilitarian calculations, I account for the effect of net fiscal transfers from the EU as a percentage of GNI (*net EU beneficiaries*).² The assumption is that citizens in countries that contribute more to the EU budget than they obtain could be more reluctant to welcome new members, fearing higher costs for their country. In terms of factors which are related to identity, I account for the presence of *EU migration* and *non-EU migration* as a proportion of a country's population.³ These factors operationalise the identity framework at the contextual level, since citizens in countries with higher levels of migration population could oppose further enlargement, fearing even more migration from future members. Finally, I control for membership of the *Eurozone*, since countries that introduced the common currency constitute the core of the European integration processes.

Explanatory analysis: determinants of opposition to enlargement

The proposed explanatory model of opposition to enlargement offers a better understanding of the dynamics behind current public opinion contestation of this specific EU policy area. Figure 5 graphically presents the coefficients from the model that incorporates all proposed explanatory variables, and which is significantly improved compared to the model with control variables only.⁴ All variables are standardised,⁵ which allows for a direct comparison of the effects of the intervening factors in spite of the differences in measurement.

<Figure 5 about here>

² Data for 2016, European Commission.

³ Most recent data available from Eurostat.

⁴ Full regression tables can be found in the annex to this chapter.

⁵ See Gelman (2008) for the details of this technique.

Several factors turn out to be significant for explaining opposition to EU enlargement. At the individual level, *identity-related factors* yield the highest impact. Attachment to Europe and perceived identity threat are the factors with the highest influence on enlargement attitudes in our model. The higher the level of attachment to Europe, the lower the probability that enlargement will be contested. On the other hand, the perception that European integration entails a loss of identity significantly increases the odds of contesting further enlargement. Interestingly, the intensity of national attachment does not seem to matter, while exclusive national identification increases the probability of enlargement opposition only moderately.

Utilitarian factors matter to some extent, but their impact is much more modest than that of European identification and perceived identity threat. A negative view of the national economy is the strongest predictor in this dimension; however, its impact on the probability of being opposed to EU enlargement is only half of the relevant identity factors. Negative future employment prospects also matter somewhat, but their impact is even smaller. There is no visible effect of being unemployed and of negative perceptions of the household financial situation. Overall, our model indicates that in the EU-28, factors related to the cost-benefit analysis matter less for the opposition to further EU enlargement than those related to processes of identification, at the individual level.

Among the *control variables*, age turns out to be another significant predictor of opposition to enlargement. The older the respondent, the higher the odds that she will position herself against welcoming new countries to the Union. *Political cues* matter somewhat as well, as we find that those who view themselves as closer to the right tend to be somewhat more opposed to enlargement.

Finally, *contextual variables* also provide some insight into the way in which opposition to enlargement is shaped. The results confirm what we have already observed in the descriptive analysis. Being a *net beneficiary of the EU budget* is a strong predictor of support for further enlargement. In other words, citizens in countries which contribute to the EU more than they receive from it – the richer and more developed member states – tend to oppose further enlargement to a greater extent, possibly owing to concerns about the costs which such an expansion might entail. On the other hand, levels of migration are not significant predictors of opposition to enlargement, and citizens in countries with a higher proportion of EU migrants (as well as non-EU migrants for that matter) are not significantly more opposed to the accession of new countries to the EU. However, here it should be noted that it is possible that presence of migrants at the local level could influence attitudes much more strongly than the data collected at the national level suggests.

In sum, the proposed model indicates that both sets of factors – identities as well as interests – are relevant for our understanding of the underpinnings of the current

negative mood regarding further EU enlargement. At the individual level, however, European identification and perceived identity threat are the most important predictors of enlargement attitudes, while at the country level, cost-benefit analysis among EU budget contributors and beneficiaries turns out to be the most relevant explanatory factor.

Overall, the picture that emerges from the analysis suggests that an improvement in European economic performance will not necessarily stop the tide of negative attitudes to future enlargements of the EU. While economic factors do have some influence, the activation of perceived identity threat turns out to be the biggest obstacle to further uniting of the continent. Therefore, the backlash over the refugee and migrant crisis, which has not been solved since 2015, and the emergence of populist radical right as a relevant political force across the continent could mean further politicisation of EU enlargement, and a further significant increase in its levels of contestation among European public opinion.

On the other hand, the relevance of identification with Europe as a factor which could potentially appease the negative opinions suggests that, as in other areas of EU policy, the effective existence of a European political community and a European society will be essential for the legitimacy of any further developments in European integration, including welcoming new members.

One last question to be addressed in this analysis is the issue of a possible causal heterogeneity. We saw in the descriptive analysis that citizens in most of the recent member states of the EU tend to be significantly more supportive of further enlargement than in the other member states. In order to explore these differences further, I introduce controls for the wave of enlargement and check whether the main explanatory factors identified in the analysis (age, the perception of the national economy, attachment to Europe, and identity threat) have a differential impact across contexts. In particular, I check whether their influence on enlargement attitudes is different in the new member states (*Eastern*⁶) as compared to the 15 members before the last round of enlargement.

<Figure 6 about here >

The enlargement wave dummies confirm the observations from the descriptive analysis: citizens in countries that joined in the third enlargement wave (Southern European) and the last, fifth, wave (Eastern European and Mediterranean countries) remain significantly more supportive of further enlargement, even when we control for all relevant individual⁷ factors.

⁶ “Eastern enlargement” denotes the whole process of enlargement between 2004 and 2013, and encompasses all the countries which accessed the EU in this period, including the Mediterranean countries of Cyprus and Malta.

⁷ All previously considered country-level factors are also included in the model (not included in the graph; for full model information, see the table in the annex), except for EU budget balance, since this

<Figure 7 about here>

As far as the possible causal heterogeneity is concerned, we indeed find an interaction effect, but only for the age variable. The negative interaction indicates that while among the citizens of the EU-15 age is indeed associated with significantly stronger opposition to enlargement, for the citizens in the more recent member states, those which joined the EU between 2004 and 2013, the age variable does not have any effect on these attitudes. This means that citizens in these countries, across all age groups, have a significantly smaller probability of opposing future enlargement than those in EU-15 member countries (see Figure 7).

Discussion

This paper explores the issue of public opinion attitudes regarding further enlargement of the EU. For decades, the European Union remained a work-in-progress, as successive waves of enlargement redefined the boundaries of the European community. However, public contestation of the accession of new countries has been increasing since the beginning of the last enlargement wave towards the East of the continent, and currently those who reject future enlargement outnumber those who still support it across Europe, with clear majorities opposed to enlargement in almost half of the member states.

Moreover, such strong opposition to enlargement currently stands in stark contrast to attitudes towards other EU policies. We see that, in spite of the processes related to the politicisation of EU institutions and policies, European citizens are significantly more in favour of any other of the major aspects of deepening of integration than of further widening its geographical scope, attesting to the persistent public opinion enlargement fatigue. Moreover, this is the policy area where we find the greatest variation among states, with countries admitted in the last wave of enlargement significantly more in favour of keeping the Union open to potential new members.

In terms of the determinants of such strong rejection of future enlargements, we find that at the individual level, identity threat turns out to be the strongest predictor of negative attitudes. Utilitarian calculations seem to matter more at the country level, in terms of a strong divide between net contributors (opposed) and beneficiaries of the EU budget (in favour), as well as perceptions of national economy. As in other EU policy aspects, identification with Europe strongly counteracts negative attitudes, indicating a notion of European collective identity which is open and inclusive. Differences between countries and country groups persist, with the significantly more favourable position of citizens in more recent member states explained by both individual level variables (the

variable is strongly correlated with the indicator variable of member states which accessed the Union in the last wave of enlargement.

differential impact of age) and contextual factors (the divide between net contributors and beneficiaries of the EU budget).

In sum, these findings suggest that EU citizens, especially in the founding and Northern countries, are strongly in favour of fixing EU borders at their current shape, and any future accessions will need a major effort on the part of the political elites to convince European public opinion of the necessity of further uniting of the continent and admitting new members. Most importantly, an improved economic situation might not be sufficient to change this negative mood, since identity threat is found to be the main driver of enlargement contestation. In the context of a populist and nationalist backlash in European politics, the rejection of any further EU enlargements is unlikely to abate any time soon.

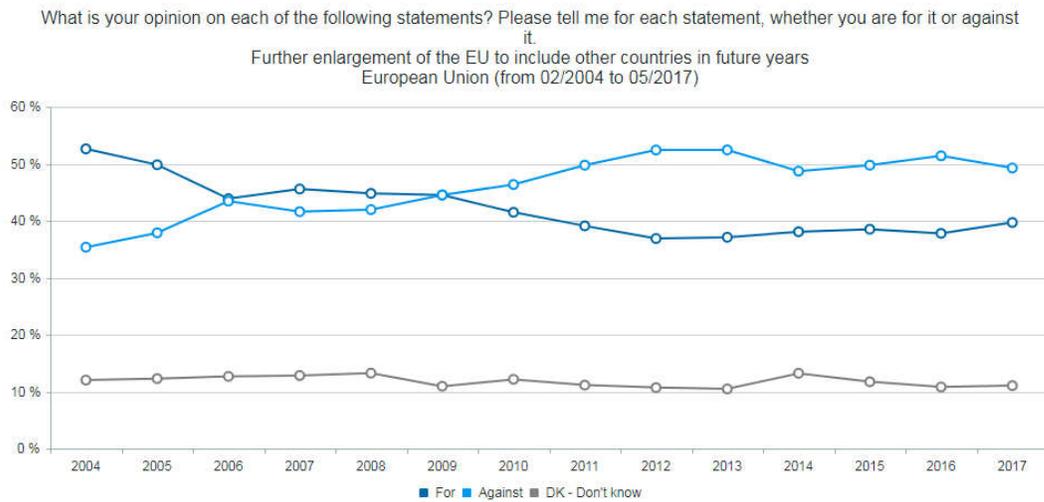
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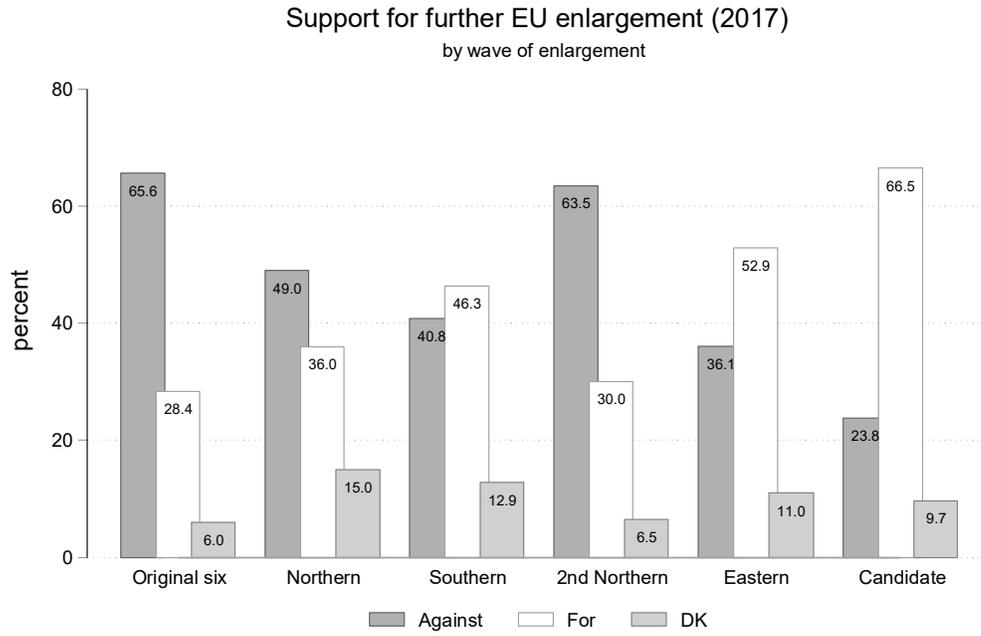
Figures and tables

Graph 1 Development of attitudes towards enlargement 2004-2017



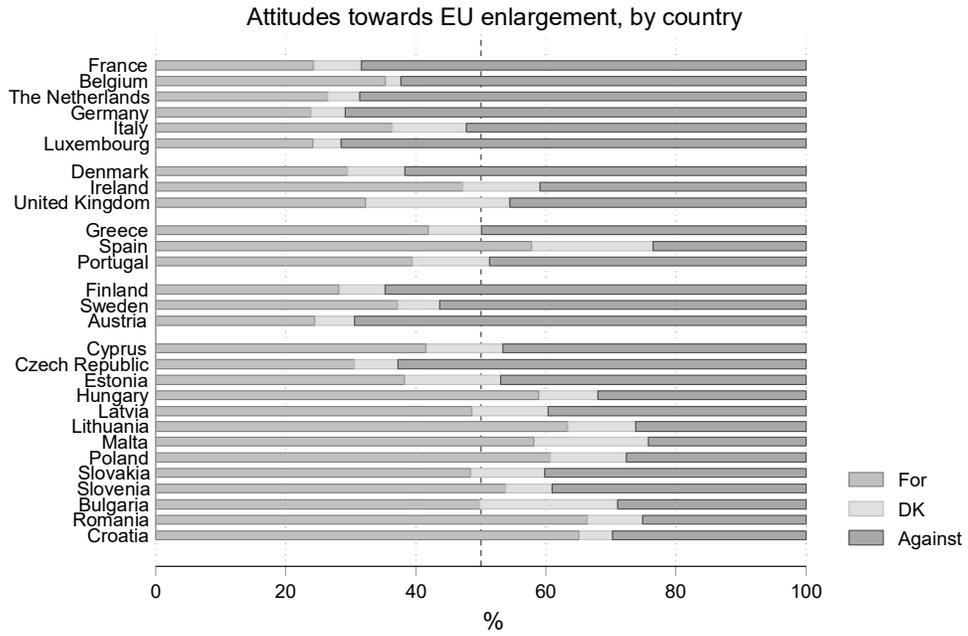
Source: Eurobarometer Interactive.

Figure 1 Attitudes to EU enlargement, by enlargement wave (2017)



Data: EB 87.3 (May 2017)

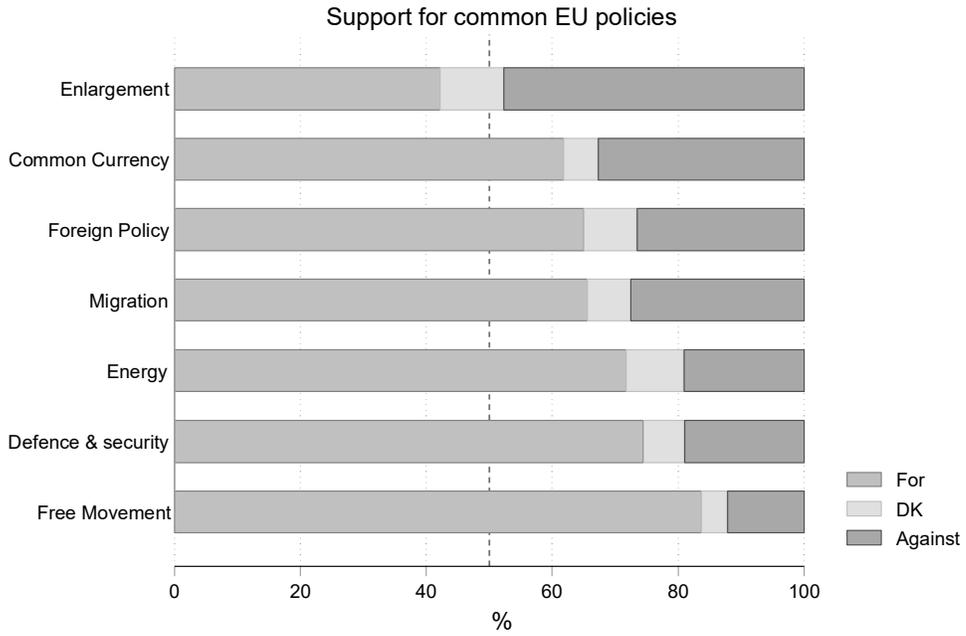
Figure 2 Attitudes to EU enlargement, by country (2017)



Data:

EB 87.3 (May 2017)

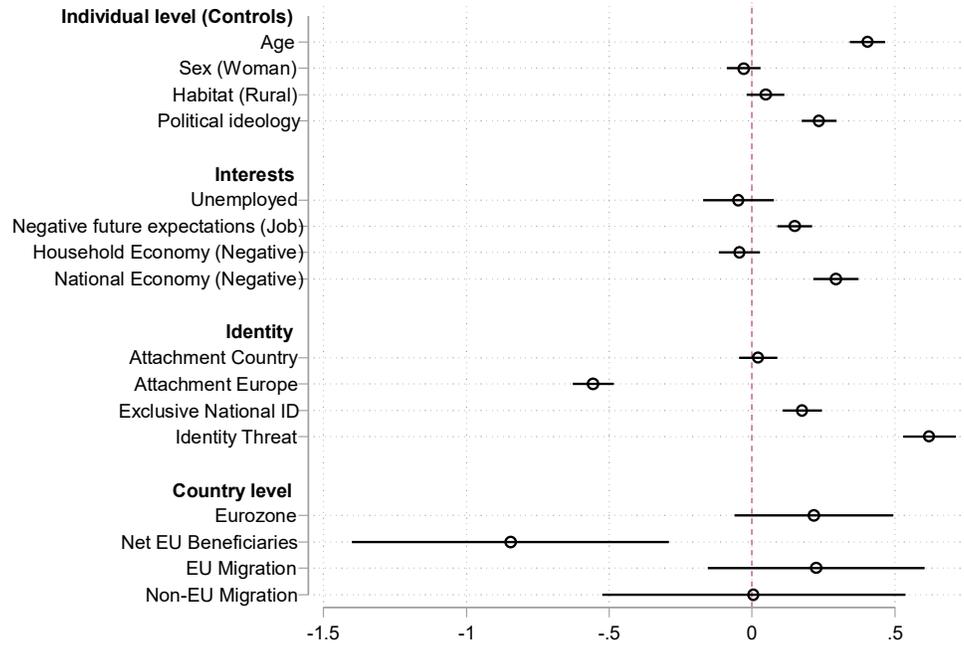
Figure 3 Support for EU policies (2017)



EB 87.3 (May 2017)

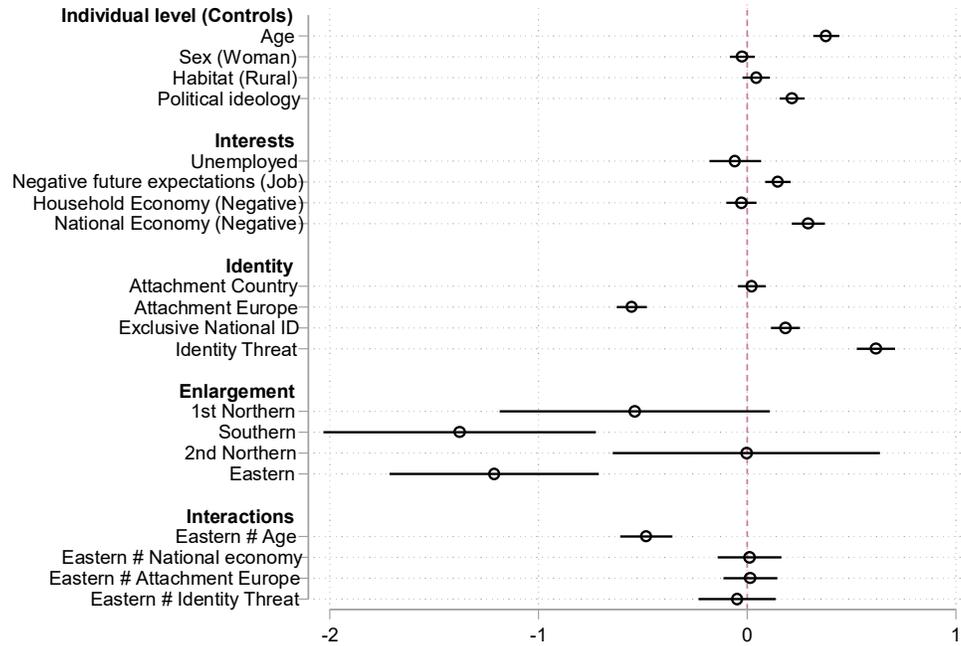
Data:

Figure 4 Coefficients from a multilevel logit model of opposition to EU enlargement



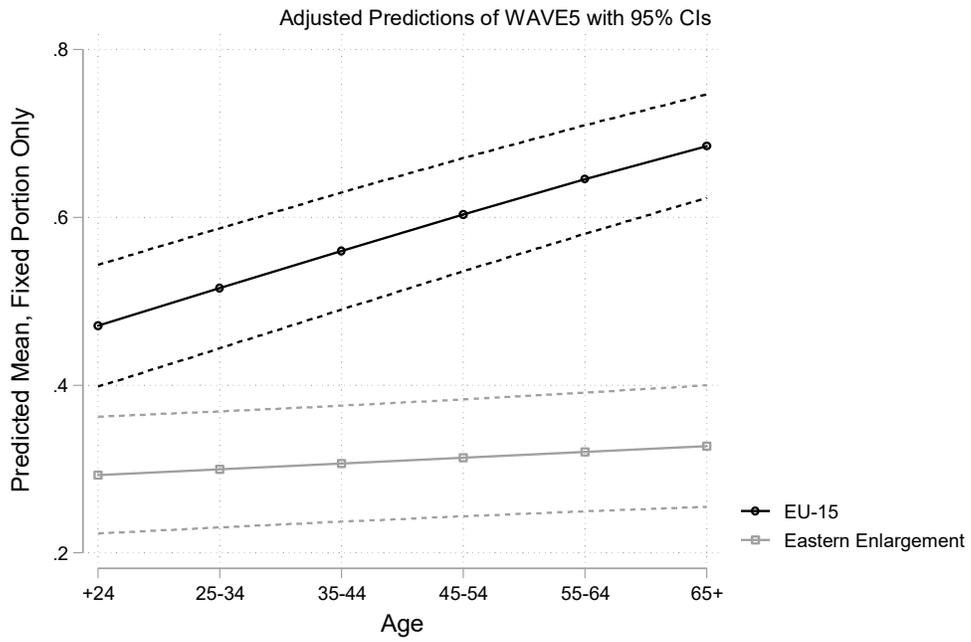
Note: The graph displays the coefficients and standard errors from a multilevel logistic regression on opposition to EU enlargement (xtmelogit command in Stata) plotted with coefplot. Dependent variable: Against further EU enlargement. Full model information can be found in the table in the annex. Data: EB 87.3 (May 2017).

Figure 5 Coefficients from a multilevel logit model of opposition to EU enlargement, with cross-level interactions



Note: The graph displays the coefficients and standard errors from a multilevel logistic regression on opposition to EU enlargement (xtmelogit command in Stata) plotted with coefplot. Dependent variable: Against further EU enlargement. Contextual variables not shown due to space limitations. Full model information can be found in the table in the annex. Data: EB 87.3 (May 2017).

Figure 6 Interaction effect of age and Eastern enlargement



Annex. Table 1 – Full regression tables

	Model 0 (Individual controls)	Model 1 (Contextual)	Model 2 (Interests)	Model 3 (Identity)	Model 4 (Enlargement Waves)	Model 5 (Interactions)
Individual level						
Age	0.466*** (0.030)	0.466*** (0.030)	0.463*** (0.031)	0.404*** (0.032)	0.404*** (0.032)	0.379*** (0.032)
Sex (Woman)	-0.011 (0.029)	-0.011 (0.029)	-0.017 (0.030)	-0.029 (0.030)	-0.029 (0.030)	-0.024 (0.030)
Habitat (Rural)	0.089** (0.033)	0.085** (0.033)	0.070* (0.033)	0.047 (0.033)	0.048 (0.033)	0.044 (0.033)
Ideology			0.249*** (0.030)	0.234*** (0.031)	0.234*** (0.031)	0.216*** (0.031)
Unemployed			-0.034 (0.062)	-0.048 (0.063)	-0.047 (0.063)	-0.058 (0.063)
Negative Future Perspectives (Job)			0.168*** (0.031)	0.149*** (0.031)	0.148*** (0.031)	0.148*** (0.031)
Household Economy			0.061 (0.036)	-0.044 (0.037)	-0.044 (0.037)	-0.028 (0.037)
National Economy			0.409*** (0.040)	0.293*** (0.041)	0.292*** (0.041)	0.293*** (0.041)
Attachment Country				0.021 (0.034)	0.022 (0.034)	0.023 (0.034)
Attachment Europe				-0.556*** (0.037)	-0.557*** (0.037)	-0.554*** (0.037)
Exclusive National Identity				0.175*** (0.035)	0.175*** (0.035)	0.183*** (0.035)
Identity Threat				0.620*** (0.047)	0.621*** (0.047)	0.617*** (0.047)
Contextual level						
Eurozone		0.278* (0.136)	0.220 (0.139)	0.216 (0.142)	0.208 (0.134)	0.220 (0.134)
Net EU Beneficiary		-0.667* (0.262)	-0.846** (0.281)	-0.846** (0.283)		
EU Migration		0.136 (0.179)	0.204 (0.192)	0.225 (0.193)	0.111 (0.153)	0.116 (0.152)
Non-EU Migration		0.051 (0.251)	0.012 (0.268)	0.006 (0.270)	0.112 (0.193)	0.111 (0.192)
Enlargement wave						
1st Northern					-0.541 (0.332)	-0.540 (0.330)
Southern					-1.372*** (0.334)	-1.378*** (0.333)
2nd Northern					-0.000 (0.328)	-0.004 (0.327)
Eastern					-1.220*** (0.257)	-1.213*** (0.256)
Interactions						
Eastern # Age						-0.482***

						(0.064)
Eastern # National Economy						0.011
						(0.078)
Eastern # Attachment Europe						0.015
						(0.066)
Eastern # Identity Threat						-0.047
						(0.094)
Constant	-0.107	-0.118	-0.112	-0.094	-0.071	-0.070
	(0.132)	(0.105)	(0.113)	(0.114)	(0.087)	(0.086)
Model information						
n	21,143	21,143	21,143	21,143	21,143	21,143
N	28	28	28	28	28	28
LL	-13448	-13439	-13323	-13005	-12997	-12968
AIC	26906,86	26896,92	26673,68	26045,77	26036,41	25986,32

Note: Entries in the table are coefficients from a multilevel logistic regression (xtmelogit command in Stata). DV: Opposition to further EU enlargement. Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05. Data: EB 87.3 (May 2017).

Table 2 – Summary of the variables in the model

	Variable	n	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
Dependent:						
	Opposition to enlargement	28,007	0,48	0,50	0	1
Independent:						
Individual level						
Controls	Age	28,007	4,06	1,65	1	6
	Sex (Woman)	28,007	0,55	0,50	0	1
	Habitat (Rural)	27,994	0,32	0,47	0	1
	Ideology	22,442	5,26	2,18	1	10
Interests	Unemployed Negative Future Perspectives (Job)	28,007	0,07	0,26	0	1
	Household Economy	27,398	2,24	0,74	1	4
	National Economy	27,145	2,59	0,80	1	4
	Attachment Country	27,945	3,54	0,65	1	4
Identity	Attachment Europe	27,517	2,70	0,87	1	4
	Exclusive National Identity	27,508	0,39	0,49	0	1
	Identity Threat	28,007	0,13	0,33	0	1
Contextual level						
Interests	Eurozone	28,007	0,67	0,47	0	1
	Net EU Beneficiary	28,007	0,01	0,01	0,00	0,04
Identity	EU Migration	28,007	0,04	0,05	0,01	0,34
	Non-EU Migration	28,007	0,07	0,04	0,01	0,13

Data: EB 87.3 (May 2017).