



# Leave or remain? European identification, legitimacy of European integration, and political attitudes towards the EU

Denis Sindic, Xenia Chryssochoou, Susan Condor, Inga Jasinskaja-Lahti, David Bourguignon, Sven Waldzus

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Leave or Remain? European identification, legitimacy of European integration, and political attitudes towards the EU

Denis Sindic

Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), CIS-IUL, Lisboa, Portugal

Xenia Chryssochoou

Pantheon University of Athens, Athens, Greece

Susan Condor

University of Loughborough, Loughborough, UK

Inga Jasinskaja-Lahti

University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland

David Bourguignon

University of Metz, Metz, France

Sven Waldzus

Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), CIS-IUL, Lisboa, Portugal

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Correspondence should be addressed to Denis Sindic, Centre for Psychological Research and Social Intervention, ISCTE-Lisbon University Institute, Edif. ISCTE-IUL, Room 2W17, Av. das Forças Armadas, 1649-026 Lisboa, Portugal. Email: [denissindic@gmail.com](mailto:denissindic@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

In this paper, we look at the relationship between European identification and political support for (or opposition to) EU membership. First, we argue that conceptualising political attitudes towards the EU as a direct product of European identification (a) neglects the distinction between the social reality of Europe and the political reality of the EU and (b) leads to psychological reductionism. We propose that the relationship should instead be conceptualised as mediated by legitimacy perceptions and as moderated by social-level variables. Second, we look at three spheres of European integration and propose that their perceived legitimacy is appraised through the following principles: (1) normative solidarity for wealth sharing; (2) political authority for sharing political decisions, and (3) collective self-realization for the sharing of practices. We illustrate the key mediating role of those principles by drawing on data from a survey ran across five European countries. Third, we argue that these mediational relationships are in turn moderated by social, political, and ideological realities, and illustrate this point by looking at the case of UK in the context of the EU membership referendum. We point to an ideological assumption in the UK political landscape about the illegitimacy of EU supranational decision-making and argue that this contributed to shape both the debate of the referendum campaign and its result.

## Leave or Remain? European identification, legitimacy of European integration, and political attitudes towards the EU

This special issue asks how social psychology can contribute to an understanding of political events such as Brexit, and whether our conceptual and methodological tools are appropriate to this task. In this paper, we consider both questions, but start by reframing the first to address what a social psychology rooted in the social identity tradition (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) can tell us about determinants of political support or opposition to the EU—and in particular about the role of European identification. Regarding the second question, we argue that the conceptual tools offered by the social identity tradition can only be commensurate to the task if they lead to (rather than detract from) a consideration of the interaction between social-level and psychological variables in predicting attitudinal outcomes. We argue this point in two steps. First, we look at the role of the perceived legitimacy of European integration in mediating the relationship between European identification and political attitudes. Second, we look in more detail at the Brexit case to illustrate how these mediational processes are in turn moderated by the specific social, political, and ideological context in which they take place.

### **European identification and political attitudes to the EU: a straightforward relationship?**

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) was initially proposed to account for specific phenomena such as intergroup discrimination (Turner, 1975), but also with the explicit meta-theoretical goal of providing an alternative framework to dominant individualistic (and sociological) social psychological theories of the time. It sought to provide a theory of intergroup phenomena in which individual and social factors interact with each other (Turner & Oakes, 1986). Thus, both Tajfel (1981) and Turner (1999) stressed that the psychological

processes postulated by the theory (social categorization, identification, and comparison) should not be taken as happening in a vacuum. Rather, predictions as to their outcomes should always incorporate a consideration of the social, political and ideological realities that feed those processes.

Over the years, however, questions have been raised as to the extent to which some applications of the theory have always been successful in fulfilling that promise (e.g., Reicher, 1996). The issue of the relationship between European identification and political attitudes to the EU can be taken as a case in point. In the past two decades, social psychological research on identity processes has shown an ever-increasing interest for the issue of subgroups-superordinate group relationship, with the development of various models inspired by the Social Identity tradition, such as the Common Ingroup Identity Model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) and the Ingroup Projection Model (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999; Wenzel, Mummendey & Waldzus, 2007; see also Hornsey & Hogg, 2000). However, there is little in that work that problematizes the relationship between superordinate identification and attitudes towards the superordinate group in political terms. Rather, the assumption tends to be that identifying with the superordinate group entails being pro-group on all dimensions, including the political. This amounts to predicting a specific attitudinal outcome on the basis of identification processes alone.

In part, this assumption relates to a more general tendency in the social identity literature to somewhat conflate the social with the political (Sindic & Condor, 2014). Of course, both spheres are deeply intertwined, so that the prediction may often prove empirically accurate. There is no doubt, for instance, that identifying with one's nation generally entails support for the national group to possess its own state. Indeed, support for political separation has to be

sought amongst those who do not identify with the existing nation-state and may not even see it as a nation (e.g., Sindic, 2011). However, this association between identification and political support depends on ideology as much as the process of identification itself. That is, it relies on embracing the basic tenet of nationalist ideology that a group of people, as long as it forms a “nation”, has a right to self-determination that should normally be actualized into the possession of its own state (e.g., Guiberneau, 1996; Sobral, 2015).

Since nationalism constitutes the dominant political ideology of our time (Billig, 1995), however, this ideological dependency can easily be taken for granted, and its role in conditioning the relationship between identification and political support forgotten. By contrast, the case of the EU provides a fertile ground to question the automatic association between the two. This is because whether or not identifying with Europe necessarily entails supporting the existence of common European political institutions cannot be taken for granted to the same extent. To be sure, the EU was built using many techniques that, historically, have been the keystones of nation building (e.g., Licata, 2000). As a political body, it therefore incorporates many elements of nationalist ideology. Furthermore, the existence of the EU and its impact on everyday life and sense of identity are nowadays sufficiently taken for granted by European citizens that it has led some to speak of “banal Europeanism” (Cram, 2001). Perhaps as a symptom of this, the term of “Europe”, originally a social-geographical category that in principle does not carry political implications, is nowadays used very frequently, and without problematization, as standing for the EU (e.g., Laffan, 2004).

Yet a distinction between Europe and the EU remains possible. In the context of Brexit, for instance, it is still possible to understand the statement made by Boris Johnson (whether or not we endorse it), one of the leading figures of the Leave campaign, that “we are leaving the



EU, not Europe” (Boris Johnson, 2016). That is, it is still possible to imagine that there is such a thing as a European social community that needs not or should not be actualized into a political body with its own institutions. Moreover, even if one believes that Europe should possess some common political institutions, it is still possible to question the fact that the EU represent their only possible and necessary actualization. For instance, one can argue that, even after Brexit, the UK will still remain a part of the European community in political terms through the Council of Europe (Kaweesa, 2017). More generally, it remains an open question whether identifying with Europe means considering it as a nation, and whether that means embracing the associated ideological tenet that it should have its own state.

Conversely, it is also not obvious that wishing to be part of the EU necessarily entails identifying with the European community in social terms. Some may support the EU for the benefits it provides but without claiming that it involves any particular social or cultural bond with citizens from other countries (Hooghe & Marks, 2004). To be sure, this implies conceiving of the EU as a coalition of willing but ultimately sovereign national entities, rather than as a genuinely supranational political body. That is, it implies deriving the political legitimacy of the EU from the consent of the nations that constitutes it (and thus from the legitimacy imbedded in national institutions), rather than from any claim that it politically embodies the European social community as such (e.g., Chryssochoou, 2013; Sindic, Reicher, & Castano, 2001). Nevertheless, it is a view that can still be maintained, if only as an ideal of the EU should be.

### **The mediation of European identification: Legitimacy and norms**

Despite the above argument, however, the existence of a relationship between European identification and political attitudes to the EU remains an empirical reality that needs to be accounted for. Indeed, our own survey data, to which we shall refer in more detail below, shows a significant correlation between the two ( $r = .459$ ,  $p < .001$ ). To account for this reality whilst

avoiding the pitfall of psychological reductionism therefore requires invoking additional variables that both provide the content for and interact with identification processes.

To systematically address the various ways in which social, political and ideological factors interact with identification processes is beyond the scope of any single article. However, we will argue here that the enterprise can benefit from first refining our views of the social psychological processes themselves. Specifically, we propose that whilst identification does not automatically determine political attitudes to the EU, it does affect the way in which individuals interpret social and political realities, and in particular the perceived legitimacy of the various aspects of European integration. In turn, those legitimacy perceptions are bound to impact on political attitudes to the EU. We contend that looking at this mediating role of legitimacy perceptions can facilitate the subsequent consideration and incorporation of variables moderating the relationship between identification and attitudes to the EU.

The notion that identification with Europe plays a key role in shaping the perceived legitimacy of the European project should in itself be beyond doubt. Indeed, it is this conviction that has led efforts by the EU to actively promote a sense of “Europeanness” amongst European citizens (e.g., Chrysoschoou, 2013; Herrmann & Brewer, 2004; Laffan, 2004; Marks, 1999). However, legitimacy is a very broad concept, so that we need to be somewhat more specific lest it becomes overly inclusive. To do so, we shall first distinguish between three spheres of integration, and then reflect upon the main principle that underpins judgments of legitimacy in those areas.

### **Sharing wealth (normative solidarity)**

We propose that the main principle regulating the legitimacy of sharing wealth within a community is a norm of solidarity that defines a relationship of natural reciprocity between

group members. Solidarity in that sense is to be distinguished from other pro-social behaviour like altruism and need-based helping, which may be directed towards outgroup members, and which arguably obey to different standards of legitimacy similar to charity (Barros, Sindic, & Justo, 2017). In simple terms, charity is the “nice” thing to do, whereas solidarity is the “normal” thing to do. In more technical terms, as a norm, solidarity carries a dimension of obligation, as opposed to being merely desirable. Indeed, provided that a norm is generally accepted as a standard, the onus of justification lies with deviance from rather than compliance with the norm (Habermas, 1987). For instance, a Eurosceptic British politician may complain that British taxpayers are asked to pay for building a road in Spain, without feeling the need to add any further justification as to why this is illegitimate. However, the same politician might feel the need to invoke some justification (if only the existence of limited funds) should (s)he oppose the building of a road in a remote part of the UK or in a British overseas holding, even though there may be as many British taxpayers who will never make personal use of it. By doing so, (s)he indicates or assumes that a norm of solidarity does not apply in the first case but does in the second.

Conceived in those terms, wealth redistribution requires the existence of a common identity to be legitimized. Indeed, it depends on the notion that contributors and beneficiaries belong to the same community (e.g. Fraser, 2003; Hooghe & Marks, 2005), so that contributing can be framed as a matter of solidarity with fellow group members, and thereby legitimized in the name of the larger interest of the community.

### **Sharing decisions (political authority)**

Political legitimacy has traditionally been understood as a matter of authority acceptance (e.g., Dogan, 2003; Tyler, 2006). Indeed, a legitimate authority is one that is imbued

with the right to take political decisions for those within its jurisdiction. The litmus test of that legitimacy is the extent to which those decisions are deemed to be binding when there is contention (rather than consensus) and in the absence of direct coercion over those who disagree (Turner, 2005). Political authority also requires the existence of a common identity to be legitimately exercised, at least within the prevalent democratic political ethos of our contemporary world. This is because political decisions cannot be seen as democratically legitimate without assuming the existence of a psychologically-bound community whose will and opinions these decisions are supposed to reflect (e.g., Miller, 1995; Scharpf, 1996; Sindic, 2015).

Whilst we deem authority acceptance to be critical in appraising the legitimacy of sharing political decisions, however, we would argue that such legitimacy is also dependent upon accepting the relative homogenization and centralization of practices and institutions that ensues from possessing common decision-making mechanisms. To put it negatively, to reject the political authority of a governing body is to claim that attempts at homogenisation, where they are intended to be binding, can only represent illegitimate impositions. This may be seen as the mere practical implication of accepting or rejecting political authority, yet it is an aspect that may be overlooked should we focus only on the question of political legitimacy in purely procedural terms. For that reason, the legitimacy of sharing political decisions is also highly related with the next sphere of integration.

### **Sharing practices (Collective self-realization)**

We propose that the perceived legitimacy of EU integration also reflects the extent to which the EU is seen as contributing or not to the actualization or enactment of European identity within shared practices (a notion that has been coined as “collective self-realization”, cf.

Reicher & Haslam, 2009; Sindic and Reicher, 2009). Although questions of identity and values are often treated as a cultural matter, we contend that this principle actually relates to economic and political practices as much as cultural ones. For instance, those who believe European identity to be “social” and/or “egalitarian” may assess the legitimacy of the EU by the extent to which it enacts such values into concrete mechanisms of wealth redistribution across Europe. By contrast, those who believe it to be “liberal” might assess it in terms of the extent to which it promotes free trade. Applied in this context, the notion of collective self-realization relies on distinguishing between the social and political reality of a group, insofar as it designates the extent to which the political institutions of a group are seen as impeding or facilitating the enactment of its social identity.

### **Survey findings**

To illustrate the role that the above principles of legitimacy play in mediating the effects of identification with Europe, we can briefly refer to some data from a survey study we conducted in 2014 with a student sample ( $N = 828$ ) in five European countries, namely, England<sup>1</sup> ( $n = 113$ ), Greece ( $n = 175$ ), Finland ( $n = 116$ ), France ( $n = 199$ ), and Portugal ( $n = 225$ ). In this study, all three principles of perceived legitimacy were measured<sup>2</sup>, along with European identification and political attitudes to the EU. The latter was operationalized as support for increased or decreased political unification in the EU, with the two extremes being support for withdrawal from the EU vs. support for the EU to become a new federal state.

Our results showed that, when taking the survey sample as a whole, self-reported European identification was indeed significantly associated with adherence to normative

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<sup>1</sup> Note that we purposefully refer to England (and not the UK) as far as this survey data is concerned, because our UK respondents were almost exclusively English and that results might differ in important ways with respondents from other parts of the UK.

<sup>2</sup> See supplementary materials for a list of items.

solidarity across European countries,  $\beta = .32, p < .001$ , acceptance of the political authority of the EU,  $\beta = .28, p < .001$ , as well as the belief that the EU facilitates the realization of European values,  $\beta = .44, p < .001$ . Furthermore, each principle of perceived legitimacy in turn significantly predicted political attitudes to the EU, for solidarity,  $\beta = .30, p < .001$ , for authority,  $\beta = .28, p < .001$ , for collective self-realization,  $\beta = .20, p < .001$ . Finally, the total indirect effect of European identification on political attitudes showed an overall successful mediation ( $\beta = .27, p < .001$ ), to which each of the three principles of legitimacy significantly contributed: for solidarity,  $\beta = .11, p < .001$ ; for political authority,  $\beta = .08, p < .001$ ; for collective self-realisation,  $\beta = .09, p < .001$  (all lower bounds of CIs in bootstrapping estimates above 0).

When looking at countries separately, however, both similarities and differences emerged. On the one hand, European identification remained significantly associated to adherence to all three principles of legitimacy in all cases but one. The one important exception (on which we shall come back) is that in England the link between European identification and adherence to the political authority of the EU was not significant,  $\beta = .13, p = .293$ . On the other hand, there were several important differences between countries at the level of the relationship between legitimacy principles and political attitudes to the EU. Overall, all three paths were significant only in Portugal, whereas in other countries only two out of the 3 paths (not always the same) were significant. For our present purpose, however, the detail of these differences does not matter so much as to simply stress their existence.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Path analysis showed that a model where England was allowed to differ from other countries on the identification-political authority path provided a better fit than a model where it was constrained to be equal to other countries (e.g.,  $\Delta\chi^2 = 8.70, df = 1, p = .003$ ; AIC = 176.1 vs. 182.8). Direct comparisons of regression weights indicated that the coefficient for England was significantly different from all other countries, except France (e.g., UK vs. Finland,  $z = 4.71, p < .001$ ). More generally, the best fit model taking into account parsimony allowed several other differences between countries (for more details, see supplementary materials).

In sum, this data supports the notion that all three principles play a key role in assessing the legitimacy of the EU and in explaining the association between European identification and political attitudes to the EU. This is not to claim that they exhaust the subject, or that they represent the only possible way to structurally organize factors of support or opposition to the EU. Nevertheless, the distinct characteristic of our approach is that we do not conceive of identity as a separate factor that is to be juxtaposed with others in explaining attitudes to the EU (e.g., Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas, & De Vreese, 2011). Rather, we conceptualize it as a common process that frames the way in which the legitimacy of integration in all areas (economic, political, cultural) is assessed.

Furthermore, at a meta-theoretical level, taking into account these legitimacy principles and their mediating role can help to pave the way towards a more interactionist account of the issue. Admittedly, on its own, a purely meditational account does not suffice for that purpose. However, its merit is to provide additional insertion points that facilitate the incorporation of social, political, and ideological factors when making predictions in specific contexts. That is, the addition of legitimacy perceptions as meditational variables allows for a more specific view of differences between countries than the simple comparison of direct correlations between European identification and attitudes to the EU would. In turn, this provides a more fruitful basis for subsequent analysis as to the roots of those differences. Otherwise put, the role of legitimacy variables should be to serve as the basis for further investigation as to deeper meaning of differences in the way in which identification and attitudes to the EU relate to each other, as we shall now illustrate in the context of Brexit.

### **The moderation of European identification: The not-so-emergent politics of Brexit**

The theme of this special issue suggests that the EU membership referendum unveiled and/or induced unexpected changes in the landscape of political values and ideologies in the UK. Without denying this might be the case, however, our argument and data point to the important continuity that also exists in terms of the prevalent attitudes and ideological assumptions relating to EU membership in the UK.

Specifically, analyses of media and political discourse (e.g., Hawkins, 2012) as well as large-scale survey data confirm that the UK's reputation for possessing a long-standing and deep-rooted tradition of Euroscepticism is by and large well-founded (e.g., see Tournier-Sol & Gifford, 2015). For instance, data from the Eurobarometer 65 in 2007 (Sindic, 2008) showed the UK at the top of the list in terms of the percentage of the population afraid that EU membership will lead to a loss of national identity (63 %), as well as in the bottom five in terms of attachment to Europe (46%).

The specific contribution of our survey data to this question lies with the finding that, in contrast with their counterparts in other countries, English respondents who claim a European identity do not judge the political authority of the EU over their national government (and the associated homogenization of practices) to be more legitimate than those who claim no such identity.<sup>4</sup> This is consistent with the broader claim that the core of British Euroscepticism lies in an attachment to national sovereignty that is not shared in the same way or to the same extent by many other countries (Gifford, 2010). By the same token, it is also consistent with the argument that even self-declared pro-Europeans in the UK often tend to accept much of the assumptions characteristic of Euroscepticism (e.g., Schnapper, 2015). We propose to briefly expand on these

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<sup>4</sup> Of course, one could rightly point out that a student sample is, in many respects, hardly representative of the general population. Yet, this makes this particular conclusion all the more appealing, since a student sample likely contained a higher proportion of respondents claiming a European identity compared to the general population.



points by looking at some examples of pre- and post-referendum political debates about EU membership in the UK.

Thus, qualitative data from a study based on interviews with political candidates in the 2001 national elections (Sindic, 2010; 2015) suggests that the preservation of national sovereignty was already central to Eurosceptic discourse at the time.<sup>5</sup> This is because national control over the decision mechanism process was framed as the precondition to address all other issues. For instance, one Conservative candidate argued that “...in this election there are lots of other things very important, what should be done for the Health Service, what should be done for education, and everything else, but the point is, I’d like first to remain in a position where we can actually make those decisions, and that’s why the sovereignty issue is the crucial one.” This candidate made clear that the biggest problem with the EU was not so much the content of its policies, but the fact that they are being imposed over the will of individual nations, thereby jeopardizing the “freedom of choice to act in our own way”. The point was repeatedly stressed: “if everyone in Britain agreed on a particular point, we want to do that...but...Europe didn’t want to do that, that would be it, we couldn’t do it”; “The way Europe is going at the moment, it’s written into some treaty, that we can’t do anything different... it destroys democracy”; “you can share ideas, you shouldn’t force them on each other... that’s why we should keep our vetoes”.

By referring to data antedating the referendum by such a large margin, our purpose is precisely to suggest that the core structure and content of key Eurosceptic political arguments has varied little in almost two decades. Indeed, similar formulations could be found at the heart of the Leave campaign, from its main slogan of “Let’s take back control”, to the notion that, by staying in the EU, Britain will become a mere region of a European superstate. Such arguments

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<sup>5</sup> The study used semi-structured interviews focusing on the issues of Scottish independence and membership in the EU.

can also be found in a post-referendum debate between Nigel Farage (former UKIP leader) and Remainer Alistair Campbell (former spokesman for Tony Blair and director of communications and strategy), taking place on a radio show hosted by the former<sup>6</sup>, and which we will follow here as main illustration.

To mention but a few examples, at one point in the show, Farage asked Campbell: “are you excited about the United States of Europe? They’re gonna have a European army by 2025, they’re gonna have foreign policy without veto by 2025...”. Later on, he added: “if the European project was to become cooperative where nation-states genuinely work together (Campbell: which I think they do, most of the time), I’d have no problem with it, it is the fact that European law is made by the Commission and that we the voters can’t change it”. Still further on, he stressed: “when we get to the point about democracy, the key flaw with the European Union, is once something becomes a piece of European law, there’s nothing the British government, nothing the British parliament, or the British voter can do to change any one piece of legislation”.

What is noteworthy in both Farage’s arguments and their predecessors is not only the similarity in theme, but also the common framing of the issues on which they rely. On the one hand, their deixis (Billig, 1995) indicates a clear-cut distinction between “us” (“everyone in Britain”, “we the voters”, “the British government”) and “them” (“Europe”, “the European commission”), more akin to a classic ingroup-outgroup opposition than a subgroup-superordinate group relationship. Consequently, EU laws and policies are a matter that is decided by “them”, not by a larger “we” in which the smaller “we” (Britain) plays a part. On the other hand, the essentially incontestable political values of freedom and democracy are equated with the possession of a sovereign national government, so that any attack on the latter is ipso facto a

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<sup>6</sup> The Nigel Farage Show on Sunday, 14th January 2018, broadcasted on LBC radio station.

violation of the former. For instance, preserving the UK's vetoes is not merely about keeping intact the sovereignty of national political institutions. Rather, it is about preserving "our vetoes" and "the freedom of choice to act in our own way": The sovereignty of the national government and the freedom of British citizens are taken as one and the same. A similar assimilation can be found in Boris Johnson (2016)'s assertion that Brexit "means restoring our democracy, and control of our laws". In other words, behind the argument that the EU does not embody democracy and the will of the people, lays the assumption that the national government unquestionably does (Sindic, 2015). Coupled with a framing in which "they" (the EU) decide for "us" (Britain), the conclusion that this constitutes an illegitimate imposition becomes very difficult to contest.

Of course, it may be hardly surprising that Eurosceptics argue from a nationalistic stance that equates national sovereignty with democracy and the freedom of citizens. However, the success of Euroscepticism in British political discourse can be measured by the way in which pro-EU membership arguments often accept rather than challenge those premises (Schnapper, 2015). Thus, in one of the above extracts, Campbell did not hesitate to interrupt Farage to dispute the assertion that the EU is not a cooperative enterprise. However, he left the assertion that "we the voters" plays no part in the decisions of the European Commission unchallenged. Instead, he kept stressing that he did not support the vision of a United States of Europe, that "Britain is a sovereign nation", that "we have always had sovereignty over our own decision-making". Rather than countering Farage by trying to legitimize EU political authority, then, Campbell accepts that the preservation of national sovereignty is indeed paramount, and that a European political body

seeking to supersede that sovereignty would be inherently illegitimate. The only bone of contention is whether this is actually the case.<sup>7</sup>

Our claim is not that the above arguments are necessarily representative of all anti- or pro-EU arguments in the UK. Nevertheless, they are clearly key arguments in the discourse of two prominent political figures, who themselves can be deemed highly prototypical of their respective camp (Campbell having been dubbed by Farage as “perhaps Remainer-in-chief”). Moreover, the common assumptions that underline those arguments create an asymmetry that tends to play in favour of the anti-EU position. Indeed, if the (il)legitimacy of supranational decision mechanisms is taken as a settled question, then the political debate does not bear upon contrasting the merits and demerits of European political integration. Rather, the debate bears upon the extent to which national sovereignty is or is not being lost by being part of the EU, putting those arguing the negative in an inherently defensive position. This may contribute to explain why, at one point, Campbell lamented that the Remain campaign offered “no sort of positive message”, a claim with which Farage agreed: “that’s right, Remain told us that if we leave it would be a disaster, but it did not tell us why staying in it would be a good thing”. Yet, throughout the debate, Campbell himself offered no such positive arguments. This may be symptomatic that the absence of “positive message” might reflect less a failure of the campaign than a fundamental difficulty in making positive arguments for political integration, once the illegitimacy of EU political authority is taken as a premise. As Gifford and Tournier-Sol (2015) put it, “these dominant constructions [of Euroscepticism] leave little space for the positive case

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<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, in an another debate on talkRadio (24.10.2017), Campbell did challenge the “we vs. they” framing of his pro-Brexit opponent, by arguing that “for decades now, people like you have basically projected the European Union as something that is done to us, not something that we can be part of and be a positive player within”.

for British membership to be made, certainly with no perceived electoral advantage from doing so”. (p. 9)

More importantly, perhaps, for the voter, taking a moderate position within that frame of reference entails endorsing the belief that some illegitimate loss has indeed already been incurred. To still support EU membership in those conditions necessitates believing that the benefits of EU membership at other levels clearly outweigh such loss. By contrast, where national sovereignty is accepted as paramount, its loss can in and of itself constitutes a sufficient reason to support withdrawal, even when the possibility of costs in other areas is not excluded. This can be illustrated by the way in which, in the following extract, a pro-Brexit caller to the radio show used this argument to render moot all of Campbell’s claims about the disastrous economic effects of Brexit:

Campbell: “But (name of the caller), what I went through earlier, those things about, you know, inflation going up, or defence orders, or the health service ... there’s nothing that’s happened since, that has in any way made you a little troubled?”

Caller: “No, and the reason being, because of the flipside. You said earlier on that you weren’t happy with the idea of a massive army, etc. and that’s the route we would go down if we remained, and there wouldn’t be much choice in it about that.”

Further venture into these issues would obviously require a more thorough consideration of national identity, its complex relationship with European identity, and how both affect conjointly legitimacy perceptions. It would also require to further specify the cultural, ideological, and political variables for which “country” merely act here as a proxy. There is no

doubt that the specificity of the UK on which we focused is relative, and that Euroscepticism and its underlying contributors also exist in other countries, albeit perhaps in different forms and/or to a variable extent. Nevertheless, the present discussion suffices to illustrate our general claim that the processes we described are moderated by the broader context in which they take place.

### **Final Remarks**

In this paper, we argued for distinguishing between identification with Europe as a social psychological process and support for the EU as one of the possible political outcomes of that process. We attempted to show that making this distinction opens up a conceptual space in which a richer and more fruitful account of attitudes towards the EU can be developed and illustrated this point by looking at the mediation of identification through legitimacy perceptions in five countries. We then built on one key empirical difference regarding the relationship between identification and the legitimacy of EU political authority in England to illustrate how these processes might in turn be moderated by the context in which they take place.

At the same time, variations between countries should not make us lose sight of the fact that, on the whole, all three principles of legitimacy proved remarkably consistent in being related to both European identification and political attitudes to the EU. This suggests that the relevance of those principles is far from being purely local. Furthermore, a lack of significant relationship in one particular instance does not necessarily entail that the principle in question is irrelevant in the context at stake. We hope to have shown that, even in the UK, the perceived legitimacy of EU's political authority remained a highly relevant issue, albeit in a different way. In our view, it would therefore also be a loss to theoretical understanding to dismiss the importance of generic processes of identification and legitimacy perceptions. Rather, progress in

that area should combine further enquiry in the detail of those processes with the analysis of the social, political and ideological context that give them their particular shape.

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