

# In Europe We Trust?

## Exploring Three Logics of Trust in the European Union

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### Introduction

With the expansion of European Union (EU) jurisdictional authority over a wide range of policy areas, the introduction of a single currency, and the on-going Eastward enlargement, European integration has motored full speed ahead. Yet, in recent years, public support for European integration has become increasingly fickle. The ‘permissive consensus’ – in which the relative silence of citizens gave space to elites to expand the European project – has been replaced by a ‘constraining dissensus’ (Hooghe and Marks, 2009). Increasingly, national political parties are rallying Eurosceptic sentiment to distinguish themselves from the predominantly pro-EU mainstream in order to reap electoral gains. This increased contestation over deepening integration efforts combined with the real financial challenges the EU and the euro face, has put public support for the EU, its institutions and its policies high on the scholarly agenda (e.g. De Vries and Edwards, 2009; Hobolt, 2012; Hooghe et al., 2002; Kriesi et al., 2006; Steenbergen et al., 2007; Tillman, 2004; Van der Eijk and Franklin, 2004; Van Spanje and De Vreese, 2011). Citizens’ evaluation of the *legitimacy* of the EU and its institutions seems more important than ever.

In any democracy, legitimacy is derived by the perception of the political process as originating ‘by the people’ and serving ‘for the people’. Legitimate institutions include the public in the decision-making process and benefit citizens by the outputs they produce. Yet, in the multilevel setting of the EU institutional structure and policy making, legitimacy issues might arise in absence of clear notions about who constitute ‘the people’. Moreover, trust in the EU need not only depend

on what happens in the European realm: the legitimacy of the EU may only be derived indirectly, that is through the individual member states.

Surprisingly, empirical work about the nature of the legitimacy of the EU and its institutions is scarce (for exceptions see Rohrschneider, 2002; Karp et al., 2003 and Zmerli, 2010). In this study we focus on trust as the prime expression of this legitimacy. Political trust is both the “the glue that keeps the system together and [...] the oil that lubricates the policy machine” (Van der Meer, 2010: 76), as it helps to solve collective action problems and to reduce the transaction costs of public policy. Trust, as diffuse support, is “fundamental in character because [it is] directed to basic aspects of the system” (Easton, 1975: 437). “Whereas specific support is extended only to the incumbent authorities, diffuse support is directed towards offices themselves as well as their individual occupants” (Easton 1975: 445). Although the extensive work on the public support for specific European policies are highly insightful (e.g. Hooghe and Marks, 2005), they often fail to grasp and explain the *diffuse support* for the EU. So what, ultimately, is the nature of this diffuse support?

Because the EU and its member states are highly interdependent, we need to grasp their interrelations as sources of citizens’ trust in the EU. In this study, we propose and test a framework that explains the nature of trust in the EU. Rather than specifying these sources of trust as causal precursors of differing trust levels, we approach them primarily as attitudinal correlates: we are interested in the question *how* citizens trust the EU, more than *how much*. Our framework consists of three rivaling – though not mutually exclusive – logics that are (often implicitly) raised in the literature. Each logic implies a different nature of trust. The *logic of rationality* hypothesizes trust to be a rational evaluation of the object – the EU – by its merits: performance and accountability. The *logic of identity* assumes trust in the EU to depend on emotional attachment towards the EU or the citizen’s member state. The *logic of extrapolation* considers trust in the EU to be unrelated to the Union itself. Instead, trust in the EU goes hand in hand with trust in other institutions, either

inherently as part of one's personality or social standing, or indirectly because trust in the EU is merely derived indirectly through trust in the national political institutions. By testing the relative power of these explanations and the interactions between them, this study aims to answer the following question: *what logic(s) can explain trust in the European Union, and how do these logics interact?*

We combine the logics of rationality, identity and extrapolation into one framework and their relative validity and their interactions in an environment of multilevel government. We thereby contribute to both the existing literature on public opinion towards the EU and the existing literature on trust in several ways. Previous studies on public opinion towards the EU have focused primarily on rational and identity explanations for rather specific attitudes. This study is one of the first to focus on diffuse support, and moreover adds a third explanatory mechanism, i.e. extrapolation, which has its theoretical origins in the literature on trust. Studies on political trust, on the other hand, have mainly focused on national political arena's, ignoring cases of multilevel governance such as the EU. Theoretically, we include the identity explanation, common in EU research but rare in trust research.

## **Theory and Hypotheses**

We understand trust in the EU as an attitude that is directed to the existing system of political institutions. It is thereby more diffuse than support for specific policies and "appraisal of the performance of public officials", but more specific than "evaluations of citizens' democratic ideals" (Rohrschneider & Schmitt-Beck 2002: 37). Our theoretical framework explains trust in the EU through three logics: rationality, identity, and extrapolation, and spells out the possible interactions between them. We will discuss these logics in turn.

## The Logic of Rationality

The rational approach assumes trust to be the consequence of subjects' evaluations of an object by its merits. Trust is a characteristic of a risk situation, in which people only become trusting if they expect it to serve their interest: “[t]he presence of trust [means] that members [...] feel that their own interests [are] attended to even if the authorities were exposed to little supervision or scrutiny” (Easton, 1975: 447). According to the logic of rationality, *diffuse* support for the EU is based on evaluations of its own performance and its own (inclusive) procedures. These evaluations refer to the regime in general (*the* EU), not to specific incumbent politicians or specific policy proposals (Easton 1975). Rational trust is therefore also relational: it assumes both a subject (the person who trusts) and an object (that is being trusted). In short: “A trusts B with regard to x” (Hardin, 2000: 26).

The subject's evaluation of the trust relationship needs not be based on actual personal experiences with government agents (if that is even possible, see Hardin, 2002: 172), but on (first-hand or second-hand) evaluations of (actual or perceived) performances and procedures of the object in the longer haul. European unification is sufficiently complex that citizens have to resort to cognitive shortcuts in the form of attitudinal cues to form opinions (Anderson 1998). Although some of these cues may take the form of personal predispositions, research shows that they are usually offered by the political environment (e.g. Huckfeldt et al 1995).

Citizens use several criteria to rationally trust objects like the EU (Kasperson et al., 1992; Hardin, 2000; Van der Meer 2010), that we can basically reduce to *outcomes* (the general performance of the EU) and *processes* (the way citizens are involved). Outcomes relate to the performance or competence of the object of trust. It is difficult to think of rational reasons to trust institutions that are unable to do what they are supposed to do. Herman van Rompuy, president of the European Council, argued that “legitimacy arises when people see, hear and feel that a political

order benefits their prosperity, their freedom and security, that it safeguards their future” (Van Rompuy, 2012). The link between these indicators and trust is however ambiguous. Citizens’ evaluations of the economy are strongly related to political trust in the national arena (Van der Meer & Dekker 2011). Unfulfilled expectations of national government performance cause citizens to become distrustful of the national government (Miller, 1974). Irrespective of these subjective evaluations by citizens, objective economic performance appears unrelated to trust in parliaments, at least at the national level (Van der Meer, 2010; but also see Miller & Listhaug, 1999; Keele, 2007). Nevertheless, attitudes may be rational even if they are not based on a correct interpretation of reality; most important is the internal consistency between perception and evaluation.

Besides evaluations of outcomes, political processes (i.e., the extent to which the electorate can affect political outcomes) affect trust as well. They have been referred to as commitment (Kasperson et al., 1992), interest alignment (Hardin, 2000) or accountability (Van der Meer, 2010). The relation between the subject and the object is important for perceptions of fairness and inclusion, or rather: democracy *by* the people. Potentially, competent institutions can make errors if no mechanisms of input or accountability exist. At least, the institution cannot be *trusted* not to do so, especially in a relatively technocratic institution such as the EU.

According to the *rational trust hypotheses*, citizens will be more trusting if they positively evaluate the EU:

*H1a:* The better citizens evaluate the performance of the EU, the higher their trust in the EU, all else being equal.

*H1b:* The more citizens feel that their voice counts in the EU, the higher their trust in the EU, all else being equal.

## The Logic of Identity

The second logic focuses on the emotional attachments that are inherent in trust relationships. As an expression of *diffuse* support political trust is related to diffuse entities such as identity and community (Weßels, 2007: 289). Trust arises when citizens emotionally identify with the state (and by extension with its institutions), which is embedded in civic communities (Juviler & Strochein, 1999: 438). The classic focal point for citizens – the nation-state in which the (supposed) civic community and the state collapse – is increasingly challenged by an actor that is more distant from citizens' sense of community. The European project has evolved from a mainly elite-driven venture to a more encompassing project, affecting citizens' lives on a broader (and more visible) range of topics. Talking about Europe therefore implies talking about *identity*.

The EU is a special case: its multilevel (and increasingly supranational) governance may be perceived as threatening to the community. “The process of European integration devalues (and is intended to devalue) the national frame of reference as the operative unit of collective self-recognition and the notion of the nation as a distinctive community of fate” (Offe, 1999: 13). Consequently, trust is also an expression of community: “citizens care – passionately – about *who* exercises authority” (Hooghe and Marks, 2009: 2; italics by authors). Citizens do not only want to be governed competently, they also care whether this governing takes place by members of their own community in their own capital, or by alien bureaucrats in ‘far-away Brussels’. The functionally optimal level of coordination does not necessarily coincide with the territorial scope of community: even when governance problems can be solved optimally through European institutions, citizens might emotionally prefer to keep policy-making at the national level. This makes identity key to understanding attitudes towards the EU and therefore also to understanding trust.

Identity has indeed been found to be an important factor in European integration (Carey, 2002; Diez Medrano, 2003; Hooghe and Marks, 2005; Kriesi et al., 2004; McLaren, 2002). However, one's national and European identity are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Diez Medrano and Gutiérrez, 2001). We expect both identities to relate citizens' feelings of emotional attachment to trust in the EU simultaneously and in opposite directions, but to some extent distinct from each other. First, in line with the studies mentioned above, feelings of *European* identity are hypothesized to be positively related to trust in the EU, as they increase the overlap between the functional and emotional scope of governance. Citizens are more likely to trust an institution that operates at a level on which they experience a shared identity. Second, feelings of *national* identity are hypothesized to be negatively related to trust in the EU, separate from the effect of a European identity: having a strong national identity next to (or instead of) a European identity, would widen the emotional gap and diminish the attachment to a European populus. This leads to the *identity hypotheses*:

*H2a:* The more citizens identify with Europe, the more they trust the EU, all else being equal.

*H2b:* The more citizens identify with their nationality, the less they trust the EU, all else being equal.

### **The Logic of Extrapolation**

The *object-specific* logics of rationality and identity assume trust to depend on (rational or emotional) evaluations by a subject of an object, by *A* of *B* regarding *X*. They emphasize that trust is a relationship between subject and object. However, trust does not necessarily depend on characteristics of the object itself. Rather, it might actually depend on citizens' general dispositions. We should distinguish between 'strategic trust', which is object-specific, and 'moralistic trust',

which is subject-specific: '[i]f the grammar of strategic trust is "A trusts B to do X" [...], the etymology of moralistic trust is simply "A trusts"' (Uslaner, 1999: 21).

Different forms of political trust are closely associated regardless of their object. In a study of citizens in six countries, Zmerli (2010) finds an especially strong relationship between satisfaction with national democracy and confidence in the EU. Such an association between different forms of political trust can be explained in three ways. First, similar to Glanville and Paxton's (2007: 232) 'psychological propensity model' of generalized (social) trust, political trust might also be due to personality traits in which "a generally positive or negative outlook on others is fashioned early and forms the foundation for assessments of trustworthiness later". Second, political trust can be the result of an 'upward' extrapolation of experiences in local contexts such as the municipality or the national political arena.

Third, because the EU is a system of multilevel government with supranational and international cooperation between member states, trust in the EU might specifically depend on the extent to which citizens trust their national political institutions. If so, the legitimacy of the EU is actually derived indirectly, through the legitimacy of the individual member states. As a rather distant and supranational entity, citizens obtain their cues primarily through the national political arenas. The EU might only be trusted to the extent that citizens trust their national political institutions (government, parliament) that at least partly control the EU.

If the logic of extrapolation holds, citizens' trust in the EU should *at least* be highly predictable on the basis of their trust in *other institutions*. However, given the close connection between levels of trust noted above, the findings can also be interpreted as a cautious indication that the logic of extrapolation extends to other levels of trust. This leads to the *extrapolation hypothesis*:

*H3:* The higher citizens' general trust in national institutions, the more they trust the EU , all else being equal.

## **Interrelationships**

The three different logics lay the brickwork for our understanding of trust in EU institutions. That said, it is likely these different explanations are interrelated. Explicating these interactions is the topic we turn to next.

### **Limits to Rationality: Identity as a buffer & knowledge as a precondition**

First, although within the rational framework, we expect trust in EU institutions to be the results of citizens' favourable performance and accountability evaluations, not all respondents will evaluate politics in a similar way. The relevance of a rational evaluation of an object by its own merits is probably conditional upon one's emotional attachment to that object. Basically, love blinds. We argue that a strong European identity, being a more general orientation, will overrule the more rational balancing of performance and process (for a related argumentation, see Gabel, 1998). Identity is the product of deeper emotional investment or of prolonged experiences. A European identity may consequently function as a buffer against more short-term notions, such as (perceived) costs and benefits. If citizens feel strong attachment to the European level, we expect them to rely less on specific information and arguments about the EU. In short, "more general or abstract levels of orientations [can] provide a buffer against the erosion of support at lower levels" (Weßels, 2007: 290).

*H4a:* The stronger citizens' European identity, the weaker the effect of (evaluations of) European competence on trust in the EU, all else being equal.

An evaluation of an object by its merits also requires knowledge of that object. In order to be able to evaluate processes and outcomes on the European level, citizens need to have some awareness and understanding of what is taking place in Brussels and Strasbourg. We therefore hypothesize that the logic of rationality depends on the level of knowledge of citizens about the EU: the greater the knowledge, the more important rational evaluations become. This expectation nicely fits with approaches to response theory that argue that citizens respond to survey questions on the basis of concerns that are the most readily retrievable to them, i.e. top-of-the-head response (see for example Zaller, 1992). People with high knowledge about the Europe are most likely to be aware of and pay attention to the workings of the EU (for a similar argumentation see Karp et al., 2003).

*H4b:* The greater citizens' knowledge of the EU, the stronger the effect of (evaluations of) European competence on trust in the EU, all else being equal.

### **Dissecting Extrapolation: Indirect legitimacy & lack of cues**

Under the logic of extrapolation, trust in the EU is hypothesized to be highly predictable by trust in national institutions. This possible association might be due to two reasons. First, trust in institutions on both levels might originate in a *common source*, like personality or social standing. Secondly, trust in the EU might be arrived at *indirectly* through national trust. Although it is difficult to pull these mechanisms apart through direct effects, we may tentatively test the likelihood of the second mechanism through two interaction effects.

First, stronger national identification should strengthen the relationship between trust in national and EU institutions. In a context of multilevel governance, the legitimacy of the EU is likely to be

dependent upon the legitimacy of the primary focus of citizens – the nation state. Trust in national institutions is then extrapolated to the European level. This is especially important for citizens with stronger feelings of national identity, as for them the nation state is the primary point of reference. Extrapolation from the national to the European is therefore more likely for citizens who are emotionally attached to their nation. This leads to the *indirect legitimacy hypothesis*:

*H5a:* The stronger citizens' national identity, the stronger the relationship between trust in national political institutions (parliament, government) and trust in the EU, all else being equal.

Second, higher levels of knowledge about the EU should weaken the impact of national institutional trust on trust in EU institutions. Citizens need knowledge of an object to evaluate it. To the extent that citizens lack cues about what is happening in Europe, they are more likely to rely on their trust in national institutions as an information short-cut (see Zaller, 1992). We therefore hypothesize the explanatory power of trust in national institutions on trust in the EU to be conditional on the level of knowledge about the EU (see also Karp et al., 2003).

*H5b:* The greater citizens' knowledge about the EU, the weaker the relationship between trust in national political institutions (parliament, government) and trust in the EU, all else being equal.

### **Trust within a Multilevel System: Europe as a lifebuoy**

To some extent, citizens' trust in the EU is likely to find its roots both in (the objective performance of) the context as defined by the nation states, as well as in the (perceived performance according to) individual citizens. Citizens' political attitudes in the EU are embedded in their nation states. National performance may be inversely related to trust in the EU, as living under an ill-performing national government increases the *potential importance* of the EU. To the extent that citizens distrust their national governments due to these governments' incompetence – assuming that trust is rational –, citizens might actually start *trusting* the European level because it provides them with an alternative source of – potentially better – governance. Rationally, to these citizens the EU can function as a potential lifebuoy, and their trust might especially depend on the extent to which they evaluate the EU to live up to this standard.

In countries that 'perform' badly, the transaction costs of shifting jurisdiction from the national to the European will be lower: "Europe appears to be the solution for domestic problems that cannot be resolved within the nation state" (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2010: 163). Reversely, Europe will be distrusted more by those living in countries that perform well, as there is potentially less to gain and more to lose. "To the extent that economic factors do shape citizens' attitudes toward the European Union, it will be in terms of comparative advantage" (Duch and Tayler, 1997: 66). In short, to the extent that EU can potentially function as a lifebuoy for those suffering from ill-performing governments – reducing the transaction costs of a transfer of sovereignty – trust in the EU should be negatively related to national performance.<sup>1</sup>

The perception of Europe as a lifebuoy would be especially strong to new member states. Most new member states have lower levels of economic performance. Hence, citizens' unfulfilled

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<sup>1</sup> Alternatively, lacking knowledge, some citizens may use information on the national state to evaluate the EU: "when in doubt, use proxies" (Anderson, 1998; Rohrschneider and Loveless, 2010). If so, good national performance should lead to more trust in the EU, not less.

expectations may be directed to the EU. Moreover, citizens in new member states may not yet suffer from the ‘post-honeymoon effect (Catterberg and Moreno, 2006), i.e., the decline in trust (in the EU as a potential lifebuoy) that occurs when citizens realize that their high expectations are not fulfilled.

This leads to the first part of the *lifebuoy hypotheses*:

*H6a:* The better countries perform objectively, the less their inhabitants trust the EU, all else being equal.

*H6b:* The better citizens’ evaluations of national economic performance, the less they trust the EU, all else being equal.

Not only are those living in ill-performing countries more likely to trust the EU, they are also likely to do so for different reasons. To the extent that bad governmental performance causes citizens to turn to the EU, they do so because they hope the latter will *perform* better. As they do this for substantive reasons, they are more likely to judge the EU on its merits. As we hypothesize that for those living in ill-performing countries, a rational evaluation of the EU should play a more important role, we expect a negative interaction between national performance and the effect of the evaluation of the performance of the EU (the most central dimension of rational trust) on trust in the EU, extending the *lifebuoy hypothesis*.

*H6c:* The better citizens’ perception of their nation’s economic performance, the weaker the effect of citizens’ evaluation of EU performance on trust in the EU, all else being equal.

Figure 1 below provides a graphical illustration of the three different logics we have outlined, and the interactions between them. In a next step, we turn to the empirical testing of this model.

<<< Figure 1 about here >>>

## **Data, Operationalisation and Method**

We test our hypotheses on data from the *Eurobarometer 71.3*, a survey collected in June-July 2009 in thirty countries. We include only those countries that were member of the European Union at that point in time. In all countries, approximately one-thousand respondents were randomly selected, except for Luxembourg and Malta, in which about 500 respondents took part. Separate samples were drawn in Northern Ireland and former East-Germany; these were combined (in line with their respective weights) with the samples of Great Britain and Western Germany.

## **Variables**

For a description of some of the main variables, see Appendix A. The dependent variable *trust in the EU* is measured using the dichotomous question whether respondents tend to trust or not to trust the EU. This measure is robust to alternative operationalisation.<sup>2</sup> Note that within the literature on EU support, authors often use Easton's (1975) distinction between diffuse and specific support. The latter type is more temporary in nature and refers to the degree to which citizens support a political system due to the goods it delivers, while the former relates to the degree to which citizens support

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<sup>2</sup> To test the robustness of the findings, an alternative dependent indicator was used which consists of a standardized scale of the respondents' trust in three European institutions (see Appendix B). These items show an extremely high intercorrelation of 0.90, implying that the resulting scale reflects a rather diffuse common trust in the EU as a whole. The results of this alternative indicator were substantially identical to the dichotomous indicator we used in our main analysis (see below). We prefer the single item, as it is a conceptually more valid indicator of diffuse support for the EU than the sum of rather specific institutions.

the system for its own sake regardless of specific political outputs or outcomes. Although trust indicators are often used as operationalizations of diffuse support (e.g. Gabel, 1998), we are careful in making this assumption as the wording of the question used here refers to trust in EU institutions more generally and could both include evaluations of the system as such as well as the goods they deliver.

Of the independent variables, *rationality* is assessed by performance and commitment of the EU. The evaluation of *performance* is based on a battery of questions that focuses on the performance of the regime (EU) on a wide range of policy areas: “[u]sing a scale from 1 to 10, how would you judge the performance of the European Union in each of the following areas?”. Respondents’ scores are calculated on the basis of their answers on this question regarding 13 policy areas (see Appendix A). The evaluation of process (*commitment*) is based on the respondents’ agreement or disagreement with the statement that “[m]y voice counts in the European Union”.

We measure *identity* with two indicators based on separate questions: one measuring the strength of national identity, and one measuring the strength of European identity. The questions asked to what extent respondents personally feel attracted to both identities on a scale ranging from one (more affiliation) to four (less affiliation). After recoding, a higher score reflects strong identification. Empirically, many voters do not display mutually exclusive European and national identities.

To investigate the effect of *extrapolation*, we calculated trust in national institutions on the basis of respondents’ trust in the national judicial system, political parties, the national government and the national parliament. A Mokken scale analysis shows that these items form a strong scale<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Mokken scale analysis (Van Schuur (2003) orders items on a scale by increasing levels of ‘difficulty’ (in this case, with increasingly fewer respondents trusting a certain institution). Persons who dominate difficult items should also dominate easier items. Model fit is expressed in the H-coefficient, a measure between 0 and 1. It compares the number of observed errors in respondents’ answer pattern compared to the number of expected errors under the condition of

Because the items of this independent variable are part of the same battery of questions as our dependent variable, we run the risk of finding associations between them due to survey design. We ran a separate analysis with an alternative indicator of trust in the European Union that was part of another battery (see footnote 2). This showed a highly similar strength of association with national trust.

To measure the *objective performance of national governments*, two indicators are used. The first indicator is corruption as measured by Freedom House in their Corruption Perception Index of 2009. A higher score on this index corresponds to a lower level of corruption, as perceived by experts. The second indicator of national performance is growth of national GDP in 2009.<sup>4</sup> We measure *subjective performance of national governments* by using the respondents' answer to the question how they evaluate the situation of the national economy on a scale from one (very good) to five (very bad), which is most closely related to trust empirically (Van der Meer and Dekker, 2011). A higher score reflects more pessimism about the national economy.

The level of knowledge of respondents is measured using the question whether they were aware of which countries were the previous and the current president of the European Council, and whether or not they had heard of the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Central Bank. The items form a strong scale.<sup>5</sup> Of course, this measure of knowledge is self-reported and likely to confound with interest in the EU and a general positive attitude towards the EU. Nevertheless, it is the best indicator available. Moreover, we control for evaluations of the EU and European identity and use the scale primarily to estimate an interaction effect.

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statistical independence. Our national trust scale has an  $H$ -value of 0.63 (which is considered a good scale). No individual item  $H_i$ -scores under 0.50, and no systematic errors occur in the P-matrices.

<sup>4</sup> Objective economic indicators are difficult to interpret for 2009, as the economic crisis was affecting countries' growth figures in a diversified way that cannot always be attributed to government performance.

<sup>5</sup> Mokken scale analyses show an  $H$ -value of 0.65, no item-fit below 0.60, and no systematic errors in the P-matrices.

Furthermore, the analysis includes several control variables at the individual level that were found to be relevant determinants of political trust: gender, education in years and age (modelled as a curvilinear effect). Ideally, we would also have included social trust as a control variable (cf. Zmerlie 2010). Unfortunately, it was not available in this data set. We do not expect this exclusion to affect our outcomes substantively.

The relationship between social and political trust is (quite constantly) positive and significant, but rather weak at the individual level with an explanatory power of less than 8% on average (cf. Newton 2001; Zmerli & Newton 2008; Bäck & Kestilä 2008; Zmerli & Newton 2011).

At the state level, we include the commonly used dummies for regime type in the 1970s (communist or authoritarian, with democratic as the reference category; cf. Van der Meer, 2010). As a robustness check, we ran a separate model using years of democracy without disrupt since 1920, based on Inglehart (1997).

## **Method**

Because the dependent variable is dichotomous, we perform logistic regression analyses, in which the probability to trust the EU is fitted to a logistic curve. By raising  $e$  to the power of the coefficients, we calculate the odds-ratio, i.e. the *multiplicative effect* of the variable on the *odds to trust the EU*.

Evidently, the structure of the data is nested: individual citizens are nested in countries. Our hypotheses include multiple levels of analysis, and hence we performed a (random intercept and random slope) multilevel analysis with individuals as the first-level unit and the member states as the second-level unit. Multilevel modelling corrects the estimated standard errors to prevent underestimation of higher-level effects (Snijders and Bosker, 1999).

To assess the relative weight of the main explanations we standardized all variables; the reported coefficients indicate the impact of variables on the trust in the EU in the case of an increase of one standard deviation of that variable.

Both the logic of rationality and the logic of identity are operationalized using two indicators that are too distinct conceptually to merge them into one scale. To be able to interpret the *combined* effect of these two variables, Heise's sheaf coefficient is calculated (Heise, 1972). This coefficient treats two or more variables as if they were one, which allows for summarizing the combined effect. It assumes the variables to influence the dependent variable through a *latent dimension*. The interactions between the logics and other variables are calculated using the strongest individual indicator of each logic. Table 1 shows that these are competence and European identity, respectively.

The analysis was performed using the MLWIN 2.24 package (Rabash et al., 2009; Browne, 2011) on the basis of maximum likelihood (IGLS) estimation procedures. Estimation on the basis of a Bayesian Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) method yields similar results which are reported in Appendix C (see the robustness checks section for more details) . Missing values are dealt with through listwise deletion. The results remain robust under multiple imputation of the core independent variables (see Robustness section).

## **Empirical Results**

### **Descriptives**

Figures 2a and 2 show the aggregated mean standardized scores in both old and new member states for trust in the EU and three main explanatory variables. The most EU-trusting citizens can be found in several of the new, post-2004 member states and, to a lesser extent, the Benelux countries. The high levels of trust in the post-communist developing democracies, where national trust is low and

the evaluation of EU competence is high, provide preliminary evidence in favour of the logic of rationality.

The trusting attitude in the relative stable democracies of the Low Countries is contrary to this logic. The high level of national trust in the Netherlands and Luxembourg, particularly, is more in line with the logic of extrapolation. Denmark and Sweden show both high levels of European identity and national trust, but no particular enthusiasm about the EU; in Sweden the low evaluation of EU competence seems to cause this distrust. This mixed picture provides indications for all three logics, but in different circumstances.

<<< Figure 2 about here >>>

### **Comparing the Logics**

Models 1a and 1b in Table 1 make clear that all three hypothesized causes of trust in the EU, i.e. rationality, identity and extrapolation, have explanatory power. This is line with hypotheses *H1a* and *b*, *H2a* and *b* and *H3*. Trust in national institutions has by far the greatest impact: a standard deviation increase in trust in national institutions makes a respondent  $e^{1.16} = 3.2$  times more likely to trust the EU – ceteris paribus. The effect is impressive: the gap in predicted trust between a citizen with an average low level of trust in national institutions and a citizen with an average high level of trust in national institutions (when measured as  $\pm 1$  SD) is 50 percentage points.

By comparison, a standard deviation increase on the combined indicators of rationality – as measured by the sheaf coefficient – makes respondents about 2.6 times as likely to trust the EU. If we look at these indicators more closely, citizens' feelings of being heard are less important than perceptions of competence.

Finally, identity is the weakest explanatory logic. The combined indicator of identity leads to a mere 45% higher chance to trust the EU for each standard deviation increase. This effect is almost completely attributable to the effect of European identity; national identity has a significant but small effect. One SD increase in feelings of European identity make a citizen about 47% more likely to trust the EU, whereas one SD increase of national identity decreases the probability to trust the EU with 6%.

In addition to these factors, objective national performance also has an effect on European trust through the objective indicators of corruption and growth. However, citizens' evaluation of the national economy has *no* significant effect when controlling for the other logics. This either indicates that a lifebuoy effect takes place without explicit contemplation about national performance, or that the economic situation is not a suitable proxy for overall governmental performance. All in all, hypothesis *H6a* is accepted, whereas *H6b* is rejected.

<<< Table 1 about here >>>

To visualize these effects, Figure 3 shows the predicted chance to trust the EU for citizens who score low (one SD under the mean) and high (one SD above the mean) on the strongest explanations of trust per logic, as well as the gap between this 'average negative citizen' and 'average positive citizen'. It indicates that the logic of extrapolation is the most prominent of the three logics: citizens are to a great extent either trusting towards institutions or not, regardless of the object of this trust. To the extent that citizens do evaluate the EU, they do this primarily on the basis of rationality: a competent and accountable EU is trusted more. Identity plays some role too, but only concerning European identity; a strong national identity hardly decreases trust in the EU.

<<< Figure 3 about here >>>

The control variables show no unexpected results. Level of education is positively related to trust in the EU. Women have more trust in the EU than men. The combination of the coefficients for age and age squared indicates that trust in the EU becomes higher with age at an increasing rate. Interestingly, no significant effects were found for the two regime types in the 1970s. Trust in the EU is significantly higher in the post-communist member states, but this effect disappears once we control for the other factors in model 1a en 1b. Interestingly, the higher level of European trust in these states is mainly a compositional effect.<sup>6</sup>

### **Conditional effects**

#### *Model 2a: Limitations to Rationality: Identity as a buffer & knowledge as a precondition*

Model 2a in Table 2 tests whether the rationality of trust is conditional on citizens' emotions and knowledge on the EU. We find that both interaction effects are significant. The significantly negative interaction between competence and identity provides evidence that identity indeed functions as a *buffer*. This supports *H4a*. Love for the EU does blind citizens to rational evaluations: caring about Europe decreases the importance of European competent behaviour. For those who experience strong emotional attachment to the EU it is less important whether the EU is deemed competent. In line with *H4b*, knowledge of the EU increases the importance of rational evaluations. Apparently, citizens with more knowledge are more likely to use their evaluation of EU competence as a source of trust in the EU. Increasing public knowledge on the topic, for instance through education, can therefore increase the extent to which citizens are able to rationally evaluate the EU by its own (perceived) merits.

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<sup>6</sup> The same holds in the model with age of democracy.

Both of these interaction effects remain significant even when we take the other four interaction effects into account (see model 2d). Figures 4 and 5 give a visual impression of the effects.

<<< Figure 4 about here >>>

<<< Figure 5 about here >>>

*Model 2b: Dissecting Extrapolation: Indirect legitimacy & lack of cues*

In Model 2b we dissect the strong effect of trust in national institutions on trust in the EU to assess whether it is conditional on national identity (trust in the EU through its member state) or on a lack of knowledge (leading to the use of national cues). Both interactions are non-significant. The explanatory power of trust in national institutions on trust in the EU is not conditional on either feelings of European identity or knowledge about the EU. *H5a* and *H5b* are refuted.<sup>7</sup> This makes it less likely that trust in the EU is second-order trust that is extrapolated from trust in national institutions. Rather, this seems to provide evidence that a common source exists for trust in institutions on both levels, possibly an aspect of personality, general outlook on life, or social standing.

*Model 2c: Trust within a Multilevel System: Europe as a lifebuoy*

Finally, we assess the extent to which the sources of trust in the EU are embedded in the national context. The interactions in model 2c and 2d provide mixed evidence. Citizens that negatively evaluate the situation of the national economy are somewhat more rational in their evaluation of the EU. This seems to indicate that Europe indeed functions as a lifebuoy, with citizens becoming more

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<sup>7</sup> In the model with the alternative indicator consisting of a scale of European institutions the interaction with knowledge is significant. We conservatively choose not to accept the hypothesis in the light of such conflicting evidence.

rational when more is at stake. However, in full model 2d this interaction loses significance. Hypothesis H6 is rejected.

<<< Table 2 about here >>>

## **Robustness Checks**

### **Alternative Estimation Strategy**

Owing to the fact that our sample includes a limited number of second level units (i.e. 27 countries), the maximum likelihood estimation used in Table 1 may not perform optimally (Gelman and Hill, 2007). Consequently, we also conducted an analysis using a Bayesian Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) method (see Jackman, 2000) to inspect the robustness of our results. The MCMC estimation strategy yields substantively similar result, see Appendix C. In a Bayesian framework, each unknown parameter must have an associated probability distribution and the results do not come as point estimates but as distributions, known as the posterior. To assure readability for all readers, the results are presented in the 'normal frequentist' fashion with the mean of the posterior distribution and the standard deviation (Bayesian credible intervals) shown in the Table appendix C. We take uninformative priors which seems to have become 'common practice' nowadays as they have little influence on the computation of the posterior distribution (Gelman and Hill, 2007: p. 354). For the fixed parameters the inverse gamma distribution was used, and the inverse Wishart distribution for the variance matrix (see also Browne 2003). We ran 1,000,000 iterations for each model and disregarded half of them as burn in. Trace plots were inspected visually and tested for convergence [Raftery and Lewis (1992) criterion]. There were no signs of nonconvergence.

### **Influential cases**

To make sure our findings were not biased by the inclusion of some countries with unduly high leverage, we performed checks for (groups of) influential cases (Van der Meer et al. 2010). A rule of thumb is that countries showing a Cook's  $d$  of more than  $2/\sqrt{N(L-2)} = 0.38$  should be considered an influential case. Malta exceeds this threshold with a Cook's  $d$  of 0.578. A repeated analysis without Malta shows a small decline of the effect of both corruption and GDP growth, but this does not substantively change our conclusions. A repeated Cook's  $d$  analysis after removing Malta shows no further overly influential cases.

### **Missing values**

As an alternative to listwise deletion, the analysis was performed with multiple-imputation estimates (Schafer 1997). The results of this analysis are substantively similar in terms of size and significance; the effect of the main indicators for all three logics were slightly boosted (see Appendix D).

There is considerable between-country variation in the size of non-response for the indicator of trust in the European Union. It ranges from 0.3% (Greece) to 19.69% (Lithuania). To check whether high level of non-response led to biased results, we repeated the analysis without countries with higher than 15% non-response for the dependent variable<sup>8</sup>. This hardly altered the size of the coefficients.

### **Multicollinearity**

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<sup>8</sup> Ireland, Italy, Portugal, United Kingdom, Lithuania, Malta.

To investigate whether possible multicollinearity problems might have affected our outcomes, the main model was re-analysed in a structural equation model (SEM) for the country that fitted best to the model according to its Cook's *d* value: the Czech Republic (for a discussion of SEM and multicollinearity, see Grewal et al., 2004), using the trust scale as the dependent variable. The results are shown in Appendix E. When we allow for full covariation between all independent variables, institutional trust remains by far the most important explanation, whereas the coefficients of both identity indicators become insignificant. This seems to indicate that the effect attributed to identity may not exist once we control for its shared covariance with the other explanations. Again, the logic of identity finds the weakest empirical evidence.<sup>9</sup>

### **East versus West**

A potential difference between 'old' and 'new' member states deserves special attention. The development of political trust in the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe has a dynamic of its own (Catterberg and Moreno, 2006). We ran separate analyses for post-communist member states to check whether the same logics are at work in the two groups of states (see Appendix F). The separate models for these groups show remarkably similar results, providing further evidence for the robustness of our findings. All main effects are of comparable size and significance. Only the already feeble effect of national identity loses significance in the old member states. Additionally, pessimism with the national economy significantly boosts trust in the EU in post-communist member states, suggesting that the EU is perceived as a lifebuoy in these societies. The in- or exclusion of East-Germany in either sample did not affect the outcomes.

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<sup>9</sup> Another methodological problem, endogeneity, is less severe for theoretical reasons. Dealing with the nature of trust in the EU, the logics imply associations of indicators (regardless of causal direction) rather than dealing with causes and effects.

## Concluding Remarks

European integration has been subject of intensive scholarly attention since its advent in the 1950s. Two reoccurring elements of this interest have been to normatively debate the *legitimacy* of the project and empirically explain citizens' *attitudes* towards the EU. This study contributes to both ventures by investigating the nature of (diffuse) trust in the EU. Levels of trust differ profoundly among countries and individual citizens. As public attitudes towards the EU have become increasingly decisive, trust is likely to be an important condition for any future expansion of the European project.

This study proposes a theoretical framework to explain the nature of trust in the European Union. The logic of rationality supposes trust in the EU to be based on a rational evaluation of the EU by its own merits. The logic of identity hypothesizes that trust in the EU is fostered by feelings of European identity and hampered by national identity. The logic of extrapolation considers trust in the EU as an extension or reflection of citizens' trust in national institutions, either because citizens use national trust as their basis or because trust in both levels originates in the same source. An analysis of the *Eurobarometer* provides evidence that the logic of extrapolation is by far the most influential. To an important degree, citizens' trust in the EU can be predicted by their trust in national institutions, regardless of their rational evaluation or emotional affiliation. Because this association is not conditional on either the strength of citizens' national identity or their knowledge about the EU, this seems to suggest that trust in both levels originates in a common source: a 'trust syndrome'.

By contrast, one's identity (even one's European identity) is at best weakly related to trust in the EU: this relationship is not robust. Trust in the EU itself is hardly the result of emotional attachment to the EU. Yet, a strong European identity has a conditional effect: it partly overrules rational arguments as a more generalized orientation. Apparently, love blinds.

These results have several important implications. First, our findings regarding extrapolation indicate that a ‘syndrome of trust’ *does* exist. Evidently, we thereby displaced the question about the root explanation of institutional trust from specific entities such as the EU to the general syndrome. Rather than focusing on explanations for different separate political institutions, a more holistic approach to political trust is appropriate, implying a focus on personality characteristics and general political attitudes rather than object-specific evaluations. Further research is needed to shed a light on the mechanisms that connect this syndrome to its concrete manifestations. Moreover, while our study has taken the ‘genealogy’ of the syndrome back to the level of institutional trust, the question remains unanswered whether it connects back as far as interpersonal trust (cf. Newton and Zmerli, 2011).

Second, identity has been the focus of many of the public debates on European integration (see Hooghe and Marks 2005). Various theoretical as well as popular accounts of European integration identify the difficulties of European identity as a major obstacle to integration. However, the role European identities as a source of trust is small and inconsistent, especially compared to the attention given to it in the scholarly debate. A European identity is hardly a precondition for trust in the EU. Whether a democracy can work without a *demos* remains open for debate, but this study at least seems to indicate that emotional attachment is not necessarily a requirement for the diffuse support for – and consequently the legitimacy of – the EU. The notion that citizens care passionately *who* governs them is secondary to the *way in which* they are governed. Although the debate on Europe has a tendency to touch some raw nerves from time to time, it is more calculus (performance and accountability) than sentiment that drives citizens’ trust.

However, citizens do not appear to be greatly interested in either one, as they extrapolate their trust from different sources. The final and most substantive implication of this study is therefore that

trust in the EU remains for an important part beyond the direct control of the European Union or its constituent member states. Attempts to increase trust through improved performance, greater accountability, better communication, or a stimulation of European identity are destined to work partially at best. If trust in the EU is to a large extent unspecific to the EU, a decrease in trust does not necessarily indicate a direct threat to the European project.

The eurocrisis is posing new challenges to the EU and, as a result, citizens are increasingly affected by European constraints to national politics. As a consequence, European integration is for the first time moving to the forefront of the national political debate in many countries. At the same time, European actors such as the Commission have become highly visible. If anything, these developments are likely to increase the logic of rationality over time. While the national and European arena become more intertwined than ever, citizens might start to become more specific in whom to trust.

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