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Integrationists, Critical Europeanists and Pessimist Europeanists: EU attitudes among students in a German university

Abstract

We investigate attitudes toward the EU of a sample of students enrolled in a German university by using a mixed-methods data design. We conducted an online survey among students at the University of Göttingen (N=730) and asked them closed questions on the EU enlargement, the allocation of authority at the EU level, the way democracy works at the EU level, and an open question on their wish for the future of the EU. We then ran a latent class analysis of the recoded answer categories from the open question and of our set of closed questions. Our three-class solution highlights variation in support for the EU among students. Indeed, while the vast majority of the respondents take highly supportive attitudes towards the EU, we can distinguish between 'Integrationists' (in favour of pursuing the EU integration project; 68% of the sample), 'Critical Europeanists' (supportive of the EU but dissatisfied with the way democracy works at the EU level; 20.50% of the sample) and 'Pessimist Europeanists' (supportive of the EU but afraid of the implosion of the EU; 11% of the sample). Our study highlights the importance of the use of non-standardised measures and mixed-methods data collection for understanding citizens' attitudes towards the EU in a more nuanced way.

Keywords: EU, attitudes, mixed-methods, students, Germany

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1. Introduction

During the last decade, the European Union has been facing severe crises that have affected its legitimacy among citizens: the eurozone crisis in 2008-2009, the so-called 'European refugee crisis' in 2015, the consequences of the 2016 Brexit referendum or the ongoing rule of law crisis with Poland and Hungary. More recently, the European Union played a key role during the COVID-19 pandemic, not only in managing the acquisition of anti-Coronavirus vaccine, but also in having to face the closing of national borders within the EU for the sake of organizing national lockdowns. During this turbulent phase, Europeans have

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been experiencing the strengths and weaknesses of the current institutional power structure of the EU. Severe crises give Europeans the opportunity to confront the European Union project. Indeed, the EU experiences peaks in its politicization in the public debate during such shocks and crises (Hutter, Grande & Kriesi, 2016). Moreover, citizens consider the EU as one of the most important problems faced by their country during such severe EU crises (Teney & Rupieper, 2021). The current turbulent phase being faced by the EU is also likely to alter citizens' mindset on the European Union. Such mindsets go beyond the mere support for or opposition to a country's EU membership and encompass opinions towards the various facets of the institutional power structure of the European Union. Indeed, attitudes towards the EU are multidimensional (Boomgaarden et al., 2011) and encompass positions towards EU enlargement, the deepening of integration, or satisfaction with the way democracy works at the EU level. These dimensions might vary independently of each other and of the overall support for the EU. For instance, one might be strongly supportive of the European Union project while being highly critical of the current level of democracy at the EU level or be against further enlargement. If we want to understand citizens' mindset on the EU in its complexity, we need to go beyond the analysis of a simple standardised measure of support for and opposition to the EU and encompass EU attitudes in their multidimensionality.

In this article, we want to assess these multidimensional attitudes towards the EU among a sample of students at a German university by complementing standardised closed questions on EU support with the analysis of an open-ended question on the EU. Our mixed-methods approach enables us to provide an analysis of EU attitudes of a large-scale sample of students that goes beyond the classical standardised EU items. In more concrete terms, we conducted a non-representative online survey among 730 students at the University of Göttingen and asked them standardised questions on three distinct dimensions of EU attitudes and an open question about their wish for the future of the EU. The University of Göttingen is a medium-size University (about 22,000 students) in a small-size city of 110,000 inhabitants situated in Lower Saxony (in North-Western Germany). We recoded the answers to the open question and used them together with the standardised closed survey items in a latent class analysis (LCA). By using such a case-oriented explorative statistical technique, we investigated the profiles of students sharing a similar mindset on the EU. Our three-class solution highlights variation in support for the EU among students. Indeed, while the vast majority of the respondents show highly supportive attitudes towards the EU, we can distinguish between 'Integrationists' (in favour of pursuing the EU integration project; 68 per cent of the sample), 'Critical Europeanists' (supportive of the EU but dissatisfied with the way democracy works at the EU level; 20.50 per cent of the sample) and 'Pessimist Europeanists' (supportive of the EU but afraid of the implosion of the EU; 11 per cent of the sample). Lastly, we investigated variation within each class by analysing the narratives provided by members of each class to the open question.

In particular, we found variation (1) in the dimensions and policies the EU should integrate further according to the Europeanists, (2) in the types of EU institutions to be further democratized and strategies to improve the democratization of the EU regime according to the Critical Europeanists, and (3) in strategies the EU should follow to avoid its implosion according to the Pessimist Europeanists. All in all, our study highlights the importance of the use of non-standardised measures and mixed-methods data collection for understanding citizens' EU attitudes in a more nuanced way.

This article is structured as follow: we first explain why students in Germany can be considered as belonging to the ideal type of Europeanist. We then highlight the importance of considering the multidimensionality of EU attitudes to better understand attitudinal mindsets on the EU. In the second part of our article, we describe our data collection and the operationalisation of the variables used in our LCA. We present our results by interpreting the profile of the three latent classes and investigating their particularities by using some excerpts from the open question before concluding.

2. Students in Germany as ideal type of Europeanist

By drawing on a sample of students at a German university, we focus on a group of Europeans most likely to hold highly positive opinions towards the EU. Indeed, highly educated young Europeans constitute the social group benefiting the most from European integration (e. g. Fligstein, 2008; De Vries, 2018; Díez Medrano, 2010; Kuhn, 2015). They belong to the social groups most likely to experience positive social interactions with other Europeans and to benefit greatly from the EU single market and free movement rights. A high level of education and a younger age are in fact positively associated with a larger volume of transnational social practices, such as short trips abroad or contacting friends abroad (Fligstein, 2008; Díez Medrano, 2010; Teney & Deutschmann, 2018). Moreover, through exchange programmes such as Erasmus+, the EU enables students to acquire experiences in transnational mobility during their studies (Parey & Waldinger, 2011, 196). Students are therefore likely to acquire transnational human capital (Parey & Waldinger, 2011; Carlson, 2012). Transnational social capital refers to the amount of knowledge and personal skills that enables a person to operate in different fields beyond the nation state (Gerhards & Hans, 2013, 100), such as foreign languages, knowledge of other countries, or intercultural competencies (Gerhards, Hans & Carlson, 2016). Transnational social capital is an asset in enabling one to fully benefit from the EU single market and navigate more comfortably beyond one's national labour market. Students are therefore much more likely to consider the EU single market in a positive light (Parey & Waldinger, 2011; Carlson, 2012). Indeed, various studies have repeatedly shown that highly educated young people belong to the groups who support the EU most and identify the most as Europeans

(e. g. Fligstein, 2008; Díez Medrano, 2010; Kuhn, 2015; Kuhn et al., 2021). Furthermore, a recent study points to the fact that social groups characterised by a high educational level constitute the groups most homogeneous in their attitudes towards the EU and in their identification as European (Dochow-Sondershaus & Teney 2022). Thus, students tend not only to take particularly positive attitudes towards the EU, but they are also very likely to hold highly homogeneous opinions towards the EU.

Besides the particularities of the social groups of students, the national context of our study is also important to mention. Citizens in Germany do indeed tend to take more positive attitudes towards the EU than Europeans from other countries (Banchoff, 1999; Díez Medrano, 2003). According to De Vries (2018, 79), Germans are characterised by a certain regime scepticism towards the EU; that is, they tend to be supportive of the EU and its benefits but evaluate the procedures operating at the EU level less positively than those at the national level. The landmark book by Díez Medrano (2003) on the framing of the European Union in different member states highlights the particularly cosmopolitan discourse on the EU carried out by the elites in Germany. Accordingly, the reinvention of German identity after the trauma of WWII has been explicitly directed towards European and international components and has, in turn, largely influenced the public discourse on the EU in Germany. Thus, by analysing the mindsets on the EU among a sample of students at a German university, we focus on a homogeneous social group with a particularly positive mindset on the EU.

All in all, our study focuses on a group that can be defined as an ideal type of Europeanist. Moreover, we conducted our online survey in a single medium-size University in North-Western Germany, thus not representative of the student body in Germany. This has one obvious major limitation: our results cannot be generalized to other social groups and our conclusions will have to remain restricted to our target group. On the other hand, our sample provides a great advantage. By investigating EU attitudes of a social group characterised by highly homogeneous and positive opinion on the EU, we can assess the extent to which the EU receives unconditional and undifferentiated support from its most fervent supporters. Our main research question is therefore: how can students at a German University – who are expected to hold homogeneous EU attitudes – be explored using various attitudinal dimensions?

3. Attitudes towards the EU: Between ambivalence and multidimensionality

Previous studies have highlighted the stability of EU support in Germany over time. Indeed, German public opinion towards the EU seems to have remained relatively unaffected by the severe crises faced by the EU during the last decades. For instance, the eurozone crisis impacted mainly the attitudes of citizens residing in

member states hit hard by the economic crisis. By contrast, citizens from member states – including Germany – that did not face such economic hardship did not let the eurozone crisis affect their support for the EU (e. g. Teney, 2016; Schäfer & Gross, 2020, 41). In a similar vein, the so-called 2015 ‘European refugee crisis’ does not seem to have increased or decreased the level of support for the EU and the European integration project (Stockemer et al., 2020; Yeung, 2021). de Wilde (2021) provides a more long-term picture of the stability of EU support over time. Accordingly, he observes a drop in support for the EU at the aggregate level immediately after a severe crisis such as the eurozone crisis or the so-called ‘European refugee crisis’. However, overall support for the EU increases again over time. Interestingly, de Wilde also shows that the proportion of ‘Don’t know’ responses in social surveys on the EU support item has decreased over time. He thus concludes that the population overall has become less indifferent towards the EU, while the overall support for the EU has remained stable over time and this despite severe crises.

However, these studies tend to focus on the standardised one-dimensional measurement of attitudes towards the EU (with some exceptions, see for instance Teney, 2016). In fact, while overall support for the EU might be stable, other underlying attitudinal dimensions might give a more contrasted picture. Similar to the decrease in indifference towards the EU over time observed by de Wilde (2021), the growing politicization of the EU in the public debate – which goes hand in hand with the severe crises faced by the EU (Hutter, Grande & Kriesi, 2016) – might lead citizens to take more fine-grained and differentiated attitudes towards the EU. While we are not able to statistically estimate the effect of the COVID-19-crisis on various attitudes towards the EU – since we collected cross-sectional data – we are nevertheless able to assess attitudes towards the EU in their multidimensionality. This, in turn, allows us to assess the extent to which students take unconditional positive attitudes towards the EU or whether they hold a more differentiated and contrasted opinion of the EU.

Studies highlighting the importance of encompassing more attitudinal dimensions than the overall standardised EU support item have been burgeoning. In particular, researchers using qualitative data collection and qualitative data analysis argue in favour of a more fine-grained operationalisation of EU attitudes. First, the aforementioned work of Díez Medrano (2003) highlights variation in the framing of Europe across groups and countries and the multidimensionality in citizens’ attitudes towards the EU. Second, Duchesne et al. (2010) and Duchesne et al. (2013) stress the ambivalence and indifference expressed by many group discussion participants from Paris, Brussels and Oxford when they talk about Europe. Besides these landmark qualitative studies on EU support, several quantitative studies also share this plea for a more differentiated measurement instrument. For instance, Stoeckel (2013) points to the prevalence of ambivalent and indifferent attitudes towards the EU among a large proportion of EU citizens by analysing Eurobarometer

data. Furthermore, several studies depart from the main EU-support items found in international surveys to develop an innovative battery of items assessing the multidimensionality of EU attitudes. They all recommend using a broader range of items covering different attitudinal dimensions of EU support and opposition (see for instance Boomgaarden et al., 2011; de Vreese, Azrout & Boomgaarden, 2019; Beaudonnet & Di Mauro, 2012; De Vries, 2018).

In this article, we want to contribute to this research avenue by analysing the data of a unique survey mixing closed and open questions on the EU. Encompassing not only standardised items on EU support which measure different attitudinal dimensions but also an open question about wishes for the future of the EU enables us to provide a more comprehensive insight into the EU attitudes of students at a German University. On the one hand, the quantitative standard instruments measuring three distinct attitudinal dimensions of the EU regime enable us to quantitatively compare the relevance of each dimension in students' mindset. More precisely, we use items measuring both the scope (i. e. enlargement of the EU) and the level (i. e. allocation of further political power at the EU level) of the EU integration project. Our third item measures the evaluation of the performance of one facet of the EU process, namely satisfaction with the way democracy works at the EU level. On the other hand, evaluating students' answers to an open question on their wishes for the future of the EU enables us to consider their opinion on the EU without any predetermined stimulus. Incorporating both standardised items and students' answers to the open question within a single analysis allows us to assess EU attitudes of students at a German University in a nuanced way. Moreover, we use a case-oriented explorative statistical technique (LCA) to investigate the profiles of students sharing a similar mindset. The LCA aims to reduce the complexity of the data by classifying cases into a limited number of classes that are characterised by low within-class and high between-classes heterogeneity. In contrast to multivariate regression analysis, which assesses the effects of multiple variables on a single dependent variable, LCA enables us to investigate the relationship between various attitudinal items. More precisely, LCA focuses on similarities between respondents in respect of a set of variables, and not on similarities between variables (as is the case with factor analysis). In the second part of our analysis, we describe the classes from the LCA regarding their socio-demographic profile and investigate variation within each LCA class by analysing narratives provided by class members to the open question.

4. Data & methods

We conducted an online survey from 19 April to 20 May 2021 among the students of the University of Göttingen (Lower Saxony). It should be noted that the data collection took place in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, which implied online teaching for our target group. All students enrolled at the University of

Göttingen (the university to which the authors were affiliated at the time of the data collection) were invited per email to participate in the online survey and received a reminder two weeks later. In total, 1750 students participated in our survey. This corresponds to a response rate of 6.21 per cent of the entire student population enrolled at the University of Göttingen at the time of the survey (N: 28,174). Such a response rate is not unusual for online surveys among students (see for instance Maineri & van Mol, 2021). In order to enhance the response rate, we raffled 50 Amazon vouchers each worth 20 euros. The invitation and reminder emails, as well as the questionnaire, were provided in both English and German. Non-German students were also invited to participate in the survey and were able to do so by answering the English version of the questionnaire. The inclusion of students with an immigrant background in our analysis did not significantly affect the main results of the LCA (see variable “migration background” in Table 3). We therefore kept non-German students in our analysis.

Our sample shows some deviation from the socio-demographic characteristics of the student body of the University of Göttingen. Our sample is composed of a higher proportion of women than the proportion in the student body of the University of Göttingen (60.4 per cent compared to 52.8 per cent). Our sample is also much younger on average than the average age of the student body (23.37 years compared to 28.61 years old). More importantly, our sample is strongly biased towards students from the human and social sciences (76.84 per cent in our sample compared to 26.34 per cent of the total student body). The fact that students from the social sciences participated to a larger extent in our survey might be due to two reasons. First, the topic covered by the survey might have attracted the interest of students in the social sciences to a larger extent. Second, as one of the authors was a member of the social sciences faculty at the University of Göttingen at the time of the data collection, students from the social sciences faculty might have felt more inclined to participate in the survey. These sample biases together with a response rate of 6.21 per cent imply that the sample we analysed cannot be considered as representative of the students at the University of Göttingen.

The survey questionnaire was composed of a mix of standardised closed items and open questions on the EU. Besides socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, parents’ education, migration background, interest in politics and subject studied), the topics included in the questionnaire encompassed students’ experience and desire to go abroad during their studies, their levels of national and supranational identification, their attitudes towards the EU, the significance they attach to the EU and their wish for the future of the EU. The distribution of the EU indicators for the entire sample can be found in the last column of Table 2. The open question on students’ wish for the future of the EU used for our LCA was the last question on our questionnaire and was non-compulsory. In total, 730 students answered this open question. Our latent class analysis is therefore restricted to a sample of 730 students. The difference between the overall sample size of 1750 students and the

analysed sample size of 730 students was mainly due to the large number of respondents who did not answer the open question on the future of the EU. As open questions require more time and effort to answer, they unfortunately encountered greater non-response than closed-ended items. Table A in the Appendix presents the socio-demographic differences between our overall sample (N: 1750) and the analysed sample (N: 730).

The LCA, which combined the standardised and open questions in the analysis, was conducted on a battery of standardised closed questions on attitudes towards the EU as well as on students' answers to the open question: 'What do you wish for the future of the EU?' The battery of standardised closed questions is composed of four items tapping three different attitudinal dimensions. The first item measures attitudes towards EU enlargement ('The EU should continue to accept new member states'). The second one assesses satisfaction with the way democracy works at the EU level. Both items could be answered with a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Lastly, we built an additive index based on the following two items: 'EU institutions should transfer some of their decision-making power back to the member states' (reversed coding) and 'The member states should transfer some of their decision-making power to the EU', as these two items measure the same underlying attitudinal dimension (Cronbach alpha: 0.66). Our additive index ranges from 2 (strongly in favour of power back to the member states) to 10 (strongly in favour of more power to the EU level).

Turning now to the open question on the future of the EU, we quantified and standardize respondents' narratives in such a way that the answers to the open question can be used as indicators in an LCA.

We followed an *in vivo* approach in the coding of the answers to the open question by using the literal arguments of the respondents' answers as codes. Each answer was examined according to the arguments and partial aspects it contained. For every argument within an answer, a code corresponding to the actual word written was generated, so that each respondent was assigned to as many answer codes as arguments contained in their answer. If an argument within a respondent's answer matched an already generated answer code, the argument was included as an additional case in this generated code. These answer codes were then transformed into dummy variables with the value of 1 if the respondent mentioned the particular argument in their answer to the open question (and the value of 0 if the argument was not mentioned). Since respondents' answers to the open question were complex and often contained more than one argument, most of the respondents therefore have a value of 1 in more than one dummy variable. Students' answers to the open question were coded into a total of 23 dummy answer variables. For the latent class analysis we kept the dummy variables that were mentioned by at least four per cent of the students, which amounted to six dummy variables in total.

This coding was carried out by two different researchers. We ran a Cohen's kappa test to assess the intercoder reliability (Landis & Koch, 1977a). We obtained kappa values between 0.41 – 0.80 on the generated dummy variables, which – according to Landis and Koch (1977b, 165) – can be interpreted as moderate to substantial agreement between the coding of the two researchers. Only one dummy variable (Statusquo_o) showed a value slightly below the threshold of 'moderate agreement', but is still considered a fair agreement (0.39).

The list of the standardised closed items and the dummy variables of the open question used in our latent class analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Description of variables used in the Latent Class Analysis (N:730)

Label	Range	Mean/ proportion	Meaning
Enlarge_c	1-5	3.73	The EU should continue to accept new member states (1= Strongly disagree; 5 = Strongly agree)
Satis_demo_c	1-5	2.84	I am satisfied with the way democracy works in the EU (1= Strongly disagree; 5 = Strongly agree).
Power_c	2-10	7.11	Additive index generated out of variables indicating that the member states should transfer decision-making power to the EU and that the EU should transfer decision-making power back to the member states (reversed coding). (2 = less power for the EU; 10 = more power for the EU).
Unity_o	0/1	27.39 %	Wishes/hopes for more unity between EU states. A sense of cultural and political togetherness including all EU states. More common ground and further cohesion of the EU. A unified Europe with less competition and disagreement between states (mutual support, more consensus, convergence of the member states).
Coop_o	0/1	14.10 %	Wishes/hopes for more cooperation between the EU states. Better and more direct communication between the states as well as better collaboration, especially in times of crises (COVID-19, climate, dept, refugee, financial crisis) and also in everyday politics.
Climate_prot_o	0/1	18.35 %	Wishes/hopes for more climate protection within the EU. Wish that the EU takes the climate crisis more seriously. A stronger focus on and more commitment to fighting the climate crisis in domestic as well as in foreign policy (environment-related policy, sustainable economy, a global role model for environmental protection, environmental sustainability as an export product).

Statusquo_o	0/1	11.64 %	Wishes/hopes for a status quo of the EU in the future. The EU should remain as a democratic institution and stay as it is. It should not radicalize, get weaker, have more countries leaving or break apart (permanency and stability).
Stronger_say_o	0/1	7.53 %	Wishes/hopes that the EU has a bigger say than the member states and more rights and duties for the EU parliament. There should be more decisions based on majority and less on consensus and the ability to overrule individual member states. In general, a slight centralization of political power on the EU level and therefore more influence in- and outside the EU (centralized foreign, migration and trade policy, more decision-making powers, abolition of the member states' veto power, greater ability to act).
Democracy_o	0/1	10.41 %	Wishes/hopes that democracy in the EU should be strengthened in terms of more opportunities for direct participation and politics for the ordinary citizen. A return to basic democratic principles and less political influence for big companies. Also, clearer and more transparent communication so more people can participate. The EU should adhere to its own democratic principles (citizen participation, more direct democracy, referendums, wide information programmes and transparency).

Source: own elaboration

We ran a latent class analysis with LatentGold software and select a three-cluster solution based on goodness-of-fit statistics (lowest BIC statistic) (see Table B in Appendix). The three-cluster solution also showed a good distribution of cases across the three classes. Moreover, this three-cluster model can classify respondents into one of the three classes very well: the three-cluster solution misclassified only 8.8% of the respondents from our restricted sample. All EU indicators used in our latent class analysis contributed significantly to the three-cluster solution according to their Wald test (see Table B in Appendix). However, this three-cluster solution did not perfectly satisfy the assumption of local independence. Following Vermunt and Magidson (2005), we relaxed the assumption of independence between the pairs of items with particularly large bivariate residuals (i. e. larger than 3.84). Accordingly, we specified the following pairs of items as mutually dependent in the model estimation: Power_c and Stronger_say_o; Coop_o and Unity_o; Climate_prot_o and unity_o; Enlarge_c and Democracy_o; Climate_prot_o and Coop_o; Power_c and Democracy_o. The three-cluster LCA models with and without local dependencies showed substantially similar results. The table with the overall model fit statistics (Table B), the table presenting the Wald test for each EU indicator (Table C), and the table with bivariate residuals of our latent class analysis (Table D) can be

found in the Appendix. In the Results section, we present the characteristics of our three-cluster model estimated with Bootstrap L^2 .

5. Results

Table 2 presents the profile of each of the three latent classes. In this table, we see the proportion of the members of the three classes endorsing each of the EU indicators we used to build the latent class model. The last column of Table 2 shows the distribution of the EU indicators for the entire sample used in the LCA. In addition, Table 3 provides the socio-demographic characteristics of students belonging to the three classes. Besides the usual socio-demographic characteristics, Table 3 also contains one attitudinal item measuring interest in politics that varies significantly across the three latent classes. The last column of Table 3 presents the distribution of the socio-demographic characteristics for the entire sample used in the LCA. In this section, we describe the profile of the students belonging to the respective class regarding the variables used in the LCA. Next, we investigate variation within these classes by interpreting some of the narratives which members of the class provided to the open question. Lastly, we describe these classes according to their socio-demographic profile.

The first class is the largest one and comprises 68.08 per cent of the respondents. Members of the first class tend to wish for more unity (35.97 per cent of the respondents belonging to the first class answered ‘more unity’ to our open question), more cooperation (mentioned by 19.06 per cent of class 1 members) and more climate protection (22.59 per cent of class 1 members mentioned climate protection in response to our open question) within the EU. They show an average level of support for further enlargement and of satisfaction with the way democracy works within the EU. However, they tend more than average to favour allocating more power to the EU. In sum, this first class is comprised of students favouring the continuation of the European integration project and supporting more climate protection by the EU. We therefore label members of the first class ‘Integrationists’. If we now have a look at some answers given by Integrationists to the open question on their wishes for the future of the EU, we can see that this wish for more integration can take different forms. First, Integrationists can hope for an ambitious integration boost in order to build an overall stronger European Union. This is illustrated by our first two excerpts:

“I would like the EU to move closer together and cooperate even more. I would like the EU to take a clearer stance on authoritarian regimes, inside and outside the Union. I would like the EU to continue to show that strength does not consist in military power, but in political and economic cooperation and unity. I hope that the Union will be able to cope with future crises and will continue to exist for a long time” (authors’ translation; ID: 158, female, 25, no migration background, lived abroad, undergraduate of business, administration and law, parents: tertiary education).

“More cooperation, more climate protection, standing up for our values (human rights, etc.), global solidarity, international cooperation and mutual aid” (authors’ translation; ID: 2833, female, 20, no

migration background, lived abroad, undergraduate of natural sciences, mathematics and statistics (biology), parents: at most secondary education).

Table 2: Profile of members of the three Latent Classes (N: 730)

Indicators	Cluster1 "Integrationists"	Cluster2 "Critical Euro- peanists"	Cluster3 "Pessimist Euro- peanists"	Overall average
Cluster Size	0,6808	0,2053	0,1139	1.000
Unity_o				
0	0,6403	0,8758	0,9684	0,7260
1	0,3597	0,1242	0,0316	0,2740
Coop_o				
0	0,8094	0,9746	0,9465	0,8589
1	0,1906	0,0254	0,0535	0,1411
Climate_prot_o				
0	0,7741	0,8826	0,9626	0,8164
1	0,2259	0,1174	0,0374	0,1836
Statusquo_o				
0	0,9860	0,9996	0,0623	0,8836
1	0,0140	0,0004	0,9377	0,1164
Stronger_say_o				
0	0,9338	0,8801	0,9502	0,9247
1	0,0662	0,1199	0,0498	0,753
Democracy_o				
0	0,9662	0,6124	0,9868	0,8959
1	0,0338	0,3876	0,0132	0,1041
Enlarge_c (Mean)	3,8689	3,1571	3,9693	3,7342
Statis_demo_c (Mean)	3,0433	1,7899	3,5031	2,8383
Power_c (Mean)	7,4276	6,1616	6,9655	3,5178

Source: own elaboration

By contrast, other Integrationists wish for further integration in particular policy fields, such as climate change and environmental issues or a fairer allocation of displaced persons, as illustrated in the last two excerpts:

"I think it would be great if the EU were given more powers to be able to set stricter requirements in terms of environmental protection and animal welfare. I also hope that regional and minority languages will be supported more by the EU and that the EU will be able to impose more requirements on the states in this regard" (authors' translation; ID: 191; female, 25, no migration background, lived abroad, postgraduate of education, social work, parents: at most secondary education).

“More cohesion and solidarity, above all a communal and fair distribution of refugees. Abolition of the Dublin Agreement. Bigger joint steps to face the climate crisis” (ID: 268; female, 25, no migration background, lived abroad, postgraduate of health and welfare, parents: tertiary education).

Table 3: Socio-demographic characteristics of the three LCA Classes (N:730)

Variable	Categories	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Overall
		Integra- tionists	Critical Euro- peanists	Pessimist Euro- peanist	
Subject studied (%)	Humanities	55,78	53,69	54,43	55,21%
	Social sci- ences	20,52	24,83	22,78	21,64%
	Natural sci- ences	23,71	21,48	22,78	23,15%
Gender ***	Male	34,46	56,38	27,85	38,22
	Female	64,34	40,94	47,70	60,41
	Diverse	1,20	2,68	0	1,37
Parents' education	at most sec- ondary edu- cational qualifica- tion	37,45	32,89	31,65	34,27
	Tertiary ed- ucational qualifica- tion	62,55	67,11	68,35	65,73
I am interested in politics (mean/sd)		3,99 (1,00)	4,26*** (0,85)	3,55*** (1,16)	4,00 (1,02)
	Migration back- ground [1=yes]	,018 * (0,38)	0,22 (0,41)	0,29 (0,45)	0,20 (0,40)
Spent an academ- ic term abroad [1=yes]		0,24 (0,43)	0,26 (0,44)	0,24 (0,43)	0,25 (0,43)
	Age	23,34 (4,10)	23,67 (3,56)	22,98 (4,20)	23,37 (4,01)
N		502	149	79	730

Source: own elaboration

Note. Interest in politics is measured with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

CramersV & Chi²: * $p < 0,05$; ** $p < 0,01$; *** $p < 0,001$.

t-test: * $p < 0,05$; ** $p < 0,01$; *** $p < 0,001$

Lastly, the socio-demographic profile of the Integrationists does not differ much from the overall average of the socio-demographic characteristics (compare 'Integra-

tionists' column with the last column of Table 3). This is probably due to the large size of this first class: as 68 per cent of the sample belong to this class, the overall average of the socio-demographic characteristics is strongly biased towards the average of the first class.

Turning now to our second class, it comprises 20.53 per cent of our sample and is characterised by respondents who are less enthusiastic about and more critical towards the EU than the Integrationists as they show a high level of dissatisfaction with the way democracy works at the EU level. 38.76 per cent of the members of class 2 answered our open question by saying that they wish for more democracy in the EU. Moreover, the level of satisfaction with the way democracy works at the EU level is particularly low for this class (class average of 1.79 compared to sample average of 2.84). Furthermore, the second class is the class showing the lowest level of support for further EU enlargement (class average of 3.16 compared to sample average of 3.73) and further power allocation to the EU level (class average of 6.16 compared to sample average of 3.52). Even if this class holds a more dissatisfied view of the EU than the Integrationists, its members can nevertheless not be characterised as Eurosceptic, as the class averages for our item on EU enlargement (average of 3.16 on a 1-to-5-point scale) and allocation of power (average of 6.16 on a scale ranging from 2 to 10) remain very high in absolute terms. Besides their more critical stance on the EU, members of the second class are the ones wishing most often that the EU had a bigger say in the world (12 per cent of class 2 members answered 'bigger say' to our open question). Owing to their critical stance on the way democracy works in the EU while remaining supportive of the EU project, we label members of the second class 'Critical Europeanists'.

The Critical Europeanists' answers to our open question on their wish for the future of the EU again point to a variety of elements of the EU regime and institutions that they wish will become more democratic or be subject to more transparency. As illustrated in the four following excerpts, these elements range from less lobbyism, a stronger EU parliament, more transparency and accessibility for citizens through to a stronger fight against corruption and a more democratic way of awarding EU commissioners' posts.

"More cohesion and more decision-making power of the EU institutions in order to be able to appear stronger and more united internationally. But also beyond that, clearer elections for EU posts and increased action against corruption within the EU institutions and member states" (authors' translation; ID: 299, male, 28, no migration background, not lived abroad, postgraduate of social sciences, parents: at most secondary education).

"I hope that the countries of the EU will continue to grow together and allow themselves to be shaped by joint decisions. I also hope that the EU's democratic system will be reformed so that the MEPs of the EU have the greatest decision-making power" (authors' translation; ID 211; male, 20, no migration background, not lived abroad, undergraduate of natural sciences, mathematics and statistics, parents: tertiary education).

"I would like the EU to have more democratic legitimation through the EP's right of initiative and an increase in the ability to act through a move away from the unanimity principle in the Council"

(authors' translation; ID: 1051; male, 24, has migration background (one parent from Switzerland), lived abroad, postgraduate of business, administration and law, parents: tertiary education).

“That especially the political events in the EU become more transparent and accessible for the citizens, so that Europeans do not feel totally at its mercy and powerless against it. I think that is the only way to build a stronger European identity. In addition, Europe must clearly stand up for its own values, internally and externally, because these are actually our advantage” (authors' translation; ID: 2733; female, 20, no migration background, lived abroad, postgraduate of social sciences, parents: tertiary education).

The Critical Europeanists are more likely to be men and to be more interested than average in politics. It thus seems that interest in politics goes hand in hand with a more critical opinion on the lack of democracy and transparency of some elements of the EU regime and its institutions. In fact, their shared wish to strengthen the democratic level of the EU regime and its institutions makes them the most pro-integration group in our analysis. Indeed, they wish among other things for a strong European Parliament, an elected European Commission, and better integration of citizens within the EU apparatus, which would imply a radical change of the status quo towards a democratized, integrated EU. By contrast, the first class – the Integrationists – are less radical in their wish for further European integration, as they mostly restrict this further integration to particular policy fields, such as the fight against climate change.

Turning now to our last and smallest class (comprising 11.39 per cent of the sample), class 3 is mainly characterised by the fact that almost all its members (93.77 per cent) said in answer to our open question that the EU should not fall apart. Members of the third class do not differ from the average sample in respect of the other EU indicators used in our latent class analysis. In sum, class 3 members are characterised by average attitudes towards the EU (which on average are very positive) and by a focus on the perceived threat of the EU falling apart. For this reason, we label members of the last class ‘Pessimist Europeanists’. The Pessimist Europeanists are more likely to be women and to be less interested than average in politics (see Table 3). However, they do not differ from the average on the other socio-demographic characteristics. Our last set of excerpts of answers to the open question again points to various strategies suggested by the Pessimist Europeanists to prevent the overall collapse of the EU, to secure peace within the EU or the EU founding values such as democracy and human rights.

“I hope that the politicians think realistically so that the EU continues to exist and does not disintegrate in an attempt at an ideal image” (authors' translation; ID: 526, male, 23, no migration background, lived abroad, postgraduate of agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary sciences, parents: tertiary education).

“The EU should remain as it is. The EU has many advantages, but harbours more and more disadvantages in the case of deeper integration. The consolidation of all EU countries on all political and social levels will eventually go wrong. And that is what can become dangerous for Europe” (authors' translation; ID: 1456, male, 23, has migration background (both parents from Soviet Union), not born in Germany, lived abroad, undergraduate of business, administration and law, parents: tertiary education).

“I wish that Europe continues for many years and that the exchange between the countries is promoted and demanded even more, at an early stage among pupils and students, but also even more intensively between adults, so that understanding among the member states is always supported.” (authors’ translation; ID: 393, female, 24, no migration background, lived abroad, postgraduate of health and welfare, parents: tertiary education).

“My wish for the future of the EU is that it will continue to exist and that objective, diverse discourse can continue to take place and that right-wing populism will be stopped. I wish that the EU will continue to stand for freedom, openness, tolerance and diversity and that supranational cooperation will continue to be promoted and valued. I also wish that refugees and displaced migrants are accepted and welcomed and that they are given the opportunity to live in dignity in Europe and Germany, whereby structural (e. g. bureaucratic) obstacles are dismantled. I wish that peace in Europe will continue to exist” (authors’ translation; ID: 1420, female, 21, no migration background, lived abroad, undergraduate of social sciences, parents: tertiary education).

6. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to assess attitudes towards the EU among a sample of students at a German University in their multidimensionality. For this purpose, we conducted an online survey among students from the University of Göttingen in Germany (N=730). In our analysis, we combined items measuring three dimensions of attitudes towards the EU and the answers of an open question on students’ wishes for the future of the EU. The results of a latent class analysis point to three classes of students that differ regarding their EU mindset. We named the largest class (which covers 68 per cent of our sample) the Integrationists, as most members of this class share the preference of pursuing the EU integration process. Moreover, the Integrationists have a tendency to wish for more EU regulations against climate change. A further analysis of some Integrationists’ answers to our open question shows that this wish for further integration applies to various components of the EU regime and EU policies. Our second class, the Critical Europeanists, constitutes 20.50 per cent of the students surveyed. They are more likely than the other classes to be male and to be interested in politics. This class is characterised by a tendency to be dissatisfied with the perceived lack of democracy and transparency of the EU. Here again, this dissatisfaction covers different elements of the EU regime and EU decision-making process, as highlighted in the Critical Europeanists’ answers to the open question. Despite this critical stance on the current way democracy works at the EU level, the Critical Europeanists have an overall very positive and supportive opinion towards the EU. In fact, their shared wish of strengthening the democratic level of the EU regime and its institutions makes them the most pro-integration group in our analysis. Indeed, they wish among other things for a strong European Parliament, an elected European Commission and better integration of citizens within the EU apparatus, which would imply a radical change of the status quo towards a democratized, integrated EU. By contrast, the first class – the Integrationists – mostly restrict their wish for further integration to particular policy fields, such as the fight against climate change. Lastly, the Pessimist Europeanists constitute our smallest class (11 per cent of our sample). This class

also shows very positive and supportive attitudes towards the EU. However, the Pessimist Europeanists tend to be afraid of a potential collapse of the EU. They are on average less interested in politics and more likely to be female.

Overall, the vast majority of the students surveyed share a very positive opinion on the EU: their answers to our set of closed questions as well as their answers to our open question point to particularly Europhile attitudes. The variation between the three classes should therefore be relativized: the students surveyed at the University of Göttingen are very likely to support the EU and wish for a sustainable continuation of the European Union project. Where their opinions diverge, however, is on the potential fear of a collapse of the EU and on the extent to which the EU (or part of it) should be further integrated or should improve its level of democracy and transparency.

The extent to which our results can be generalized to other students enrolled in our university or in other universities in Germany and to students from other EU countries is obviously an open question. First of all, while a response rate of 6.21 per cent to an online survey is not unusual, our survey with such a low response rate is very unlikely to be representative of the student body of the University of Göttingen. Our sample is moreover strongly biased towards students from the Humanities and Social Sciences, which is also likely to affect the generalisability of our results to the student body of the University of Göttingen. Furthermore, the university where we conducted our survey is a medium-sized university in a small city in the North-Western part of Germany. Students enrolled at this university are likely to come from the surrounding area. It is therefore likely that a similar survey conducted in another German university that attracts a larger proportion of students from other German states or from abroad might produce different results. Moreover, students socialised in Germany are very likely to have a unique mindset on the EU. Indeed, the framing of the EU in the German public discourse and in the educational system is characterised by a strong cosmopolitan perspective: the EU is considered as a guarantor of peace and democracy within Europe (Díez Medrano, 2003). This particular framing of the EU in the German public discourse is highly likely to have influenced our respondents during both their childhood and early adulthood. This, in turn, implies that our results are very unlikely to be generalisable to other EU countries. Conducting a similar survey containing a large battery of EU items and some open questions among students attending universities in other EU countries would help contribute to our understanding of mindsets on the EU among highly educated young adults and their variation across countries.

Lastly, our study highlights the importance of considering different attitudinal dimensions when analysing public opinion towards the EU. Indeed, public opinion towards the EU is much more complex than the usual survey item of support for and opposition to a country's EU membership (Boomgaarden et al., 2011; de

Vreese, Azrout & Boomgaarden, 2019; Beaudonnet & Di Mauro, 2012). Moreover, combining the three closed items tapping into different attitudinal dimensions and an open question in the analysis of EU attitudes turns out to be a promising research avenue: students' answers to our open question help us refine and complement our assessment of their attitudes towards the EU based on our battery of closed items. First, we could use the recoding of their answers to the open question to complement answers to traditional closed-ended attitudinal items in our LCA analysis. This, in turn, enabled us to provide more nuanced profiles of EU attitudes among our respondents than would have been the case with the exclusive use of standardised items. Second, our illustrative use of quotes from the open-ended answers enabled a better understanding of the variance within the LCA profiles. As we have hopefully shown, the analysis of mixed-method data on opinions towards the EU is therefore likely to help us advance the debate on public opinion towards the EU.

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Appendix

Table A: Comparison of the Overall Survey Sample and the Analyzed Sample

Variable	Categories	LCA-Sample	Main-Sample	Cramer'sV T-Test/
Subject of studies (%)	humanities	55,21%	56,32%	1.000 ***
	Social sciences	21,64%	20,98%	
	Natural sciences	23,15%	22,70%	
Gender	Male	38,22	36,86	1.000 ***
	Female	60,41	61,71	
	Diverse	1,37	1,43	
Parents Education	at most secondary educational degree	34,27	36,97	n.s
	Tertiary educational degree	65,73	63,93	
I am interested in politics (mean/sd)		4,00 (1,02)	3,83 (1,11)	***
Migration Background [1=yes]		0,20 (0,40)	0,23 (0,42)	**
Spent an academic term abroad [1=yes]		0,25 (0,43)	0,25 (0,43)	n.s
Age		23,37 (4,01)	23,52 (3,76)	n.s
N		730	1.750	

CramersV & Chi²: * $p < 0,05$, ** $p < 0,01$, *** $p < 0,001$.

t-test: * $p < 0,05$, ** $p < 0,01$, *** $p < 0,001$

Table B: Model Fit Evaluation Information for 1 to 5-Cluster-Solutions of a Latent Class Analysis

	LL	BIC(LL)	Npar	L2	df	p-Value	Class-error
1-Cluster	-5179,09	10503,24	22	1742,79	708	0,000	0,000
2-Cluster	-5115,03	10441,04	32	1614,66	698	0,000	0,099
3-Cluster	-5075,30	10427,51	42	1535,20	688	0,000	0,075
4-Cluster	-5044,38	10431,61	52	1473,37	678	0,000	0,107
5-Cluster	-5020,73	10450,21	62	1426,05	668	0,000	0,149

Table C: Wald-Test-Statistics for each EU indicator of our Three-Cluster-Solution

Variables	Cluster1	Cluster2	Cluster3	Wald	p-Value	R2
More unity (dummy)	0,844	-0,042	-0,801	25,85	0,000	0,082
More cooperation (dummy)	0,776	-0,546	-0,229	16,30	0,000	0,043
Clima protection (dummy)	0,615	0,016	-0,632	15,68	0,000	0,031
EU should remain (dummy)	-0,550	-2,382	2,932	10,65	0,005	0,843
Stronger EU (dummy)	-0,210	0,460	-0,250	9,23	0,009	0,007
More democracy (dummy)	-0,514	1,460	-0,946	38,80	0,000	0,223
EU enlargement	0,233	-0,586	0,353	28,94	0,000	0,078
EU democracy	0,452	-1,380	0,928	41,68	0,000	0,264
EU power scale	0,304	-0,503	0,199	25,87	0,000	0,083
Intercept	0,995	-0,203	-0,792	76,33	0,000	

Note: The Wald test assess the extent to which each indicator contributed to define classes. P-value should be lower than 0,05.

Table D: Bivariate residuals of our final Three-Cluster-Solution

Indicators	Uni-ty_o	Coop_o	Cli-mate_prot_o	Sta-tus_quo_o	Strong-er_o	Democ-racy_o	En-large_c	Democ-racy_c	Power_c
Unity_o	-								
Coop_o	0,0000	-							
Cli-mate_prot_o	0,0000	0,0000	-						
Sta-tus_quo_o	0,0010	0,0529	0,0573	-					
Stronger_o	0,0672	1,5335	0,3876	0,0334	-				
Democra-cy_o	0,5155	0,7124	0,0141	0,0634	0,4583	-			
Enlarge_c	1,2476	1,0827	1,1638	0,0825	0,0855	0,0000	-		
Democra-cy_c	1,7292	0,0567	0,1446	0,0365	0,7221	0,0510	0,5880	-	
Power_c	0,0788	0,9383	0,0043	0,0008	0,0000	0,0000	0,0667	0,0000	-

Source: own elaboration

Note: This table presents the bivariate residuals of the three-cluster solution in which we allowed for local dependency between pairs of indicators showing bivariate residuals higher than 3,84. Accordingly, we specify the following pairs of items as jointly dependent in the model estimation: Power_c and Stronger_say_o; Coop_o and Unity_o; Climate_prot_o and unity_o; Enlarge_c and Democracy_o; Climate_prot_o and Coop_o; Power_c and Democracy_o.