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**Young and European?
Youth Attitudes
to Social Europe**

Harshly hit by the strong economic crisis, European democracies have come to face troubling challenges in recent years. Among these, one of the biggest is probably the difficulty in preserving the welfare system(s) in Europe. To give but an example, from 2009 to 2011, social expenditures were reduced by almost 20,000 million Euro in Europe-27 (Eurostat 2009, 2011; provisional data). Social austerity measures have become the norm in most EU member states, and the number of people at risk of poverty and exclusion has increased dramatically as a consequence. Young people are one of the most disadvantaged groups within this context. Not only has youth unemployment grown considerably in Europe,¹ but cuts in social expenditure make the educational and labour integration of the young increasingly difficult. This situation has raised popular discontent with both national and European governments, and promoted active protests among young citizens all over Europe. But who do young Europeans truly perceive as responsible for this situation? And how would they like it to be solved?

This paper aims at investigating youth attitudes and beliefs about the *new* Europe, emerging from the economic crisis. Recent findings reveal that 15-34-year-olds consider a harmonized social welfare state throughout the Union as the main characteristic of a strengthened EU-citizenship (EACEA/Eurydice 2012, 17). However, until now, little is known about what youth preferences are with regard to the welfare state within the present European Union. This study is a first approach to the question.

In particular, an online survey (hereafter *Your Voice*) was administered in several universities of four EU member states, trying to tap youth attitudes towards social Europe. The survey was conducted in May 2014, on the occasion of the European elections of May 25, 2014; a moment in which citizens should receive more information about the European Union, and be able to perceive better the conflicts about the EU integration process. This paper provides the most interesting results of this original study.

¹ According to Eurostat, 5.2 million young people aged 15-25 were unemployed in the EU-28 area in May 2014. This represents 1.2 million more than in 2008.

1. THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE WELFARE SYSTEM: WHAT ABOUT ATTITUDES?

There is a large number of writings on the influence of European integration on the welfare system(s) (e.g. Ferrera 2005; for a review see Leibfried et al. 2008; Bonoli and Natali 2012; etc.), since “European integration and European welfare states have become intertwined in complex ways” (Kumlin 2011, 576). The EU does indeed interfere with the welfare system(s) and “the sovereign right of the state to determine the boundaries, forms and extent of national solidarity, including tax and spending levels” (Ferrera 2014b, 222). The economic crisis has further reinforced the clash between the EU and the welfare system(s), as new problems arise in the social arena. To start with, it has become extremely difficult to finance welfare systems after the financial crisis, now that many EU member states are confronted with a big sovereign debt. Fiscal austerity has been encouraged by the EU, and as a consequence social coverage is being reduced in many of these countries. In addition to this, the crisis has brought about new social inequalities and needs (also influenced by changes in demography, labour markets, etc.) which welfare systems have to address, while keeping austere at the same time. These circumstances have provoked much intellectual discussion on how the tension between the European Union and the welfare system(s) should be solved (Ferrera 2014a; Marlier and Natali 2010; Martinsen and Vollaard 2014). Among the citizenry, we can see vast discontent with the diminishing of the welfare system, and less support for European integration (Braun and Tausendpfund 2014; Klingeren et al. 2013).

Despite current debates and increasing discontent among citizens, little attention has been paid to Europeans’ preferences regarding welfare within the EU. Even if there are interesting studies on citizens’ attitudes to the welfare system (e.g. Kulin and Svallfors 2011; Oorschot et al. 2012; Roosma et al. 2013; Svallfors 2012), few scholars have investigated citizens’ perceptions of the conflict between EU integration and welfare system(s) preservation (an interesting exception is Kumlin 2011). This becomes of special relevance in the present context.

So far, literature on citizens’ attitudes to the EU has in fact relied on the concept of *EU support* (Eichenberg and Dalton 2007; Fuchs and Schneider 2011; Gabel 1998; Hooghe and Marks 2005) or *Euroscepticism* (Lubbers and Scheepers 2005; McLaren 2007). Although there is now evidence that EU attitudes are multidimensional (Boomgaarden et al. 2011), the social dimension is rarely considered. Literature on the scope of EU government—or which policies should be dealt with at European level—is certainly scarce (see, for example, De Winter and Swyngedouw 2003; Magalhães 2012), and there is a lack of data on the issue. However, since the European Union has become highly politicized in the last few years, and its influence on social matters is increasing, it is of major relevance to address the issue. This study is a first attempt to fill the gap.

Building on Ferrera’s work (2014b), an online survey was designed (*Your Voice*), incorporating several dimensions which are normally not taken into account when studying citizens’ attitudes to the EU. In particular, Ferrera identifies four lines of conflict or dimensions, which have emerged in the last years as a consequence of the economic crisis. These lines of conflict not only define the tensions between member-states and the EU, but frame most political confrontations in the European and national arenas during election time:

The financial crisis has exacerbated existing tensions and activated new ones. The clash between nation-based social protection needs and EMU-induced austerity and spending cuts has rapidly escalated and has entered the electoral arena, where it is generating a new, turbulent cleavage between pro- and anti-EU actor coalitions. The crisis has also activated a (more or less) latent distributive cleavage between richer, “paying” Member States and poorer “receiving” Member States: the issue of a “Transfer Union” has gained increasing political salience. The general strain between solidarity and economic integration has therefore broken down into four distinct tensions:

- ① market-making vs market-correcting at the EU level;
- ② national social sovereignty/discretion vs EU law/conditionality;
- ③ intra-EU “system competition” between high-wage/high welfare Member States and low-wage/low welfare Member States (“old vs new” Member States or “West vs East”);
- ④ payers vs beneficiaries of cross-national transfers and financial assistance (“core vs peripheral” Member States or “North vs South”).

The four lines of tension intersect with each other, creating complex policy dilemmas, political turmoil and a further erosion of popular legitimacy for the EU—as clearly demonstrated by the campaigns and the results of the 2014 European elections (Ferrera 2014b, 223-224).

In *Your Voice* we attempted to operationalize these four lines of conflict.

2. YOUTH AND SOCIAL EUROPE: THE CASE OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN GERMANY, GREAT BRITAIN, ITALY AND SPAIN

Youth generations live in a very different context from older generations (Sloam 2013). Supranational structures and globalization favour youth participation and communication across boundaries, and free movement from one country to another. Young Europeans are therefore more mobile than their parents were, a phenomenon which has got to be known as the “ERASMUS generation” (Feyen and Krzaklewska 2013). Traditional cleavages are thus no longer relevant as they were for older generations, since the boundaries between nationalities and between social classes are not completely clear anymore. In addition, since most European young people have lived in relatively wealthy countries, perceptions of politics and political participation have changed, as well as the dominant ideology among young ones. Young people have become post-materialist. Family dynamics have also changed among the newest generations, since transition to adulthood is no longer a linear process from finishing education to having a child. There are now more intermixed family models and situations, which change very much from one person to another and from one country to another.² Responding to all these changes, youth levels of traditional participation (such as vote) have dropped dramatically in most advanced democracies, or have been replaced by new forms of political participation (García-Albacete 2014; Grasso 2014; Harris et al. 2010). In the last years, indeed, we have witnessed massive demonstrations of young people against social cuts in some countries. We take the opportunity here to study the attitudes to the EU of a special group of young people: university students.

² This description is mainly taken from Sloam (2013). See also Hoikkala (2009) for a similar analysis.

Among young people university students are the most representative of the generational changes just described. They are the most educated group and they are normally more politically engaged, more knowledgeable about policies, and therefore more likely to engage in European experiences. They might travel to another EU country as part of their university programme, or simply contact people from other European countries. They are also on the threshold of the labour market, and therefore of becoming employed or unemployed. From a pragmatic point of view, university students are also a group which is easy to reach, which makes it less costly to know about their attitudes by means of an online survey. In *Your Voice*, university students of four EU countries were interviewed: Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and Spain; all representative of a specific type of welfare system. Germany is representative of the continental welfare system; Great Britain of the Anglo-Saxon system; and Spain and Italy of the south welfare system³ (for a similar distinction in the study of citizens' attitudes see Roosma et al. 2014). The expectation is that students' preferences for social Europe will partly be determined by the type of welfare state they live in.

But there are also large differences across the four countries which are here object of study, with regard to the education system, the way students get admitted into university, the financing of universities, and the overall economic situation (and therefore the situation of the students). As for the education system, Great Britain, Italy and Spain have a common-core curriculum provision, which implies that students who complete primary education immediately progress successfully to the lower secondary level, where they all follow the same general curriculum. On the contrary, in Germany, there is a differentiated lower-level education, which implies that students are obliged to follow different educational pathways after they have finished primary education. The British, Italian and Spanish models, therefore, tend to facilitate university access to a higher extent than the German system. In terms of financing, whereas the German, Italian, and Spanish systems basically rely on public funding, the British depends heavily on private financing.

Table 1 • Student population, unemployment, and migration in the four countries

	University students		Unemployment (%)				Migration
	Number (*1,000)	% (of population)	Total	Young: 15-39 years old	Young: < 25 years old	University students ¹	% (of total migrants) ²
	2012	2012	2013	2013	2013	2013	2012
Germany	2,731.0	3.4	5.3	6.0	7.9	2.7	38.65
Spain	1,943.3	4.2	26.1	30.6	55.5	19.8	40.63
Italy	1,891.3	3.2	12.2	19.8	40.0	13.0	33.76
Great Britain	2,400.8	3.8	7.5	9.9	20.5	4.3	n.d.

¹ 15-39 years old. ² 20-34 years old.

Source: Eurostat 2012, 2013

³ Unfortunately, for linguistic reasons, no country of the Scandinavian model could be included in the sample.

Table 1 provides some additional information on the four countries: number and percentage of university students (columns 2 and 3); levels of total unemployment as compared to youth and university students' unemployment (columns 4 to 7); and percentage of university students who migrate to another EU country (column 8). These data allow for a simplified comparison of the four cases, which highlights the fact that Spain is by far the country where university students encounter the greatest difficulties. On the contrary, German students apparently have the best conditions.

Two contradictory situations have been depicted. On the one hand, young university students live in a different context and are much closer to the European Union than their parents. On the other hand, however, some of them are having a lot of trouble in finding a job, or even in continuing their university studies, due to the extreme situation in their countries. In turn, these two contradictory situations might lead to completely divergent attitudes towards social Europe: either they want more or they want less. Recchi and Favell (2009), for example, found that EU-migrants develop more favourable attitudes to the European Union because they interact with other EU inhabitants. From this perspective, one could argue that:

H¹ *The larger the students' experiences with other EU people/countries, the stronger their preferences for social Europe.*

But it has also been found that the economic crisis has negatively influenced levels of support for the EU (Braun and Tausendpfund 2014). Hence:

H² *The better the students' evaluations of the European Union, the stronger their preferences for social Europe.*

These two contradictory hypotheses are put to the test in the following pages.

3. DATA AND METHOD

In order to test the aforementioned hypotheses, the online *Your Voice* survey was administered in several universities in Germany (Humboldt University), Italy (Università di Milano and Università di Torino), Spain (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid and Universidade de Santiago de Compostela), and Great Britain (University of Derby and University of Sheffield). Different forms of administration were used in each university, and the sample is unequally distributed among the four countries.⁴ In total, 7,235 responses were collected (see Table 2). As the sample is made of students from non-randomly selected universities in each country and the number of students within each country varies significantly, we cannot ensure that the data are representative of all university students in the chosen countries. The comparison between them, therefore, is to be taken cautiously, and has a merely descriptive purpose. Yet, considering that the number of university students normally included in representative surveys is very small (see Table 2), *Your Voice* may provide

⁴ Apart from Italy, the number of responses in the other three countries is small. This however does not invalidate the results of the online survey. For other examples of small samples in political and sociological studies, see Fitzgerald 2013; Hoskins et al. 2014; Yamamoto and Kushin 2014.

more precise information on university students' attitudes. Without aiming at generalizing the results presented in this paper to the whole student population in the four countries, the results certainly give an idea of what students would like social Europe to be.

Table 2 • Number of students interviewed in *Your Voice* as compared to the European Social Survey (ESS) 2012 (representative sample)

	<i>Your Voice</i>	ESS 2012*
Italy	6,236	73
Spain	503	149
Germany	379	221
Great Britain	117	80
Total	7,235	523

* It is not possible in the ESS to separate university students from other students (undergraduate, vocational, etc.). The numbers of university students are therefore overestimated.

Source: *Your Voice* and European Social Survey 2012

As can be seen from Table 2, Italian students are strongly overrepresented in the sample (the Italian sample is also less biased, due to a broader administration of the survey), whereas there are only 117 responses coming from Great Britain. In this paper, however, data have not been weighted to approximate the effective number of students in each country, since the imbalance is too big and would lead to a meaningless interpretation of the data. Hence, all results presented here are to be read bearing in mind this limitation. A few more notes are needed on the data, with regard to other types of bias. In particular, it is necessary to refer to: 1) the field of study; 2) the gender of interviewed students; 3) the levels of political interest. There is no apparent bias regarding age in any of the four countries (see Table A.1 in Appendix A).

Field of study (Table A.2 in Appendix A). In general, humanities and social sciences are overrepresented in *Your Voice* data, whereas natural sciences, mathematics and engineering are underrepresented. Great Britain is the most biased case, with strong overrepresentation of humanities and social sciences students. There is no prior empirical evidence, however, that there is a relationship between the area of studies of an individual and his or her level of support for the EU. It does not seem to be the case among the interviewees of *Your Voice* either.⁵ It could be, however, that students of areas which are more social (such as education, health, etc.) have stronger preferences for *social* Europe. In order to check on this possible source of bias, the field of study has been included in the analyses.

Gender (see Table A.3 in Appendix A). There is a high overrepresentation of women in all countries except Great Britain (this might be related to the fact that the most represented fields of study in the sample are areas with a higher percentage of women). There

⁵ There is some bias with regard to levels of support for the EU across areas of study in Great Britain and Germany, but this seems to be because there are very few cases in the categories which are biased.

is no recent evidence that women are significantly more/less supportive of the EU than men (Boomgaarden et al. 2011; Braun and Tausendpfund 2014; Hobolt and Tilley 2014).⁶ Table 3 below shows that differences in levels of support for EU unification are significant between men and women, although these do not follow the same pattern in all countries (as in data of the European Social Survey). Gender is therefore included as a control variable in the analyses.

Levels of political interest (see Table A.4 in Appendix A). Online surveys are generally biased in terms of political interest, since respondents tend to be more interested in politics than the average citizen. Our sample is also more politically interested than the average citizen, and in the case of Germany and Great Britain also more politically interested than the average student in these two countries. This is probably due to the fact that humanities and social studies are overrepresented in the sample. Since all countries are equally biased in terms of political interest and the survey was conducted in a moment in which more information about the EU was available (the campaign for the EP elections), it is assumed that this bias is not problematic in terms of comparison (except maybe for the British case). Political interest is however included as a control variable in the analyses.

As a final check, *Your Voice* data are compared with European Social Survey (ESS) data. In both surveys, one of the items which is normally used to measure support for the European Union has been included, with exactly the same wording:

Now thinking about the European Union, some say European Unification should go further. Others say it has already gone too far. What number on the scale best describes your position? (0 “Has already gone too far” and 10 “Should go further”)

Table 3 • Mean levels of support for EU unification: *Your Voice* as compared to ESS Round 6, 2012 (scale 0-10)

	<i>Your Voice</i>			ESS Round 6			
	All	Male	Female	All	Students	Male students	Female students
Italy	6.69	7.07	6.48	5.92	6.34	6.03	6.62
Spain	6.38	6.76	6.17	6.01	6.67	7.00	6.39
Germany	7.24	7.66	7.08	5.54	6.19	6.18	6.20
UK	5.57	5.17	6.06	4.01	4.62	4.24	5.11

Source: *Your Voice* and European Social Survey Round 6, 2012

Table 3 presents the mean levels of support for EU unification in *Your Voice* and in Round 6 of the ESS. As can be seen from the table, students are more supportive of EU integration than the mean population (ESS Round 6, column 5). It seems that students are more open and favourably oriented than the average citizen—they might actually belong

⁶ Yet, there is some evidence in the past. See for example Gabel 1998.

to a *different generation*. Table 3 also shows that university students in *Your Voice* are stronger supporters of EU unification than the average student as reported by ESS data (columns 2 and 6). This is especially the case in Germany and Great Britain. Levels of support for the EU vary also for men and women, when comparing *Your Voice* and ESS data. These findings would suggest that *Your Voice* sample is biased towards higher levels of support for the European Union. However, a number of objections prevent from drawing a definitive conclusion in this regard. First, in ESS data it is impossible to separate university students from other students, such as undergraduate or vocational training ones. Since university students tend normally to be more in favour of the EU, ESS data might underestimate effective levels of support among students. Second, although in some countries the sample of *Your Voice* is small, it is still significantly bigger than the representative subsample of students in the ESS. Maybe we simply have more precise data about this group population. And third, the context in which the two surveys were conducted differs considerably, as *Your Voice* was run at a time of rich-information context on EU matters. This might have influenced students' perceptions of the EU at that particular point in time.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to compare *Your Voice* with other recent surveys to check its quality further.⁷ So far, although the previous paragraphs recommend caution, they do not prevent from using *Your Voice* data. On the contrary, much information can be obtained from this online survey. When reading the following pages, though, the reader is prayed to bear this section in mind.

4. THE CONFLICT DIMENSIONS: UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' VIEWS

In order to measure students' preferences for social Europe, a set of items was designed following the four lines of conflict mentioned above. There is therefore a theoretical distinction between four dimensions (exact operationalization of the items can be found in Appendix B):

- ① The welfare dimension: preferences for strong welfare vs weak welfare;
- ② The market dimension: preferences for market correction vs market-making;
- ③ The Europeanization dimension: preferences for more EU decision-making vs more Member States' decision-making;
- ④ The solidarity dimension: preferences for more/less solidarity (towards other countries; towards other peoples).

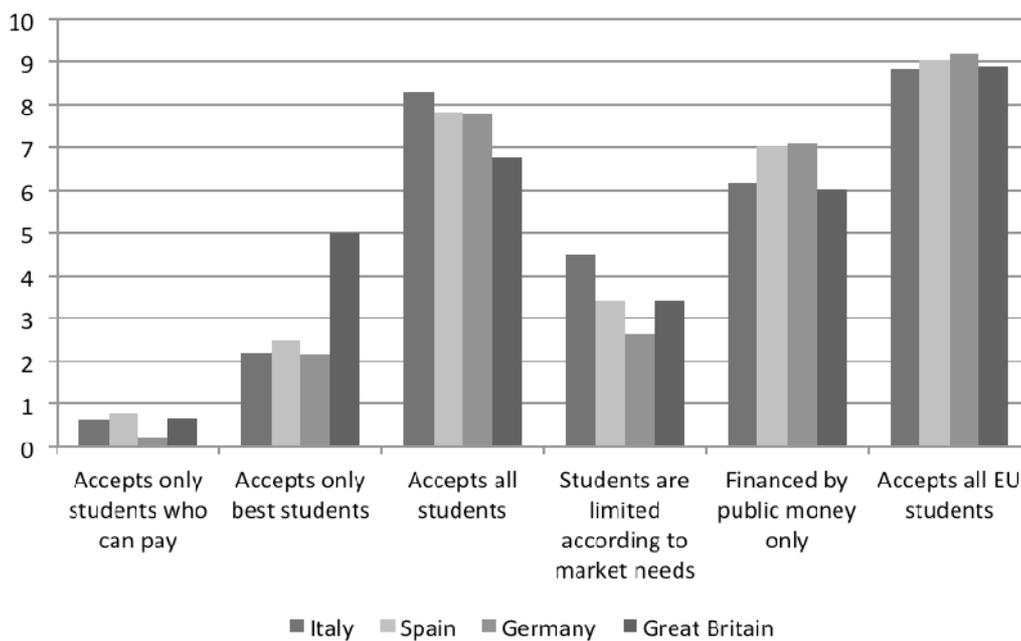
This theoretical distinction was applied at two levels: on the one hand, a set of questions was formulated about students' preferences for these four dimensions regarding the functioning of their university (or their ideal university)—this is named 'close politics'; on the other hand, another battery of questions was aimed at measuring students' preferences for these four dimensions in relation to the national/European levels—'distant politics'. In this section, a descriptive overview of students' preferences is presented. Considering the warnings from the previous section, analysis is displayed separately for each country.

⁷ Most recent Eurobarometer data are still not available.

4.1. Students and their ideal university

As already mentioned, a set of questions was asked about the students' ideal university. Figure 1 shows the mean levels for each question and they all measure on a scale from 0 to 10. It appears that students from all countries have strong preferences for an inclusive university, giving opportunities to every single person who wants to study (the mean is above 7 for all countries except Great Britain, in an 11-point scale). An ideal university, according to the interviewees, is one which encompasses as many students as possible; where students who cannot pay on their own are accepted; and which is mostly financed by public money. These ideals are highly predominant in Germany, Italy, and Spain, and less so in Britain. In the latter, students have a slightly more market-oriented vision of university, since their ideal university includes also—even if not as strongly as the other features mentioned above—that only the students with the best grades are accepted. This is surely related to the fact that the university system in Great Britain is highly meritocratic, since it is not publicly financed. In relation to the European dimension, most interviewees are in favour of an open university, accepting all EU students.

Figure 1 • Students' preferences for "social and European university"



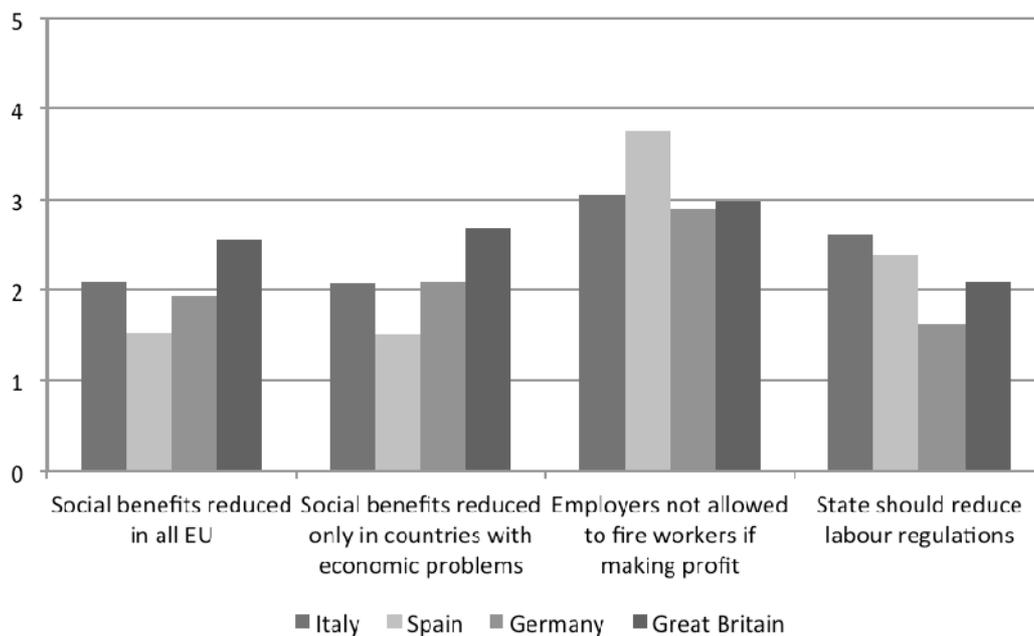
4.2. The welfare and the market dimensions

Figure 2 shows the mean levels of agreement (in a 5-point scale, where 1 means 'disagrees completely' and 5 'agrees completely') for the welfare and the market dimensions. As it appears, students are in favour of maintaining social benefits in Europe, especially in Spain—which comes as no surprise considering the bad economic situation of the country. In Germany and Great Britain, however, students make a difference between the reduction of social benefits in all EU countries and the reduction of social benefits only

in countries with economic problems (something which does not occur among Italian and Spanish students). German and British students indeed are slightly more in favour of cutting social benefits in countries with economic problems, rather than in the whole of Europe.

Students are also generally more in favour of market protection than of market-making in all four countries, even if it depends on the specific aspect the question refers to. While Spaniards are the most opposed to employers being allowed to fire workers when their business is making profit (probably because they have suffered more from this type of situation in the last few years, and levels of unemployment are very high), the Germans and the British are those who agree less with the liberalization of the labour market. Although these might seem contradictory preferences at first sight, the average is clearly in favour of market protection.

Figure 2 • Students' preferences for social vs market Europe

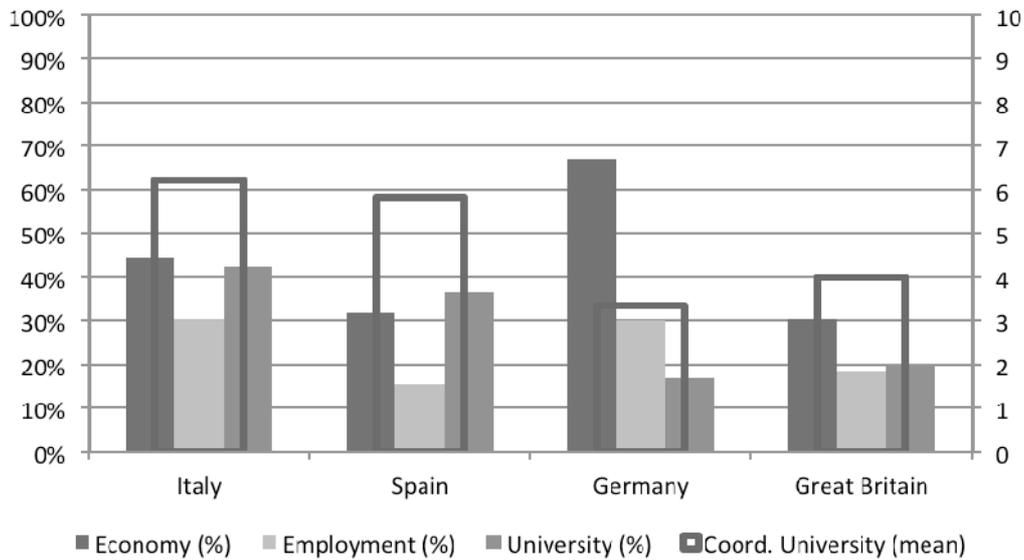


4.3. The Europeanization dimension

Regarding students' preferences for EU decision-making versus national government decision-making, Figure 3 shows the percentage of students who think the EU is the best level at which to make decisions about economy, employment, and university (Y-left axis), and the mean level of support for coordination of university by the EU (Y-right axis). Figure 3 reveals that, with some exceptions, less than 40 per cent of the students prefer the EU to be in charge of all areas, which suggests that university students still prefer things to be decided at home. However, there are important differences across countries and issues. Probably the most intriguing country is Germany. More than 65 per cent of the German interviewees consider that the EU is the most appropriate level at which to

make decisions about economy, whereas only 30 per cent of the interviewees think the same about employment; and less than 20 per cent about university. Also strikingly, the country where there is less support for employment policies being taken at European level (about 15 per cent) is the country where levels of unemployment are the highest: Spain. Lastly, and it is no surprise considering the generally low levels of support for the EU, British students are the less supportive of EU decision-making in all three areas.

Figure 3 • Students' preferences for more or less EU

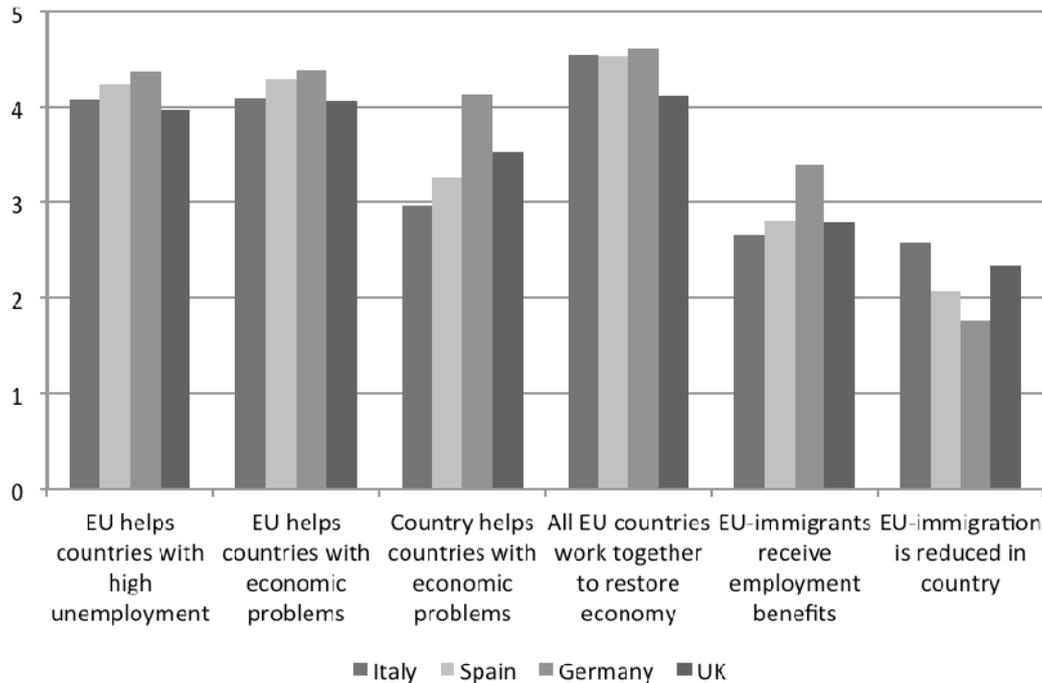


4.4. The solidarity dimension

The last dimension—solidarity—appears to be the one generating more agreement among university students of all four countries, particularly if referred to EU solidarity with other countries.⁸ Solidarity of the students' country with other EU countries receives less support from the students, mostly in Italy and Spain. To a certain extent, also, students tend to be less in favour of solidarity with other peoples, namely EU-immigrants. All in all, and at first sight, the German students of our sample seem to be the ones most in favour of solidarity.

⁸ One of the items initially designed to measure solidarity appeared to be problematic, probably because it had a high level of difficulty. It was therefore not considered in the analysis (response-rate was very low and did not correlate with any of the other items).

Figure 4 • Students' preferences for solidarity



4.5. Combining the different dimensions

Previous figures have shown that students tend to be in favour of maintaining the welfare system; although they do not oppose market liberalization policies strongly. They are also rather against EU decision-making, although more in favour of European solidarity. In order to have a more nuanced analysis of how university students' attitudes to these different dimensions relate to each other exactly, factor analysis has been conducted. Initially, all items presented above (some of them have been reversed—see Table 4) were included in the analysis. However, it resulted that students' preferences for 'close politics' appear to belong to a different construct than students' preferences for 'distant politics' (see above). Even if there is a correlation between 'close politics' and 'distant politics', factor analysis considers them in separate factors. For this reason, all but one items of the 'close politics' (the one referring to EU coordination of university) have been dropped from the analysis. This is a very interesting finding per se, which will require more investigation in the future, but it is not developed further in this paper.

An additional transformation has been operated on the initial indicators in order to avoid dichotomous items: a composite index was created by means of the three items referred to as preferences for EU decision-making. The resulting index provides the number of policies (from 1 to 3) the students think should be established at European level. Exploratory rotated principal components factor analysis has been run for the 12 remaining items (varimax rotation). Factor analysis was first performed for the sample as a whole; and subsequently for each of the countries separately. With a few exceptions, the same five factors emerge from the result in all countries, explaining 66 per cent of the var-

iance for the whole sample. The results of this exploratory analysis correspond quite well with the theoretical distinction presented above.

Table 4 • Factor dimensions of students' attitudes to social Europe (principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation. Factor loadings below .3 were omitted from the table)

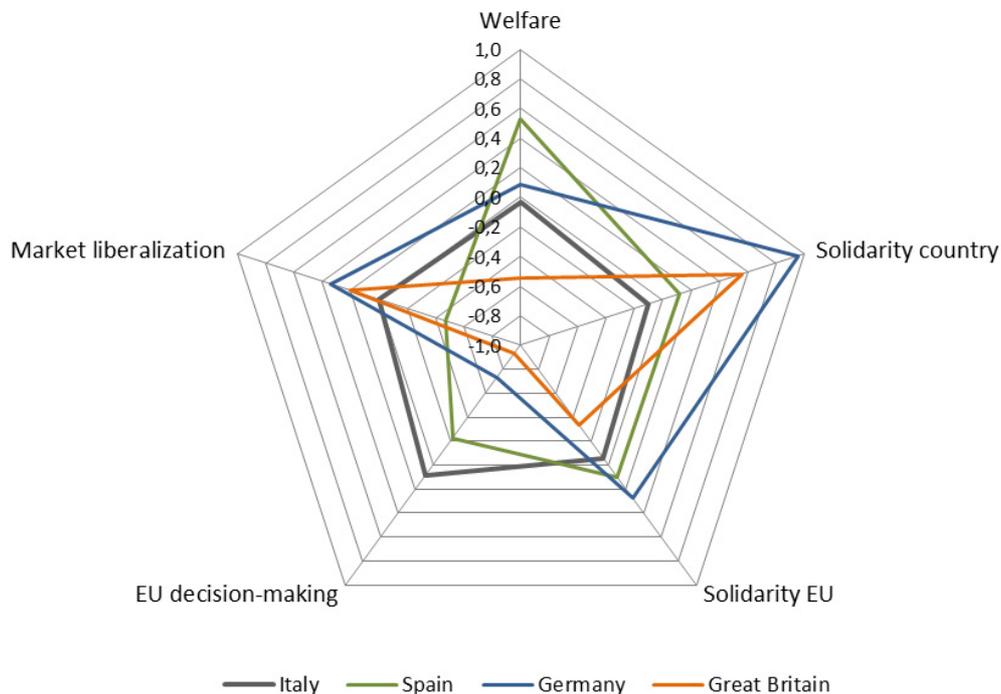
	Factors				
	Welfare	Solidarity country	Solidarity EU	EU decision-making	Market liberalization
Social benefits reduced in all EU	0.861				
Social benefits reduced only in countries with economic problems	0.848				
EU-immigration is reduced in country (<i>reversed</i>)		0.762			
Country helps countries with economic problems		0.730			
EU-immigrants receive employment benefits		0.697			0.419
EU helps countries with economic problems			0.819		
EU helps countries with high unemployment			0.736		0.342
All EU countries work together to restore economy			0.639	0.356	
EU coordinates university				0.828	
EU decides on policies (economy, employment, university)				0.769	
Employers not allowed to fire workers if making profit (<i>reversed</i>)					-0.863
State should reduce labour regulations	-0.529				
Initial eigenvalue	2.81	1.69	1.25	1.18	1.02
Per cent explained variance	23.44	14.1	10.41	9.86	8.48
Scale reliability Cronbach's alpha	0.74	0.62	0.60	0.69	–

The number of items per factor varies from one factor to another (see Table 4). The first factor has been called *welfare* and includes two items related to social benefits. Interestingly, the item about labour regulations loads negatively in this factor, indicating that welfare attitudes are opposed to market liberalization attitudes (though this is not true for the other item on employers' constraints). As could already be anticipated in previous figures, solidarity is not a homogeneous construct for the students: on the one hand, factor two—*solidarity country*—consists of items related to solidarity (with other peoples and other countries) coming from the students' country. Factor three instead—*solidarity EU*—also

refers to solidarity, but from the point of view of the European Union as a whole. Therefore there is a distinction between how solidarity is conceived, depending on whether it comes from the country or from the European Union. The fourth factor is called *EU decision-making* and comprises the items referring to EU's role in the decision-making process. Lastly, factor five called *market liberalization* comprises the single item about employers' permission to dismiss workers. Two other items load high in this factor—those related to employment—which makes theoretical sense, since market liberalization is perceived as opposed to increasing unemployment benefits. There are no strong correlations between the predicted factors (less than .02).⁹

Factor loads have been predicted and saved for each individual. Figure 5 provides a graphic representation of the five factors in all four countries. Each axis represents the average load of a factor in the country; a high average means that a factor is more relevant in a country than another factor with a low average. Figure 5 reveals two interesting aspects. Firstly, the five dimensions or conflicts are not perceived as contradictory by the students, but in some cases even as complementary. Secondly, there are significant differences across countries with regard to students' preferences for social Europe.¹⁰

Figure 5 • The five dimensions of conflict (country's means of factor loads for each dimension)



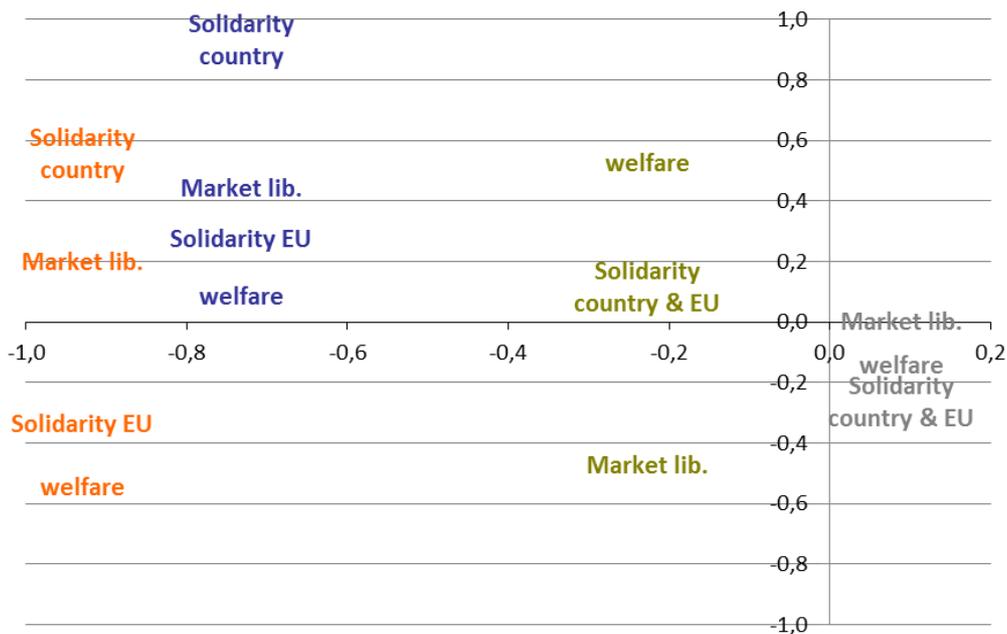
⁹ Correlation is .54 if summary variables are constructed for each of the factors.

¹⁰ Factor analysis is very problematic for Great Britain, due to the reduced number of cases. It is still retained here in order to provide an exploratory picture of the differences across countries.

The grey line in Figure 5 represents the Italian students' position in each of the dimensions presented above. It appears that this is the country where students perceive less the conflict between the five dimensions, since there is a balance between welfare and market liberalization on the one hand; and between these two and solidarity and EU decision-making on the other. Italians seem to expect a lot from EU's capacity to solve these conflicts in a balanced way. Spain is represented in green in the graph. Here a contradiction is clearly felt between the welfare and the market dimension: Spanish students want more welfare and less market liberalization. But welfare seems to be opposed to the EU decision-making dimension as well, probably in relation to the strong austerity measures which have been implemented to fulfil EU obligations. On the contrary, solidarity—both from the EU and from the country—and welfare are complementary for Spanish students. They clearly still perceive the state as the 'social father'.

In blue in Figure 5, the German case contradicts the widespread image of Germany leading European integration. As a matter of fact, the only dimension which students do not perceive as complementary with the others is EU decision-making. In other words, German students want more country solidarity, more EU solidarity, more welfare, more market liberalization, but less EU decision-making in general. German students therefore prefer policies to be kept at home. Lastly, Great Britain is depicted in orange in the graph. Apparently, British students represent quite accurately the situation in their country: while in favour of market liberalization and country solidarity, they are much less supportive of EU decision-making and EU solidarity and welfare. Figure 6 provides a different visualization of the combination of factors, in which the EU decision-making dimension is kept constant in the X axis and the other factors are represented in the Y axis. The colour code for the countries is the same as in Figure 5.

Figure 6 • The EU decision-making dimension and the other dimensions



5. CORRELATES OF STUDENTS' PREFERENCES FOR SOCIAL EUROPE

Finally, a test of the hypotheses presented in section 2 is provided, but should be taken very cautiously. Each of the predicted factors described in the previous section are considered as dependent variables. As for the independent variables, the independent part of hypothesis 1 is operationalized by means of a set of variables which measures students' experience in other EU countries or with other EU citizens, and levels of identification with the European dimension. Hypothesis 2 is tested by means of several variables which measure students' evaluations of national and European governments; students' attribution of responsibility for the economic situation of the country (responsibility of the national government; of the European Union; of Northern countries—in Italy and Spain—and of Southern countries—in Germany); evaluation of the economic situation; expectations concerning the future; and information about the household situation (see Table 5). Gender, political interest, and position in the left-right scale are also included as controls. Great Britain is dropped from the analysis, because of the small number of cases. A dummy has been included for each of the three other countries (reference category is Italy). OLS regression with errors clustered by countries is performed for each of the dependent variables.

Why do students want more or less of one dimension? In general, independently from the dimension we consider, hypothesis 2 tends to receive more confirmation than hypothesis 1 (without considering students' identity feelings). Evaluations of the different levels of government and of the economic situation are the stronger correlates of all five dependent variables. The worse the students' evaluations of their national government and economic situation, the more they are in favour of the welfare dimension. On the contrary, the worse the evaluations of the economic situation, the less they are in favour of market liberalization. EU decision-making is supported mainly when there are good evaluations of the European dimension. Finally, depending on the type of solidarity, one or the other variable is at play. Thus, students tend to be more supportive of country solidarity the more they think the EU is responsible for the economic situation in their country (and vice-versa, they tend to be less supportive of country solidarity the more they think the country itself is responsible for the economic situation). On the contrary, EU solidarity is more strongly supported the more students perceive their country as responsible for the economic situation. Summing up, students tend to be more supportive of EU solidarity and EU decision-making the better they evaluate the European Union. On the contrary, they are more supportive of country solidarity the worse they evaluate the European Union.

With regard to hypothesis 1, either identity feelings resume students' experiences in the EU, or there is no evidence that moving around Europe or meeting other EU fellows increases support for any of these dimensions.

Table 5 • Correlates of the different EU models (standard errors in parentheses)

	Factors				
	Welfare	Solidarity country	Solidarity EU	EU decision-making	Market liberalization
Variables					
Gender (female = 1)	-0.006 (0.046)	-0.082* (0.044)	-0.033 (0.034)	-0.165* (0.100)	-0.064 (0.063)
Political interest (1 = 'no interest at all'; 4 = 'very interested')	0.175*** (0.029)	0.090*** (0.027)	0.056*** (0.020)	0.027 (0.061)	0.021 (0.039)
Evaluation national government	-0.042*** (0.015)	0.004 (0.014)	-0.017 (0.011)	0.034 (0.032)	0.017 (0.020)
Evaluation European Union	-0.029*** (0.011)	0.005 (0.011)	0.009 (0.008)	0.125*** (0.024)	-0.005 (0.015)
Evaluation economic situation	-0.076*** (0.028)	0.013 (0.026)	0.007 (0.020)	0.044 (0.060)	0.091** (0.038)
Responsibility national government for present economic situation (0-10)	-0.008 (0.014)	-0.027** (0.013)	0.029*** (0.010)	0.038 (0.031)	-0.001 (0.020)
Responsibility EU for present economic situation (0-10)	0.031** (0.012)	0.025** (0.012)	0.013 (0.009)	0.001 (0.027)	-0.015 (0.017)
Responsibility other governments for present economic situation (0-10)	-0.017* (0.009)	-0.018** (0.009)	0.005 (0.007)	-0.042** (0.019)	-0.038*** (0.012)
Experiences in the EU (0-5)	0.020 (0.054)	0.092* (0.051)	-0.015 (0.040)	-0.099 (0.117)	0.075 (0.075)
Left-right scale (0 = 'left'; 10 = 'right')	-0.090*** (0.010)	-0.130*** (0.009)	-0.034*** (0.007)	0.004 (0.021)	0.101*** (0.013)
Feels EU citizen (1 = 'definitely not'; 4 = 'definitely yes')	0.019 (0.035)	0.154*** (0.033)	0.053** (0.025)	0.503*** (0.075)	-0.093** (0.047)
Identity: nationality and European (Ref. Nationality)	0.122 (0.087)	0.058 (0.081)	0.128** (0.063)	0.298 (0.185)	0.208* (0.117)
Identity: European and nationality (Ref. Nationality)	0.120 (0.108)	0.363*** (0.101)	0.159** (0.078)	0.784*** (0.231)	0.172 (0.147)
Identity: European only (Ref. Nationality)	0.055 (0.133)	0.324*** (0.125)	0.093 (0.097)	0.594** (0.286)	0.169 (0.182)
Household situation: father works (Ref. Mother works)	-0.150* (0.084)	-0.101 (0.079)	-0.074 (0.061)	-0.152 (0.182)	0.020 (0.116)
Household situation: both parents work (Ref. Mother works)	-0.009 (0.075)	-0.003 (0.071)	0.008 (0.055)	-0.263 (0.163)	0.087<< (0.104)
Job expectations: difficult to find a job (1-5)	-0.034 (0.025)	-0.032 (0.023)	-0.021 (0.018)	-0.019 (0.053)	0.119*** (0.034)
Likelihood of looking for a job abroad (1-4)	-0.189*** (0.068)	0.068 (0.063)	0.052 (0.049)	0.501*** (0.144)	0.108 (0.092)
Country: Spain (Ref. Italy)	0.493*** (0.074)	0.237*** (0.071)	0.057 (0.055)	-0.498*** (0.162)	-0.644*** (0.102)
Country: Germany (Ref. Italy)	-0.099 (0.087)	0.485*** (0.084)	0.185*** (0.065)	-1.804*** (0.192)	0.023 (0.121)
Constant	4.356*** (0.230)	2.757*** (0.217)	3.649*** (0.167)	0.503 (0.494)	2.152*** (0.316)
Observations	1,436	1,522	1,525	1,526	1,478
R-squared	0.186	0.291	0.074	0.173	0.121

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has attempted to provide a better insight into young university students' attitudes to social Europe. Even though this is only a first stage of the investigation—and does not aim at generalization to other contexts—it brings up interesting information about young people's preferences regarding future Europe. First and most relevant, the study reveals significant differences across the four European countries, which will need further investigation in the future. On the one hand, the German and British students interviewed in *Your Voice* are much less favourable to EU interference in national policies than the Spaniards are and, especially, the Italians. On the other, whereas Spaniards are much in favour of having a strong welfare state, university students in Germany and—especially—in the United Kingdom prioritize market liberalization over welfare policies in Spain.

These tensions between national sovereignty vs European conditionality on the one hand, and market liberalization vs increasing welfare policies on the other, echo a larger divide in the European Union, which seems to be reinforced as a consequence of the economic crisis: the conflict North vs South. German and British students, in fact, impose important limits to the action of the European Union, in favour of a *Market Union*. On the contrary, the Spaniards put a major emphasis on the existence of a strong welfare system. Indeed, Spanish students have been among the most affected by the economic crisis: more than 30,000 students have risked expulsion from university for not having paid their enrolment fees. As a consequence, Spanish students are more willing than German or British students to support a *Social Union*, although the presence of the European Union is intended more as a financial source rather than as a co-legislator with the national government.

The case of Italy is outstanding since it does not fit so well within the conflict discourse between North and South. Italian students are more supportive of a *Stronger Union* (more policies taken care of by the European Union) than students from Germany, Spain, and Great Britain. However, students' preferences for *Social* vs *Market Union* are balanced, which means that a *Stronger Union* makes room for a European Union which is able to reconcile all these different dimensions or conflicts. To put it differently, there is much less agreement among Italian students on how, and which, the future Europe should be. This is explored in greater detail in Wave 2 of *Your Voice*, a post-electoral panel study which was conducted among the Italian students who had accepted to be re-contacted.¹¹ Results of this second wave once again show that Italian university students tend to have a mixed view of the future of the EU (see Appendix C for selected items). In fact, although a big majority of the interviewees think that Italian membership of the EU is beneficial (80% of the students), and is in favour of preserving the Euro as the EU currency (91% of the students), the future role of the European Union is more controversial. For example, 37% of the interviewees in Wave 2 of *Your Voice* are in favour of increasing EU powers. However, only 20% of the students support EU's solidarity across Member States, whereas the majority (46%) prefers that each country manages by itself and deals with its own problems. Interestingly, as well, Italian interviewees are more in favour of a

¹¹ 1,108 Italian students agreed to be re-contacted. Response rate of Wave 2 is 47 percent (N = 522).

future EU which promotes economic growth (51%) over economic austerity (23%), and prioritizes economic rights (59%) over social rights (17%). The message from the part of the Italian students interviewed by *Your Voice* seems quite challenging: more EU without Member States' interference; more economic growth at the expense of social rights.

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APPENDIX A

Comparison of *Your Voice* with official statistics and representative surveys

Table A.1 • Average age of university students

	Eurostat 2012	<i>Your Voice</i>
Italy	22.20	23.13
Spain	22.40	22.21
Germany	23.40	25.21
Great Britain	21.60	21.69

Table A.2 • Percentage of university students by field of study

%	Italy		Spain		Germany		United Kingdom	
	Eurostat 2012	<i>Your Voice</i>	Eurostat 2012	<i>Your Voice</i>	Eurostat 2012	<i>Your Voice</i>	Eurostat 2012	<i>Your Voice</i>
Education and training	7.20	3.50	14.20	13.26	8.10	7.94	10.30	0.00
Humanities and art	15.80	25.83	8.80	1.73	11.00	31.77	16.20	32.88
Social science, business and law	32.40	25.78	28.00	45.24	24.40	38.27	32.40	58.90
Science, mathematics and computing	7.60	19.54	8.30	29.97	12.30	15.16	12.80	1.37
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	15.40	0.38	15.10	3.17	16.80	0.72	9.20	2.74
Agriculture and veterinary	2.00	7.92	1.50	1.73	1.80	5.42	0.90	1.37
Services	2.90	2.06	8.50	0.00	3.40	0.36	1.60	2.74
Health	16.70	15.00	15.60	4.90	22.20	0.36	16.40	0.00

Table A.3 • Gender distribution of university students

	Women		Men	
	Eurostat 2012	<i>Your Voice</i>	Eurostat 2012	<i>Your Voice</i>
Italy	57.5	63.92	42.5	36.08
Spain	53.6	63.98	46.3	36.02
Germany	50.1	61.51	49.2	38.49
Great Britain	56.3	49.30	43.4	50.70

Table A.4 • Mean levels of political interest (max. 4)

	ESS 2012*	<i>Your Voice</i>
Italy	2.5	2.58
Spain	2.5	2.86
Germany	2.8	3.26
Great Britain	2.4	3.54

* Students > 17 years old.

APPENDIX B

Your Voice questionnaire: the four conflict dimensions

- **If you think of your ideal university, how close to it is a university which...**
(0-10; not at all-completely)
 - accepts only students whose families can afford it
 - accepts only students with the best grades in high school
 - gives the opportunity to study to anyone who wants to
 - is financed by public money only
 - accepts students from many different countries
 - offers only limited places, according to the demands of the labour market
 - is coordinated by the European Union authorities

- **And thinking now about your future as workers, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?** (1-5; completely disagree-completely agree)
 - It is mainly my responsibility to find a job
 - It is mainly the responsibility of the state that everybody finds a job
 - Employers should not be allowed to dismiss workers as long as their companies are making profit
 - The state should reduce workers' protection regulations in order to fight unemployment
 - All immigrants coming from a EU country should receive unemployment benefits if they are not able to find a job
 - The EU should give more help to those European countries where unemployment is very high

- **To what extent do you agree that in times of economic and financial crisis...**
(1-5; completely disagree-completely agree)
 - [country] gives financial help to another EU country with economic problems
 - the European Union gives financial help to EU countries with economic problems
 - social benefits (unemployment benefits, pensions...) are reduced in all European countries
 - social benefits (unemployment benefits, pensions...) are reduced only in countries with economic problems
 - immigration from other European countries is restricted in [country]
 - European countries are economically compensated if many people leave to work abroad
 - all European countries work together to restore economic prosperity

- **Who do you think should be the most appropriate level to decide about...**
1) regional authorities; 2) national authorities; 3) European Union authorities
 - economic policies
 - employment and social policies
 - university education policies

APPENDIX C

Your Voice Wave 2 (selected items)

Table C.1 • Preferences: solidarity

• In your opinion, in the new European Union...	N	%
All Member States help each other	75	19.89
Each country does the best for itself	174	46.15
It depends	128	33.95
Total	377	100.00

Table C.2 • Preferences: social rights vs economic rights

• In your opinion, in the new European Union...	N	%
The priority is social rights	62	16.62
The priority is economic rights	220	58.98
It depends	91	24.4
Total	373	100.00

Table C.3 • Preferences: economic austerity vs economic growth

• In your opinion, in the new European Union...	N	%
The priority is economic austerity	84	22.76
The priority is economic growth	188	50.95
It depends	97	26.29
Total	369	100.00

Table C.4 • Preferences: EU policy-making vs Member States policy-making

• In your opinion, in the new European Union...	N	%
The EU has more power	128	37.21
The Member States have more power	90	26.16
It depends	126	36.63
Total	344	100.00