

Can Economic and Social Europe Be Reconciled? Citizens' View on Integration and Solidarity

Maurizio Ferrera¹ and Alessandro Pellegata²

RESceEU “Reconciling Economic and Social Europe: Values, Ideas and Politics” (<http://resceu.eu/>) is a research project funded by the European Research Council (ERC) which involves the University of Milan and the Research Centre “Luigi Einaudi” based in Turin. The project is led by prof. Maurizio Ferrera (University of Milan) and aims to study the complex interplay between the European Union and national welfare states and to analyze how the recent crisis has exacerbated the tensions between these two dimensions.

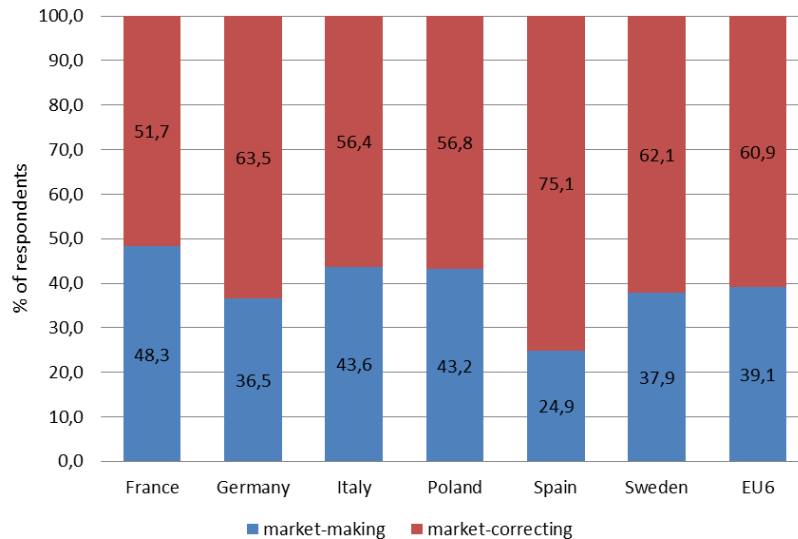
Between September and November 2016 the RESceEU project conducted a cross-country public opinion survey in France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. A questionnaire of about 50 questions has been administered to a sample of 9326 respondents aged 18 or older in the seven countries included in the research. The main purpose of the RESceEU Mass Survey is to observe EU citizens' positioning on four lines of conflict around which the politics of social Europe is mostly structured. These lines of tension deal with the ultimate EU mission, the principle of interstate solidarity in the EU, the free movement within the EU and the divide between integration and autonomy. Furthermore, the RESceEU Mass Survey investigates the respondents' propensity to voice their aversion towards certain EU political decisions and their opinion on the role of the EU during the crisis as well as its future. Considering the outcome of the “Brexit” referendum of 23 June 2016, the questionnaire administered to British respondents mainly focused on their attitudes towards the referendum and potential post-Brexit scenarios.

Figures and tables that follow present the main results obtained from the RESceEU Mass Survey. We start by providing an overview of the respondents' attitudes on the four lines of conflict identified by the RESceEU analytical framework. Then, we present surveyed citizens' opinion on the current political crisis in the EU. Finally, we show the results of a couple of questions administered to the British sample of respondents that deal with “Brexit” referendum and post-Brexit scenarios.

¹ Principal Investigator of the RESceEU project, University of Milan (maurizio.ferrera@unimi.it).

² Research Fellow of the RESceEU project, University of Milan (alessandro.pellegata@unimi.it).

Figure 1. Conflict on EU mission



Question: In your opinion, which of the following objectives should be given top priority at the EU level? (1) Ensuring fiscal stability as well as the international competitiveness of the EU industry (2) Ensuring high levels of social protection and social welfare for all EU citizens.

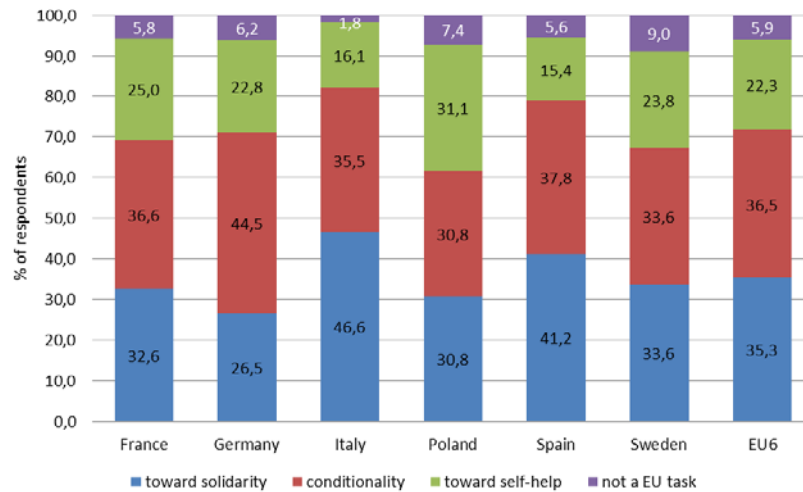
Note: Option (1) has been renamed “market-making” and option (2) has been renamed “market-correcting”. Entries are percentage of respondents. DK answers (0,39% of the total) are excluded.

Source: RESceEU Mass Survey.

Main results on the EU mission conflict:

- 61% of sample respondents support the market-correcting position according to which the EU should give top priority to ensure high levels of social protection and social welfare for all its citizens. The remaining 39% of respondents instead support the market-making position.
- The market-correcting position is majoritarian in all the six countries in which this question was administered, but with interesting cross-country differences. Spain is the country in which the highest proportion of respondents (75%) opts for the market-correcting view, followed, quite surprisingly by Germany (63%). Only 52% of French respondents instead support this position.

Figure 2. Conflict on inter-state solidarity: Core Vs periphery



Question: During the recent Eurocrisis, a number of Member States in severe economic and financial conditions have asked for help from the EU. This has led to the adoption of new common rules on the provision of financial support to heavily indebted countries. Please, indicate which of these statements comes closest to your view. Financial support from the EU should... (1) ...be granted without conditions, in the name of solidarity between EU citizens and states; (2) ...take the form of soft loans, because Europeans are “all in the same boat”; (3) ...be accompanied by precise conditions for repayment and domestic policy reform, so as not to put the Monetary Union at risk; (4) ...be offered voluntarily only by those countries that consider it to be in their national interest; (5) ...not be provided because Member States should take responsibility for their own problems instead of asking money from foreign taxpayers; (6) ...not be a task for the EU to deal with.

Note: Items (1) and (2) have been recoded into the category “towards solidarity”, item (3) has been labelled “conditionality”, items (4) and (5) have been recoded into the category “towards self-help” and item (6) has been labelled “not a EU task”. Entries are percentage of respondents. DK answers (0,66% of the total) are excluded.

Source: RESceEU Mass Survey.

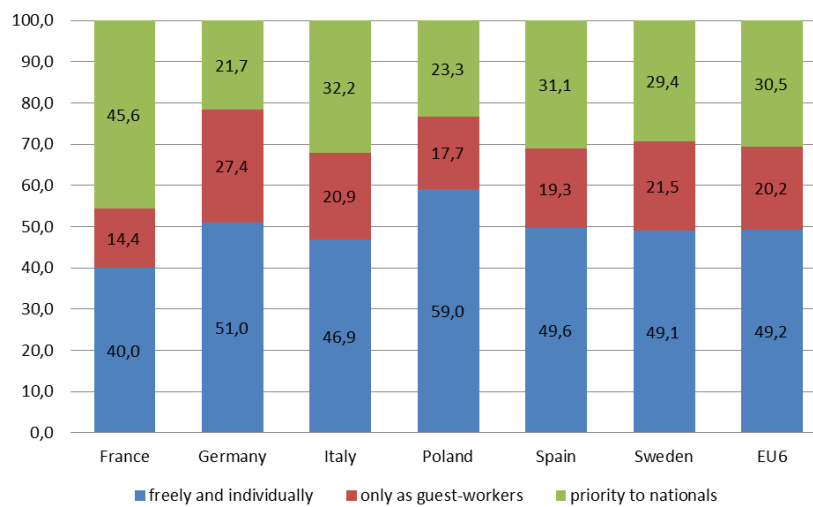
Main results on the Core Vs Periphery conflict:

- More than 36% of sample respondents is inclined to the idea that EU should provide financial support to states in severe economic or financial difficulties, but this should be accompanied by precise conditions for repayment and domestic policy reform, so as not to put the Monetary Union at risk (“Conditionality”). However, this proportion is only slightly higher than the percentage of respondents who supports a view of interstate solidarity in the EU (35%). 22% of respondents instead takes a position in favour of self-help and

responsibility of indebted states, and the remaining 6% thinks that the financial help to these countries should not be a EU task.

- Looking at different countries the more striking divide is between Germany and the two Mediterranean countries, Italy and Spain. On one side, German public opinion shows the highest level of support for the “Conditionality” option (44,5%) and the lowest one for the “Solidarity” option (26,4%). On the other side, Italy and Spain, display the highest percentage of respondents who opts for the “Solidarity” option (46,6% in Italy and 41,2% in Spain) and the lowest percentage of respondents in the “Self-help” category (16,1% in Italy and 15,4% in Spain).
- Polish (31%) and French (25%) surveyed citizens are the most inclined to self-help and responsibility of indebted EU Member States.

Figure 3. Conflict on free movement in EU: Access to labour market



Question: According to EU law, EU citizens are allowed to work in every Member State. How do you think EU citizens of other nationalities that come to work in our country should access the labour market?(1) Freely and individually, just like me and my national fellows; (2) As guest workers and only as long as they keep the job that let them in (OUR COUNTRY); (3) (NATIONALITY) workers should have priority access to jobs and employment services.

Note: Entries are percentage of respondents. DK answers (0,36% of the total) are excluded.

Source: RESceEU Mass Survey.

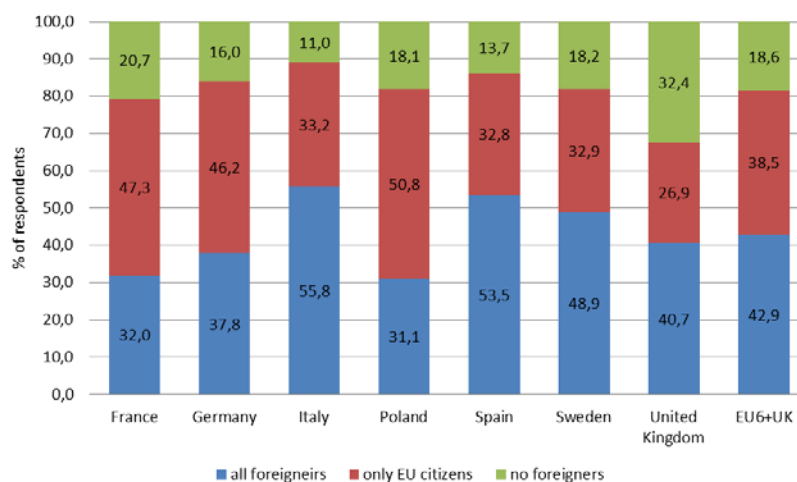
Main results on the conflict on free movement within the EU, specifically on the access to labour market by citizens from other EU Member States:

- Almost half (49,2%) of the respondents in the survey sample thinks that citizens from other EU Members States should be allowed to access the labour market freely and individually.

However, another 30,5% of respondents opts for a closure of the labour market, giving the priority to the natives. The remaining 20,2% of respondents chooses the intermediate option according to which EU citizens should access the labour market only as guest-workers, namely as long as they keep the job that let them enter the country.

- The opening option is majoritarian in five out of six countries. Poland (59,0%), Germany (51,0%) and Spain (49,6%) display the highest proportion of respondents supporting the free access to the labour market by other EU citizens. France instead is the only country in which the chauvinist position of a priority for natives is the most preferred by their surveyed citizens (45,6%).

Figure 4. Conflict on free movement in EU: Access to social protection



Question: Which of these three statements on the access to social security benefits by citizens of other nationalities comes closest to your own point of view? (1) All foreigners legally resident in (OUR COUNTRY) should have the same social security benefits as the (NATIONALITY); (2) Only nationals of other EU Member States, legally resident in (OUR COUNTRY) should have the same social security benefits as the (NATIONALITY); (3) A foreigner, even if legally resident in (OUR COUNTRY), should not have the same social security benefits as the (NATIONALITY).

Note: Entries are percentage of respondents. DK answers (0,66% of the total) are excluded.

Source: RESceEU Mass Survey.

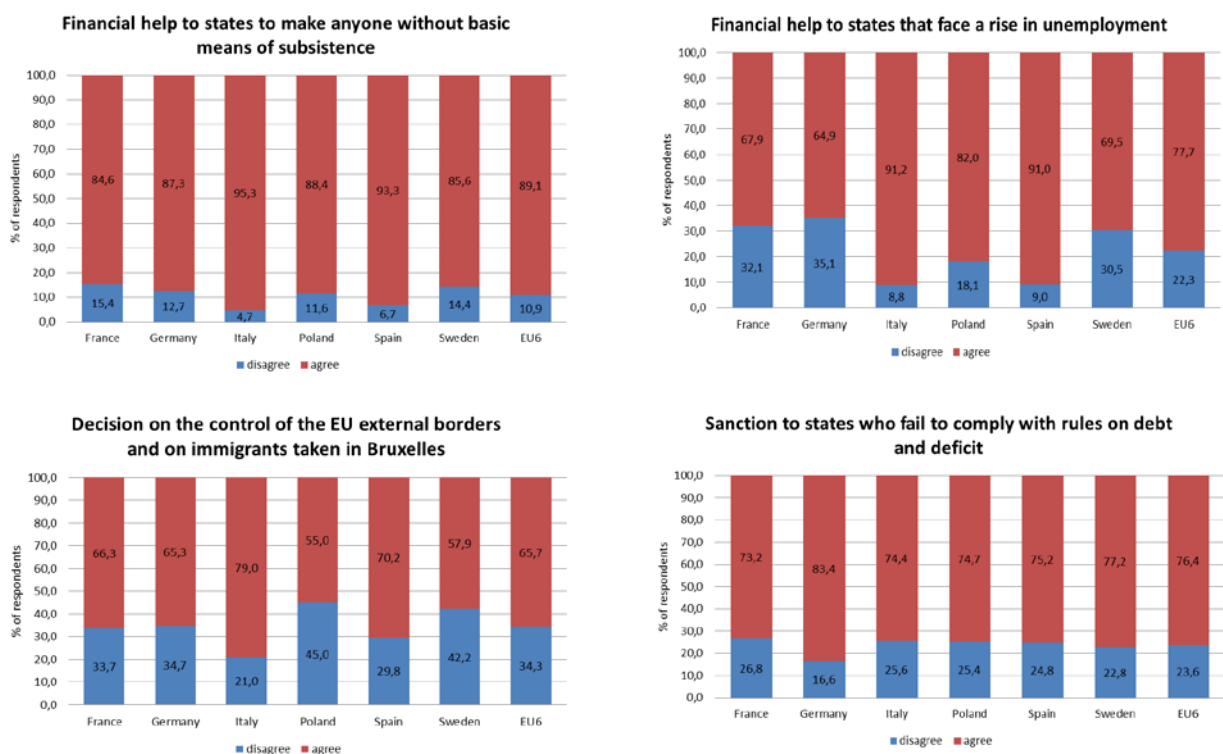
Given the important role played by free-movement of citizens and workers within the EU in the debates that precede and follow the “Brexit” referendum, this question was administered also to British respondents. Main results on the conflict on free movement within the EU, specifically on the access to social security benefits by foreign citizens:

- In the entire sample (EU6+UK) the majority of respondents is inclined to assure to foreigners, irrespective of their country of origin, the same social security benefits than the

nationals (42,9%), but the percentage of respondents who thinks that only citizens of other EU Member States should be entitled of the same rights of their national fellows is not so distant (38,5%). The remaining 18,6% of respondents opts instead for the more chauvinist position that restricts the access to social security benefits for every foreigners, irrespective of their country of origin.

- In Italy (55,8%), Spain (53,5%), Sweden (48,9%) and United Kingdom (40,7%) the majority of respondents is inclined to an opening of the national social welfare to foreigners, irrespective of their country of origin. By the contrary, in Poland (50,8%), France (47,3%) and Germany (46,2%) the highest proportion of respondents opts for the intermediate position which allows only EU citizens to have access to social security benefits.
- In none of the countries included in this study the welfare chauvinist position is majoritarian. However, in France the proportion of respondents who think that foreign citizens should not have the same access to social security benefits as natives is slightly higher than 20% and in United Kingdom almost reaches one third of respondents (32,4%).

Figure 5. Conflict on integration versus autonomy



Question: EU Member States have decided that their social and economic policies should be brought closer together. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements. a) In case of a very severe financial crisis

in a given Member State, the EU should make sure that no citizen of that state remains without means of subsistence (food, shelter, essential medicines etc...); b) The EU should equip itself with a budget large enough to provide substantial financial help to Member States facing a sudden rise in unemployment rates; c) Decisions on EU external borders control and the status of extra-EU immigrants and refugees should be made in Brussels; d) Clear and strict sanctions should be applied to Member States that fail to comply with EU rules on deficit and debt.

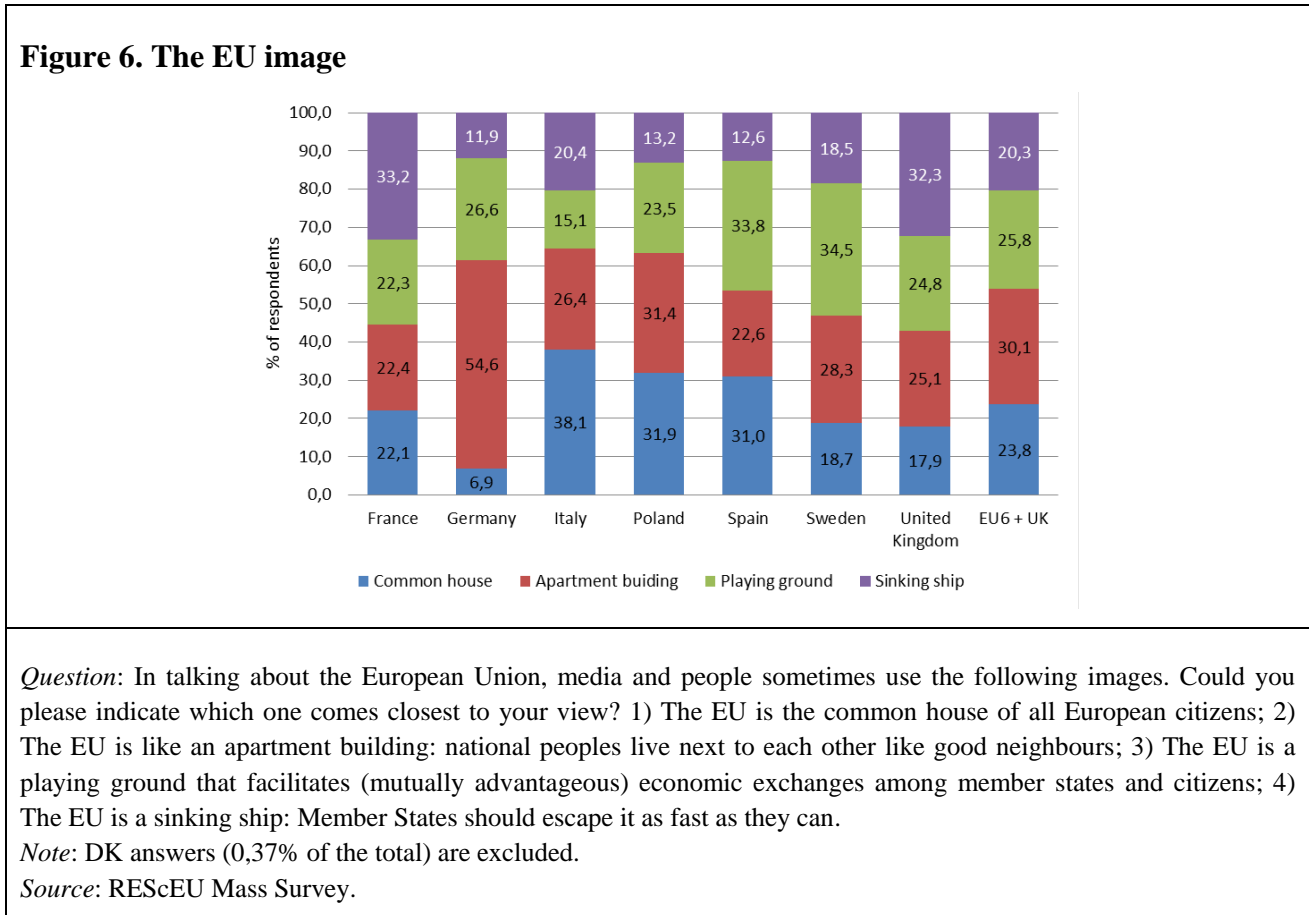
Note: Response categories “Strongly agree” and “Somewhat agree” have been recoded in the category “Agree”, while the categories “Somewhat disagree” and “Strongly disagree” have been recoded in the category “Disagree”. Entries are percentage of respondents. DK answers (a. 0,40% of the total; b. 0,47% of the total; c. 0,86% of the total; d. 0,60% of the total) are excluded.

Source: RESCEU Mass Survey.

Main results of the multi-items question on issues related to the conflict on integration versus autonomy:

- A very broad majority of survey respondents (89,1%) agrees that EU should make sure that no citizens of those states in severe economic and financial difficulties remains without means of subsistence. In all the six countries surveyed this proportion is equal or higher than 85%. This result seems to provide evidence for the presence of a sentiment of pan European solidarity in the EU public opinion.
- More than 77% of sample respondents agrees that EU should have a budget large enough to provide financial assistance to those states that face a sudden rise in unemployment rates. A country breakdown, however, reveals that while in Italy and in Spain, two countries presenting high unemployment rates, the proportion of respondents who agrees with this position reaches 91%, in Germany this percentage is equal to 65%.
- Looking to a more salient and divisive issue, such as extra-EU immigration, the proportion of sample respondents who takes a position towards more integration and agrees with the statement according to which decisions on EU external borders control and the status of extra-EU immigrants and refugees should be made in Brussels decreases compared to the two previous items (65,7%). At the opposite poles we find Italy, one of the first landing place for extra-EU immigrants, with 79% of “agree”, and Poland, in which only 55% of respondents agrees to entrust the EU to manage the issue of immigration and control the external borders of the Union.
- More than 76% of sample respondents seem to accept the fiscal and monetary policies implemented at the EU level by agreeing with the application of clear and strict sanctions to Member States that fail to comply with EU rules on deficit and debt. Not surprisingly, Germany is the country in which the highest proportion of respondents (83,4%) agree with

this position, but also the other countries show a proportion of “agree” that is higher than 70% of respondents.

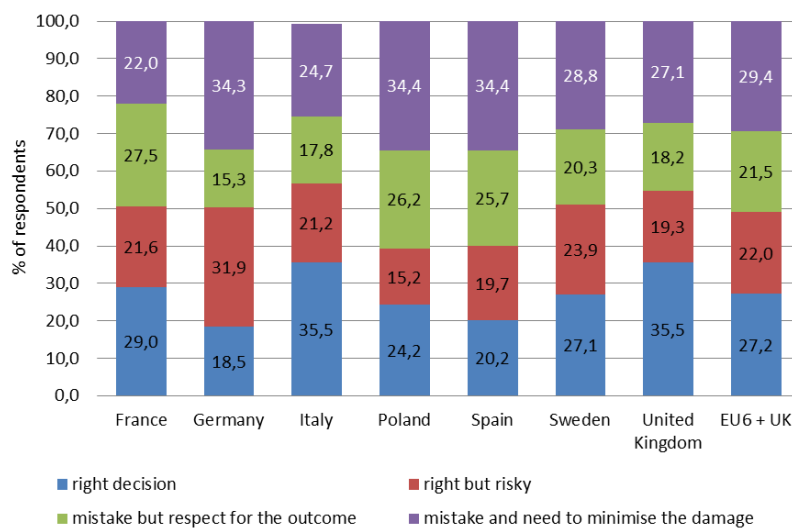


Main results of the question on which image is more representative of the current situation of the EU:

- In the entire sample respondents’ preferences are quite fairly distributed among the four images proposed. The most appealing view is that of the EU as an apartment building (30,1%), followed by that of a playing ground (25,8%), a common house (23,8%) and finally by that of a sinking ship (20,3%).
- Germany, the country that is undoubtedly playing the leading role in the EU institutions, shows the highest percentage of respondents who declares themselves closest to the image of EU as an apartment building (54%), but, at the same time, the lowest proportion of respondents who sees the EU as a common house for all European citizens (7%).

- The majority of Italian (38%) and Polish (32%) surveyed public opts for the most Europeanist image of the Union as a common house for all its citizens.
- In Spain (33,8%) and Sweden (34,5%) the relative majority of respondents expresses a position closer to the image of the EU as a playing ground through which they can obtain advantageous economic exchanges.
- One respondents over three in France (33,2%) and, not surprisingly, in United Kingdom (32,3%) sees the EU as a sinking ship that should be abandoned as fast as possible.

Figure 7. Assessment of the referendum on “Brexit”



Question: On the last 23rd of June, through a referendum, British citizens voted that the United Kingdom should leave the European Union. Please indicate which of these statements on the opportunity to call such a referendum comes closest to your view. 1) It was a right decision because any peaceful expression of the popular will should be welcomed; 2) It was a right decision, even though it can be risky to hold a referendum on such a complex issue; 3) It was a mistake to hold a referendum on such a complex issue but the British government has to respect its outcome; 4) It was a mistake to hold a referendum on such a complex issue and now British institutions must find a way to minimise damage from its outcome.

Note: DK answers (0,50% of the total) are excluded.

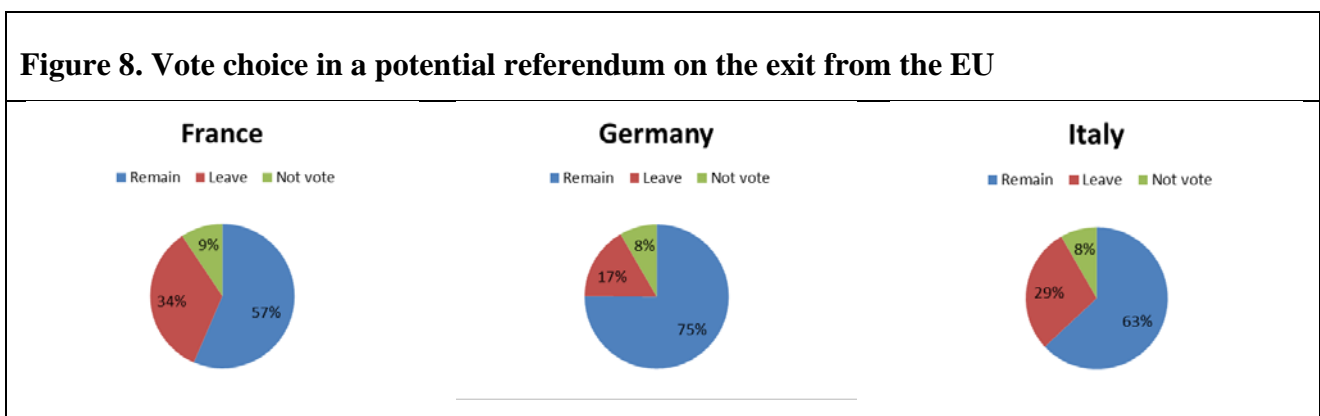
Source: RESceEU Mass Survey.

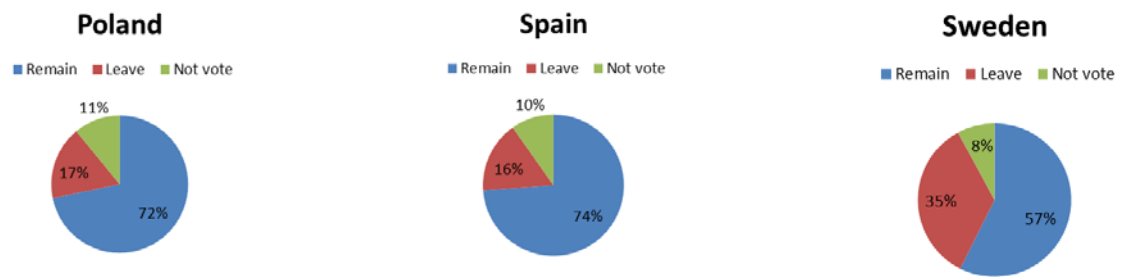
Main results of the assessment of the referendum on “Brexit”:

- Respondents are almost perfectly distributed around the four response categories proposed by the question and the sample is split down the middle between the two positions that define the opportunity to call such a referendum as right (49%), and the two that refer to this

opportunity as a mistake (51%). The percentage of sample respondents who are inclined to the most negative position, according to which “Brexit” referendum was a mistake and now British institutions must find a way to minimise its damage, is only slightly higher (29,4%) than the percentage of those who are closest to the more positive option, according to which the referendum was a right decision (27,2%).

- Given the outcome of the “Brexit” referendum, it is not surprising that in the United Kingdom more than 35% of respondents considers the decision to call such a referendum right, because any peaceful expression of the popular will should be welcomed. However, it is important to note that more than 27% of British respondents thinks that this referendum was a mistake and that British institutions must find a way to minimise its damage.
- Italy is the country in which the highest number of respondents (35,5%, the same percentage of UK) thinks that the opportunity to call a referendum on “Brexit” is a right decision because any peaceful expression of the popular will should be welcomed. Italy is followed by France (29 %) and Sweden (27%). France appears as the country in which this issue is most divisive, since 22% of respondents opts for the opposite position.
- In Germany 32% of respondents thinks that the decision to call such a referendum was right, even though it can be risky, considering its complexity.
- Poland and Spain are the countries where we can find the highest proportion of respondents (34%) who thinks that the “Brexit” referendum was a mistake and now British institutions must find a way to minimise the damage from its outcome.





Question: If (COUNTRY) should call for a referendum on its membership in the European Union, how would you vote for? 1) To make (COUNTRY) remain a member of the EU; 2) To make (COUNTRY) leave the EU; 3) I would not vote.

Note: DK answers (0,75% of the total) are excluded.

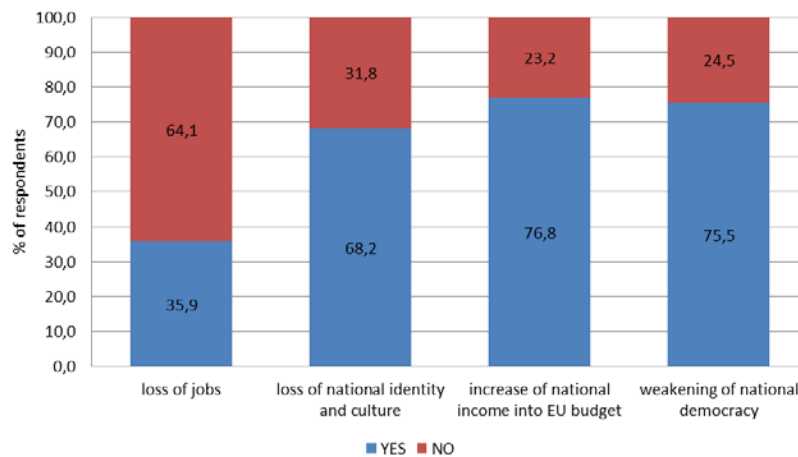
Source: RESceEU Mass Survey.

Main results on the vote choice in a potential referendum on the exit from the EU:

- Two sample respondents over three declare that if their country should call for a referendum on its membership in the European Union they would vote “Remain”, while 25% of them would vote “Leave”. The remaining 9% of respondents instead declare that they would not vote.
- Germany (75%), Spain (74%) and Poland (72%) are the countries that present the highest percentage of preferences towards “Remain”, with proportions higher than the sample average. By the contrary, Sweden (35%), France (34%) and Italy (29%) are the countries in which we can find the highest proportion of respondents who would vote “Leave”.

We present the results of a couple of questions administered to the sample of British respondents. The first is a multi-items question on the motivations that might have induced British respondents to vote “Leave”, while the second one asks them an evaluation of the potential free trade agreement that the United Kingdom may sign with the EU.

Figure 9. Outcomes of the EU unification process that influenced the British respondents’ decision to vote “Leave”



Question: Some people have fears about the process of European unification. Please indicate whether or not the following statements influenced your decision to vote “Leave” in the “Brexit” referendum: 1) The loss of jobs and social security; 2) The loss of national identity and culture; 3) A growing share of national income being paid into the EU budget; 4) A weakening of national democracy.

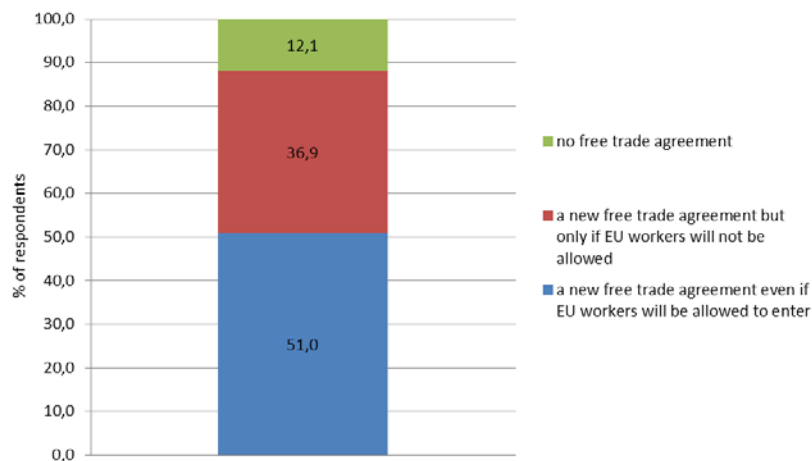
Note: The question has been administered only to respondents who previously declared that voted “Leave” in the “Brexit” referendum . DK answers (1. 1,10% of the total; 2. 0,22% of the total; 3. 0,66% of the total; 4. 1,77% of the total) are excluded.

Source: REScEU Mass Survey.

Main results on the relationship between several outcomes of the EU integration process and the decision to vote “Leave”:

- Political outcomes of the EU integration process seem to have affected more the respondents’ decision to vote “Leave” than the economic ones. While 36% of British respondents declares that the loss of jobs and social security influenced their voting decision, this percentage increases to 68% if we consider the fear of a loss of national identity and culture and to 75,5% if we look at the fear of a weakening of national democracy. 77% of them, finally, declares that the fear of an increase of national income being paid into the EU budget affected their decision to vote “Leave”.

Figure 10. Assessment of the potential new free trade agreement that could be signed between UK and the EU



Question: Some commentators suggest that the British government may now be willing to sign a new free trade agreement with the EU. Which of the following statements come closest to your view? 1) The British government should negotiate a new free trade agreement with the EU, even if this means allowing EU citizens to freely live and work in the UK; 2) The British government should negotiate a new free trade agreement with the EU but only if this means not allowing EU citizens to freely live and work in the UK; 3) The British government should not negotiate a new free trade agreement with the EU at all.

Note: DK answers (2,12% of the total) are excluded.

Source: RESCEU Mass Survey.

Main results on the British respondents evaluations of a new free trade agreement between the EU and the United Kingdom:

- As for the question on the opportunity to call a referendum on “Brexit”, the sample of British respondents is split down the middle. While 51% of them is in favour of a new free trade agreement with the EU, even if this means allowing EU citizens to freely live and work in the UK, the other 49% of British respondents is contrary to it or makes the closure of borders a condition to approve the agreement.
- 37% of respondents thinks that the British government should negotiate a new free trade agreement, but only if this means not allowing EU citizens to freely live and work in the UK. The remaining 12% instead thinks that the British government should not negotiate a new free trade agreement at all. This result seems to confirm again how “Brexit” and its implications divide British surveyed citizens and how the right of free movement of citizens and workers of the EU Member States in the United Kingdom represents a salient issue among them.