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## Investigating Malaise and Mobilization Effects of Media Use on European Identity before and after the Eurozone Crisis

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**Abstract:** Research on European integration posits that people support and identify with the European Union (EU) by considering its economic benefits. Thus, it is argued that people's sense of identity and their degree of political support for the EU can be explained by estimating the economic prosperity it yields. However, the current paper illustrates that in addition to utilitarian factors, media use can also explain political support for the EU. Thus, to examine this relationship between political support and the media, the study uses the political support framework by David Easton along with the theoretical underpinnings of the media malaise and media mobilization effects. The empirical analysis is conducted on the basis of secondary data obtained through Eurobarometer surveys. Furthermore, to test if the economic factors are a strong predictor of political support, the study assumes that the recent Eurozone crisis has caused a sharp decline in political support. Therefore, it investigates the role of different economic factors and media on political support before and after the crisis. The results indicate that consuming information from the television (TV) does not lead to malaise but rather, that it has a mobilization effect. Furthermore, the results reveal that the respondents' informed-ness and their TV usage for getting information predict political support better than the economic indicators.

**Keywords:** European identity, video malaise, media mobilization, political support

### Introduction

In the recent times, the European Union (EU) has faced a number of difficult challenges, including the Eurozone's financial crisis, Britain's decision to leave the EU (Brexit), and the refugee crisis. As a consequence of these political developments, one can clearly see a shift in the political support for both the EU and the process of European integration. Among all these issues, the Eurozone crisis particularly exemplifies the erosion of support for European integration by raising many questions, including the EU's ability to sustain economic growth and foster a sense of belonging and identity among Europeans (Luhmann, 2017). Due to the Eurozone crisis, several EU member states were forced to reduce their government spending and opt for austerity measures, which resulted in changes to the political landscape and even led to governments being ousted in Ireland and Greece (CNN, 2017).

Therefore, the Eurozone crisis can be said to have negatively impacted citizens' perceptions of the EU and prompted a decline in political support for both national governments and the EU (Armingeon & Ceka, 2014).

The reason behind the negative effect of the Eurozone crisis on political support at the European level is that the economic benefits and utilitarian factors have always been considered as a major source of support for the process of European integration (Eichenberg & Dalton, 2007; Gabel, 1998; McLaren, 2006). Therefore, scholars believe that it is this cost–benefit relationship between the EU and its citizens that has led people to support the European political community, and that, in turn, has allowed Europeans to develop a certain sense of belonging and identification with the EU (Schäfer & Weber, 2014). Hence, the argument that economic prosperity can instill a sense of collective identity among Europeans gained prominence in the literature, eventually making it one of the main explanatory factors behind the political support for the EU (Carey, 2002; Fuchs, 2011; Weßels, 2007). Consequently, aligning with this viewpoint, the current paper maintains that the Eurozone financial debacle may have negatively influenced the overall political support for the EU, including Europeans having a sense of a collective European identity. However, it is important to state that utilitarian factors alone are not sufficient to explain political support; researchers have found that affective factors such as post-material values can also influence political support (Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas, & de Vreese, 2011; Inglehart, 1977).

In addition to the economic crisis, the current research also postulates that economic factors alone may not be responsible for waning political support and the decline in people's sense of European identity. Media use might also have an effect on political support, as past studies that have investigated the role of the media and public opinion on the EU revealed that the media have the ability to influence political attitudes and people's sense of European identity as well as attachment toward the EU (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; Hillje, 2013; Peter, 2007; Staehelin, 2016).

However, despite the general agreement among scholars on the importance the media have in terms of affecting public opinion on European integration (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; Meyer, 1999), few studies (see e.g., Baccini, Sudulich, & Wall, 2016; Michailidou & Trenz, 2014; Picard, 2015) have explored the connection between media consumption and people's sense of their European identity, particularly in the context of the Eurozone crisis. Those researchers who did study the relationship between media consumption and the Eurozone crisis focused primarily on exploring either how the media covered the EU amidst the crisis (e.g., Hobolt & Tilley, 2014; Picard, 2015), or on understanding the media's role as a facilitator in making people more Euro-skeptical (Conti & Memoli, 2017). Therefore, the lack of research regarding the effects of the media on people's sense of their European identity following the Eurozone crisis points toward a research gap.

To fill this research gap, the author initially aims at descriptively showing how the levels of different indicators of political support, including European identity, vary before and after the crisis. The descriptive statistics allow for an assessment of the correlation between the Eurozone crisis and both support and identity in different EU member states. The second goal of the paper is to test if media use along with other political support indicators affect that European identity, and if this effect varies before and after the crisis among different EU member states, as each of them was affected by the crisis differently. In essence, the study tests the long-standing thesis that only an economically beneficial relationship between a member state and the EU will propagate a European identity among that member state's citizens, and if media use also has the ability to explain the variations in the citizens' sense of European identity following the Eurozone crisis.

Before examining the assumptions empirically, a theoretical framework of political support taken from David Easton (1965, 1975) is employed in the following section of the paper to conceptualize what we mean by a European identity. Subsequently, to assess the media effects, the study uses the theoretical underpinnings of the mediamalaise and media mobilization effects. Afterwards, the paper presents the operationalization of the independent and dependent variables along with the empirical analysis. Then, in the last section, the paper concludes by discussing the key findings and limitations of the study.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***Political Support***

The persistence of scholars in terms of finding ways in which to compare the forms of governing institutions and political support cultures can be traced back to Aristotle (Klingemann, 1999). However, modern theorists have extensively used David Easton's (1965, 1975) concept of political support to approach this issue. It is quite a useful analytical framework as it distinguishes among support for the political community, regime, and the authorities (Norris, 1999). While explaining the differences among these three objects, Klingemann (1999) argued that a political community is a cultural object that goes beyond the particularities of formal governing structures and marks the collective identity of the polity. Meanwhile, the regime constitutes the basic framework for governance (Norris, 1999), and the political authorities are the officials occupying governmental posts (Klingemann, 1999). The current study adopts the following modified representation of Easton's political support framework developed by Fuchs (2011).

**Table 1: Types and constructs of political support**

<b>Types of Political Support</b>	<b>Constructs of Political Support</b>	<b>Sub-constructs of Political Support</b>
<i>Political community</i> Sense of community (diffuse support)	Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• European identity</li> </ul>
<i>Regime</i> Legitimacy (diffuse support)  Trust (diffuse support)	Legitimacy  Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Satisfaction with European democracy</li> <li>• Trust in EU institutions</li> </ul>
<i>Political authorities</i> (specific support)	Short-term output evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation of the national and European economies</li> </ul>

The first and second columns of Table 1 denote the types and constructs of political support according to Easton, whereas the sub-constructs of political support are operationalized on the basis of the available data. Furthermore, the table also shows how Easton (1965) classified the political support for the three aforementioned objects into two distinct types (i.e. diffuse and specific support). Diffuse support is mainly associated with the political community and regime, and it does not focus on the performances of certain components, but rather of the system as a whole (Beaudonnet & Di Mauro, 2012; Fuchs, 2011). To understand what the diffuse support for these two political objects is, it is imperative that we look at each object individually.

With reference to diffuse support for the political community, Easton (1965) described it as a “sense of community,” “we-feeling,” or as a “feeling of belonging together” (p. 185). This idea of a communal feeling corresponds to the concept of identity (Bruter, 2005; Delanty, 2002; Hooghe & Marks, 2005), and, according to social psychological theories, such an identity is part of a person’s self-concept and of his or her affective assignment to a social group (Herrmann & Brewer, 2004; Tajfel, 1981). Since the EU has transformed itself from a purely economic community into a socio-political community (European Union, 2017), it aspires for more Europeans to assign themselves to—and to feel attached to—the Union. Therefore, an affective feeling of belonging to the EU by individuals corresponds to the idea of belonging to a collective community, thus instilling a sense of European identity. Thus, in light of the given arguments, the present study considers this affective feeling of belonging to the EU—a political community—as a European identity that resonates with the concept of diffuse support for the political community (Schäfer & Weber, 2014).

It is pertinent here to highlight that the concept of a European identity is anything but straightforward. The abundant research on the topic has not yielded a single agreeable definition. This disaccord over the concept of identity has prompted scholars to suggest that due to its imprecise and contradictory nature, it should not be investigated (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). However, despite such scholarly gloom, researchers have never abandoned the idea of exploring identity, and one can see some level of agreement, at least in the operationalization of identity in general and of a European identity in particular, because numerous scholars have used affective attachment—referred to as a we-feeling or as feeling a part of a common collective—as an apt way of conceptualizing the European identity (Easton, 1965; Fuchs, 2011; Scharpf, 1999; Schäfer & Weber, 2014). Therefore, this study also uses an affective self-attachment to the EU for the operationalization of its dependent variable: European identity.

Moving on to the second component of the political support framework, Easton (1965, 1975) argued that within any political system, the regime also requires diffuse support. However, he differentiated diffuse support for the regime by specifying two additional dimensions: legitimacy and trust. According to Easton (1975), legitimacy “reflects the fact that in some vague or explicit way [a person] sees these objects as conforming to his own moral principles, his own sense of what is right and proper in the political sphere” (p. 451). The second dimension of trust is explained by Easton (1975) as something that “will be stimulated by the experiences that members have of the authorities over time” (p. 448). In light of these explanations, the study operationalizes legitimacy through people’s satisfaction with the democracy in the EU, whereas trust is operationalized as trust in the EU. It is important to mention here that diffuse support for a regime does not serve as a dependent variable in the current empirical analysis, but as an independent variable. The second type of support mentioned by Easton is called specific support, which is an attitude (or a behavior) produced by the evaluation of the authorities’ actions (Beaudonnet & Di Mauro, 2012). Thus, specific support is based on the perceived rewards of short-term outputs (Fuchs, 2011). Since the study is related to the Eurozone crisis, it therefore makes sense to consider EU citizens’ evaluations of the national and European economies as indicators of specific support for the respective political authorities. It is also important to highlight that because the national economy of each EU member state and the European economy are interdependent on each other, evaluations of both economies will provide suitable indicators for measuring specific support for political incumbents.

The following section particularly discusses the role of the media and people’s sense of European identity by reviewing the literature and then it outlines the theoretical underpinnings of the media malaise and media mobilization theory.

### ***The Media and a European Identity***

The idea that the media play a crucial role in forming and affecting collective identities has been confirmed by scholars in various contexts (Bruch & Pfister, 2014;

Fornas, 1995; Morley, 2001; Schlesinger, 1991; Silverstone 1999). For instance, Georgiou (2006) states that “media ... have become organized mechanisms of great significance for constructing identities in local, national and transnational contexts within modernity” (p. 11). Such a role being played by the media on identity is also endorsed at the official level by the European Broadcasting Union’s assertion in 1993 that broadcasting played a decisive role in the affirmation of a collective identity in the then newly-formed Central and Eastern European democracies (Luce, 1993).

Taking the literature on the media and the European identity into consideration, a great amount of research focuses on the development of a European identity by investigating the mechanisms through which journalistic practices, choices, and professional norms affect citizens’ attitudes toward the EU (Clement, 2015; de Vreese, Boomgaarden, & Semetko, 2011; de Vreese & Kandyla, 2009; Vliegenthart, Schuk, Boomgaarden, & de Vreese, 2008).

In addition to how the media present the EU, only rarely have scholars tried to pay attention to measuring the effects of the media. Carey and Burton (2004), for example, used a content analysis of newspaper editorials along with survey data to study attitudes toward the Euro in the UK and found that the British press had an influence on the attitudes of their readers. De Vreese and Boomgaarden (2006) combined a two-wave panel study with a content analysis to investigate how the tone and amount of news in the mass media affect the evaluation of EU enlargement, and their results confirmed that the mass media matter. Schuck and de Vreese (2006) looked into newspaper articles framing the EU enlargement as a risk or as an opportunity, and they found that framing had significant effects on the readers’ political support for enlargement.

However, despite highlighting the significant relationship between the media and political attitudes, research on its effects in general, and on European identity in particular, still represents an “embryonic field of study” (Maier & Rittberger, 2008, p. 248), and it requires more empirical investigations to reveal how the media affect people’s political identities (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006, p. 421). In their recent study, Conti and Memoli (2016) complained that although the influence of the media on people’s understanding of politics and their perceptions about politics has been confirmed in the literature, the media’s impact on attitudes toward the EU has been rather neglected in the empirical literature. They further claimed that increasing attention has actually been paid to media representations about the EU (Bayley & Williams, 2012; de Wilde, Michailidou, & Trenz, 2013) but the direct impact of the media on support for the EU has only rarely been analyzed empirically (Conti & Memoli, 2016).

In the same vein, Maier and Rittberger (2008) stated that, with few exceptions, the literature on public opinion and EU integration has thus far neglected the role of the media in affecting attitudes toward feeling European, whereas Müller, Reckling, and Weiß (2014) stated that the majority of researchers who focus on the me-



dia and identity have so far mainly concentrated on the present situation without examining the long-term structures that might have led to it. However, despite the criticism, attention is gradually increasing in terms of exploring the relationship between a European identity and the media (see e.g., Bachofer, 2014; de Vreese, 2007; Guerra & Caiani, 2017; Hillje, 2013; Mourao et al., 2015; Staehelin, 2016). Within the context of the Euro crisis, a substantial body of literature has been produced, but much of the research is focused on the economic effects of the Eurozone crisis, support for a common currency, a rise in Euro-skepticism, and evaluations of the EU institutions' response to the crisis (Clements, Nanou, & Verney, 2014; Hobolt & Tilley, 2014; Hobolt & Wratil, 2015; Ioannou, Leblond, & Niemann, 2015). Hence, firstly, very few have even investigated the relationship between the media and a European identity in the context of the Euro crisis, secondly, those who did study this relationship kept their focus on how the media covered the EU during the crisis (Michailidou & Trenz, 2014; Picard, 2015), therefore not analyzing the direct impact of media use in explaining people's sense of their European identity after the Euro crisis (with the exception of Conti & Memoli, 2016).

Here, it is also important to note that the scholarship on media studies covers a wide range of different media effects, but, when it comes to investigating the effects of the media on political support and the European identity, scholars have primarily focused merely on agenda setting, priming, and framing effects (see de Vreese, 2007; Michailidou & Trenz, 2014; Maier & Rittberger, 2008; Semetko, 2004), whereas there are a number of other effects that can also help explain political attitudes and support, especially toward the EU. Thus, to advance the scholarship on the change in people's sense of their European identity and the role of the media along with other political support indicators, the current study examines the media malaise and media mobilization effects on citizens' European identity before and after the Euro crisis. The following sub-section outlines the basic conceptual undertaking of the said media effects.

### ***Media (Video) Malaise vs. Mobilization***

When it comes to the effects of the media on political attitudes, a variety of studies have focused on media use as the explanatory variable. One particular effect that has been examined, and which is also the focus of this study, is media malaise. The concept of malaise emerged in the literature when Kurt and Gladys Lang (1966) connected the increase in news consumption with feelings of disenchantment with American politics for the first time. They further argued that television (TV) broadcasts fueled public cynicism by over-emphasizing political conflict and downplaying routine policy-making (Norris, 2000). However, the malaise effect was not given much attention until Michael Robinson (1976) first coined the term "video malaise" to highlight the connection between the reliance upon American TV journalism and feelings of political cynicism, social mistrust, and a lack of political efficacy. In his research, Robinson (1976) confirmed that the more time citizens spent watching TV, the further their political support sank. However, with regard to media use and its effect, particularly on support for the EU, past research confirms

that media use can undermine political support for the EU, not in all, but at least in some member states (Van Aelst, 2017). At this point, it is important to mention that the current study also only focuses on the malaise effect of TV, thus we use the term “video” and “media” malaise interchangeably while referring only to its negative effect, which in essence is a decline in political support in those who use TV as a medium.

In addition to media use, the effects of media content have also been analyzed by various scholars. Consequently, negative political news has been found to have a positive relationship with low levels of public confidence (Floss, 2008). For instance, Miller, Goldenberg, and Erbing (1979) found that media criticism led to dissatisfaction with political leaders and policies. Along the same lines, several studies indicate that negative media content affects attitudes, particularly toward persons (Kepplinger, 2000; Kleinnijenhuis, van Hoof, & Oegema, 2006), but also toward institutions such as the presidency, the government (Patterson, 1996), and the EU, specifically (Trendz, 2008).

The counter-argument to the malaise effect is also quite compelling. It claims that the media are not associated with a malaise, but there is instead an opposite effect called “mobilization” (Newton, 1999, p. 580). For instance, Norris (1996, 2000) argued in her studies that general TV watching is related to apathy; however, contrary to the video malaise hypothesis, attention being paid to the news media was associated with positive indicators of civic engagement. Furthermore, Newton (1999) found that reading a broadsheet newspaper in Britain and watching a significant amount of TV news were associated with greater political knowledge, interest, and understanding. Holtz-Bacha (1990) demonstrated similar patterns associated with attention being paid to the news media in Germany, while Curtice, Schmitt-Beck, and Schrott (1998) also reported positive findings in terms of media use and political knowledge. In an exhaustive study, Bennett, Rhine, Flickinger, and Bennet (1999) found that trust in politics and trust in the news media go hand-in-hand, with no evidence that use of the news media is related to political cynicism. Within the European context, scholars have found similar positive relationships between media use and variables such as political knowledge (Aarts & Semetko, 2003), political interest (Strömbäck & Shehata, 2010), political participation (Schuck, Vliegthart, & de Vreese, 2016), and also political trust (Adriaansen, van Praag, & de Vreese, 2010).

In light of the given arguments for both the malaise and mobilization effects, the current study seeks to examine both effects on the European identity before and after the Euro crisis in different EU member states.



## Hypotheses

On the basis of the previously stated arguments construed from established theories, the current section outlines three hypotheses. The first hypothesis aims to descriptively show the impact of the Eurozone crisis on both diffuse and specific support for all three objects (i.e. political community, regime, and political authorities) among all member states. The assumption here is that political support, irrespective of its type, has declined after the crisis, and this fall is more noticeable among countries that were most affected by the crisis. The rationality for such an assumption stems from Easton's theory, according to which positive experiences with the current authorities of a political system lead to specific support for these authorities, and, over some time, generate diffuse support for the regime and political community (Easton, 1975; Weßels, 2007). On the contrary, negative experiences result in discontent and a lack of political support. Similarly, Weßels (2007) argues that a crisis with negative outcomes should cumulate and translate into lower political support toward the regime, political authorities, and also the withdrawal of identification with the political community in question. Therefore, in light of this argument, the first hypothesis is stated as follows:

**Hypothesis 1:** Due to the Eurozone crisis, political support in Europe has decreased, especially in those member states that were most affected by the crisis.

The second hypothesis (H2) deals with the ability of TV use for gathering information regarding EU affairs to affect the citizens' sense of their European identity. According to video malaise, when consuming information from the TV, people become more cynical toward the political system. In the case of the EU, research has convincingly shown that media coverage of the EU is more negative than it is positive (de Vreese et al., 2011; Michailidou & Trenz, 2014). Additionally, unlike other indicators of political support, a collective sense of identity in a political community develops over a longer period of time (Walkenhorst, 2008) and provides a buffer against the erosion of political support when there is a crisis (Weßels, 2007). But, the current study assumes that despite being more resilient against a crisis, the Eurozone crisis, coupled with consistent negative coverage of the EU, negatively affected the EU citizens' sense of their European identity, consequently making people feel less attached to the respective political system particularly, and such an effect is more visible in the most affected countries. Therefore, the malaise hypothesis is stated as follows:

**Hypothesis 2:** The use of television as an information source has a negative effect on the citizens' European identity and this effect is stronger in the countries most affected by the Eurozone crisis.

As previously noted, the counter-argument to video malaise is media mobilization (Newton, 1999), which asserts that media use is not associated with negative but

positive attitudes toward political institutions. Hence, the final hypothesis posits that people usually get their information about political institutions from the media, and this improves their level of information while making them more aware, subsequently empowering them to support a given political structure on the basis of acquired information. Hence, the third hypothesis states:

**Hypothesis 3:** An increasing level of information about the EU has a positive effect on an individual's European identity.

To analyze these hypotheses, a secondary data analysis is conducted. The following section outlines the design of the study and the operationalization of the data.

## Study Design

The empirical analysis of the study is based on secondary data obtained from two different Eurobarometer surveys: One was conducted in 2006 (before the Eurozone crisis) and the other in 2013 (after the crisis). The reasons behind choosing the specific time periods are, firstly, to determine the effects of the economic crisis and the media on political support before and after the crisis, and secondly, the availability of relevant variables. Ideally, the Eurobarometer survey conducted just before the Euro crisis (2008 or 2009) would have been perfect to use for the study, but the absence of the required variables forced the researcher to select the data obtained from the 2006 Eurobarometer survey. As for after the crisis, different studies point to 2013 as a turning point for the Eurozone crisis, after which the economic indicators started to show positive trends (Braun & Tausendpfund, 2014). Hence, the current study uses the data released in November 2013 to analyze post-crisis public opinion.

As noted, this study classifies EU member states on the basis of how hard they were hit by the Eurozone crisis. To undertake the categorization, the author has used the real gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate volume as the basis for classifying different member states. The calculation of the annual growth rate in GDP volume is intended to allow for comparisons of the dynamics of economic development both over time and between economies of different sizes (Eurostat, 2017). Since the literature points to different EU member states being affected differently by the Eurozone crisis of 2010–13 (Braun & Tausendpfund, 2014; Schäfer & Weber, 2014), it therefore makes sense to categorize countries into separate groups on the basis of their respective GDP growth rate between 2010 and 2013. Thus, to classify EU member states into two groups (i.e. the least and most affected), the author has calculated the average GDP growth of each member state between 2010 and 2013 (see the Annex for more details).

The classification based on the GDP growth rate groups Greece, Spain, Italy, Cyprus, Portugal, and Slovenia among the most affected EU member states, whereas

all the other countries were relatively less affected. It is important to note here that Romania, Bulgaria, and Croatia became EU members in 2008 and 2013, respectively, so they are not included in the current analysis. In the following section, the author details the operationalization of each variable.

### ***Operationalization of the Variables***

This section explains which questions from the surveys are used as variables for the final data analysis. First, the dependent variable in the study is operationalized using the following question: “Please tell me, how attached do you feel to the European Union?” using a scale from 1 (not attached at all) to 4 (very attached). This question aligns with the concept of the subjective assignment of individuals to the collective, and the same question has been used in several studies (Bruter, 2005; Fuchs, 2011; Schäfer & Weber, 2014) to assess the European identity.

The independent media variable in this study is operationalized using the following question: “When you are looking for information about the European Union, its policies, its institutions, which of the following sources do you use? (1) Meetings; (2) Discussions with relatives, friends, colleagues; (3) Daily newspapers; (4) Other newspapers, magazines; (5) Television; (6) Radio; (7) The Internet; (8) Books, brochures, information leaflets; (9) Other; and (10) Never look for such information, not interested.” The respondents were asked to choose from among multiple media sources, but the study included only those respondents who selected “Television” as an information source for European political matters. This is because the current study only investigates the “video malaise” effect that is associated with TV, and also most respondents selected TV as their main source of information. Additionally, scholars have not found compelling evidence to suggest that print media invoke political cynicism (Newton, 1999; Norris, 1996).

The second independent variable is used to assess the effect of media mobilization on the European identity and is operationalized through the following question: “To what extent do you think that you are informed or not about European matters?” The respondents were asked to evaluate their level of information according to a 4-point scale: 4 (very well informed), 3 (fairly well informed), 2 (not very well informed), and 1 (not at all informed). It is important to highlight the rationale behind testing the media mobilization hypothesis through this question. It is clear that the question itself does not point to any role for the media in terms of acquiring information, so one may not be sure about the adequacy of the item in terms of operationalizing the media mobilization effect. In response to that, it can be reasoned that because people do not have direct experience with distant and abstract political structures (Page & Shapiro, 1992), and the EU is definitely one such polity, they must therefore rely on the information they acquire through the media. Additionally, this notion is also confirmed from the current data analysis that reveals a strong positive relationship between people being informed about the EU and their use of TV. Thus, this question seems fit to be used for the operationalization of the media mobilization effect on the European identity.

Two additional indicators (satisfaction with the democracy and trust in the EU) are examined regarding the operationalization of individual political attitudes toward the diffuse support for the regime. The predictor “democracy” is operationalized through the question: “How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in the EU?” The answers were assessed based on a 4-point scale: 4 (very satisfied), 3 (fairly satisfied), 2 (not very satisfied), and 1 (not at all satisfied). The second predictor, trust, is operationalized through the question, “I would like to ask you a question. How much trust do you have in the European Union? Please tell me if 1 (you tend not to trust) or 2 (tend to trust it).”

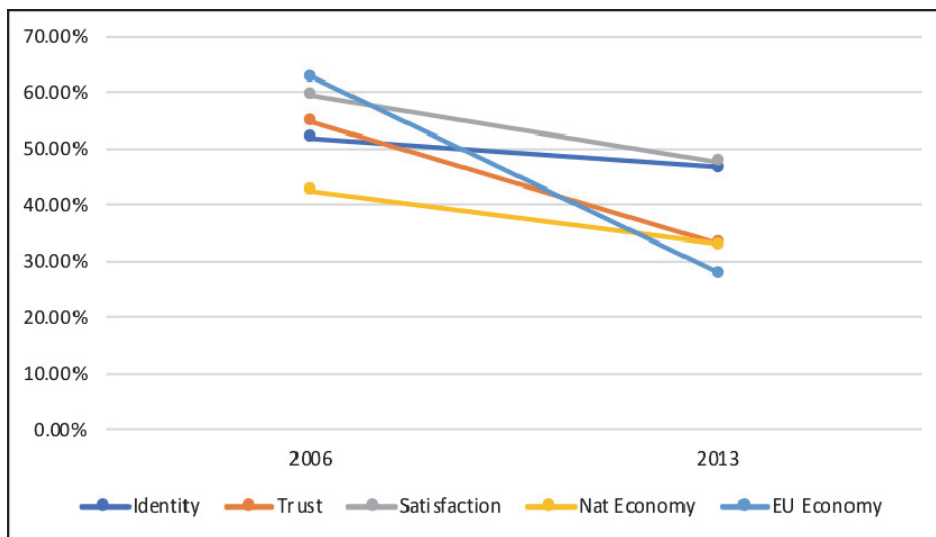
Finally, to measure the specific support for political authorities, questions about the national and European economies are used: “How would you judge the current situation in each of the following? a) The situation of the national economy. b) The situation of the European economy.” The options were 1 (very bad), 2 (rather bad), 3 (rather good), and 4 (very good).

Apart from the respective independent and dependent variables, the analysis also used gender, age, and level of education as control variables. In light of the above-mentioned concepts and operationalization of the variables, the following section presents the data analysis.

## Findings

In this section, the author outlines the results and discusses the key insights obtained from the data analysis. As for the first hypothesis, it is assumed that the crisis prompted a decline in political support throughout the EU, but it is most noticeable in those countries that were hit the hardest by the crisis. The following graph shows the percentage of all political support indicators across all member states. The figure below confirms a significant drop in both diffuse and specific support all across the Union. The most noticeable decline can be seen in the evaluation of the European economy, and it makes sense because during the crisis, the EU and its institutions were consistently held responsible for the policies that led the continent into recession (Armingeon & Ceka, 2014).

**Figure 1: Political support across the EU**

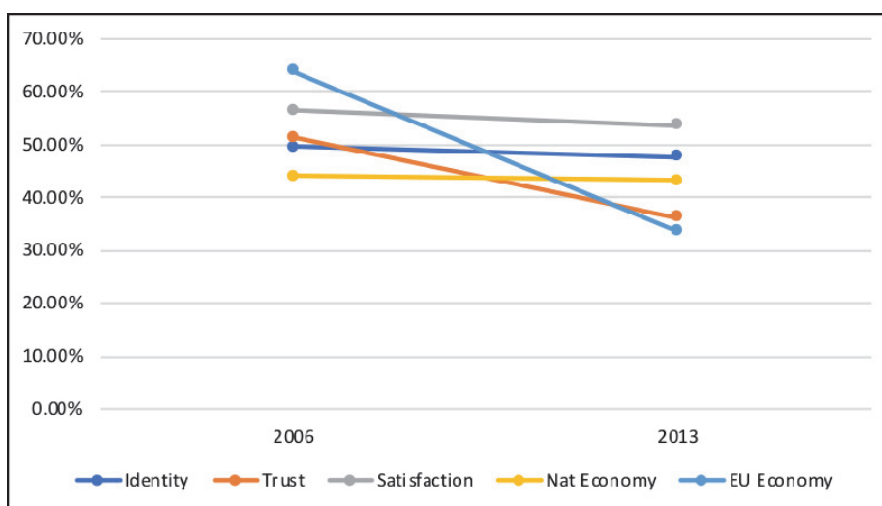


Source: Own calculation based on Eurobarometer surveys (EB 65.2 and EB 80.1).

Note: The quantities are population-weighted averages, only positive evaluations are used, and “don’t know” answers are excluded.

Figures 2 and 3 present a comparative picture of political support in the least and most affected EU member states. In figure 2, the graph shows that except for trust, other diffuse political support indicators in the least affected countries remained unchanged, whereas specific support indicators related to the national and EU economies both declined significantly. The stable percentage for the diffuse support indicators in 2006 and 2013 highlights the resilient nature of feeling attached to and satisfied with democracy. This proves the ability of diffuse support to provide a buffer against the widespread erosion of political support (Weßels, 2007).

**Figure 2: Political support in the least affected EU member states**



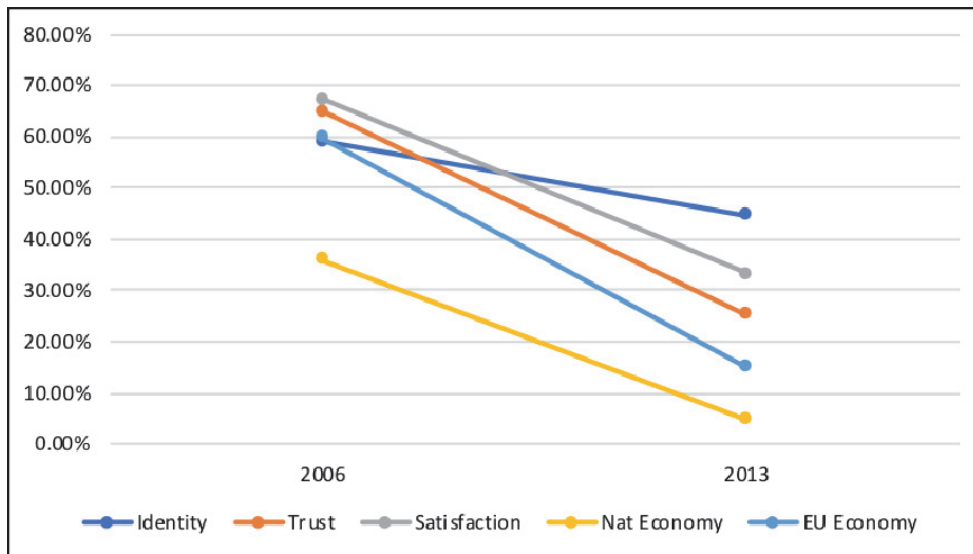
Source: Own calculation based on Eurobarometer surveys (EB 65.2 and EB 80.1).

Note: The quantities are population-weighted averages, only positive evaluations are used, and “don’t know” answers are excluded.

Public opinion on the political support indicators in the most affected countries is quite different from that in the least affected countries. The graph below shows

that all five indicators of both specific and diffuse support declined significantly between 2006 and 2013. It is also noticeable that the feeling of identity did not tank as much as the other support indicators did. It shows that economic benefits are of some importance, but they are not the sole reason for people feeling attached to their respective political community, because even in the harsh economic conditions, people in the most affected countries did not lose much of their EU sense of identity.

**Figure 3: Political Support in the most affected EU member states**



Source: Own calculation based on Eurobarometer surveys (EB 65.2 and EB 80.1).

Note: The quantities are population-weighted averages, only positive evaluations are used, and “don’t know” answers are excluded.

To test the remaining two hypotheses and see if information consumption via TV played any role in affecting people’s sense of their European identity before and after the crisis, a hierarchal linear regression (HLR) was conducted. The reason behind using the HLR is that it tests the effect of each set of variables independently. The following table shows four different blocks, where the variables that are similar to a single concept are nested in each block. This allows the author to infer how the relationship between a group of independent and dependent variables varies. The results of the analysis are presented in the following table:



**Table 2: Hierarchal regression analysis**

Variable	2006		2013	
	Least Affected ( $\beta$ )	Most Affected ( $\beta$ )	Least Affected ( $\beta$ )	Most Affected ( $\beta$ )
<b>Block 1</b>				
Age	-.02	.02	.04***	.01
Education	.10***	.09***	.16***	.13***
Gender	-.05***	-.01	-.04***	-.00
$\Delta R^2$	<b>.01</b>	<b>.008</b>	<b>.03</b>	<b>.02</b>
<b>Block 2</b>				
Satisfaction with Democracy	.36***	.38***	.31***	.33***
Trust in the EU	.27***	.22***	.24***	.18***
$\Delta R^2$	<b>.29</b>	<b>.26</b>	<b>.21</b>	<b>.19</b>
<b>Block 3</b>				
Evaluation of the National Economy	.02	.08**	.10***	.03**
Evaluation of the EU Economy	.09***	.06**	.04***	.04**
$\Delta R^2$	<b>.009</b>	<b>.01</b>	<b>.01</b>	<b>.003</b>
<b>Block 4</b>				
Information about the EU via TV	.03**	-.09***	.05***	.03**
Information Level about the EU	.10***	.13***	.13***	.09***
$\Delta R^2$	<b>.01</b>	<b>.02</b>	<b>.02</b>	<b>.008</b>
<b>Total R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>.321</b>	<b>.296</b>	<b>.273</b>	<b>.215</b>
N	5852	2335	11818	5127

Note: Standardized regression coefficients are reported and the  $p$ -value significance varies: \* < 0.1; \*\* < 0.05; \*\*\* < 0.01.

The above table enables a number of key insights to be made. To grasp the results more in their entirety, the outputs with respect to each block will be explained. The first block in the table presents the relationship between the covariates (i.e. age, gender, and level of education) and the citizens' sense of their European identity. The regression coefficients reveal a similar trend across time and for both groups of members. Education is positively associated with a sense of European identity, whereas women in the least affected countries do not feel attached as much as men do. The second block introduces indicators of diffuse support related to the regime, and both have a strong positive relationship with the citizens' European identity. The trend does not change between the two different time periods and among both groups of members. It is important to mention that trust and satisfaction with democracy are both indicators of the same construct, and therefore they are highly

correlated. However, the author combined both to make an index in order to solve any multicollinearity issues but found that the overall model did not change by joining or keeping trust and satisfaction with democracy separate.

In the third block, specific support indicators are induced, and here the relationship does not change, with one key exception, which is that after the Eurozone crisis, the evaluation of national economies in the least affected countries became an important predictor of a sense of European identity. On the contrary, the evaluation of the EU economy remained a significantly positive predictor of a European identity. It is important to note that the evaluation of the European economy is not a very strong predictor of a European identity, as it explains less than 10% of the variance in 2006 and 2013 among both groups. Moreover, before the crisis, the evaluation of a European identity was a relatively better predictor of identity in both groups of member states, whereas after the crisis, its ability to explain the variance of the dependent variable was weakened. This indicates that people who feel attached to the EU do not necessarily attribute their sense of belonging to its economic benefits.

The fourth block in the table shows the impact of TV use for gathering information regarding the EU and the respondent's level of information about the EU on the citizens' European identity. The second hypothesis on video malaise assumes that there should be a negative relationship between using the TV as a source of information and people's sense of their European identity, and that this relationship should be more obvious in the most affected countries. However, the results show that there is no negative relationship between getting EU-related information from the TV and a European identity, particularly in the least affected countries. On the contrary, in the most affected countries, the relationship between the two variables is strong and negative—as expected—but only before the crisis. Furthermore, the results indicate that after the Euro crisis, getting information from the TV became a weak but significant positive predictor of a European identity in the most affected countries, which goes against the above-mentioned assumption. As far as the respondent's level of information regarding the EU is concerned, the results reveal that it is a positive significant predictor of a European identity, irrespective of the time and country. It is also important to note that the respondents' assessment regarding their information about the EU is a better predictor of a European identity than the economic perception indicators of specific support are.

Lastly, the results point toward an important aspect and that is the ability of economic indicators to predict a European identity. The outputs from the hierarchical regression reveal that utilitarian indicators do not impact the model as much as TV use and the respondents' informational level do. Looking at the table, one can see that the addition of economic indicators causes a slight change in the adjusted  $R^2$ , demonstrating their inability to improve the overall model and explain a European identity. On the other hand, the induction of the video malaise and mobilization variables improves the adjusted  $R^2$  when compared to the economic indicators.

## Discussion

There are a number of key takeaways from the findings of this study. What is foremost is the indisputable fact that the Eurozone crisis did affect the political support of Europeans for the EU, and the most affected countries witnessed a significant decline in both specific and diffuse support, hence it confirms the first hypothesis. With regard to the citizens' sense of their European identity, the results show that it did not dramatically decline in the wake of the crisis. As a matter of fact, it remained almost similar in the least affected countries, whereas in the most affected countries, it reduced by only 14% between 2006 and 2013. This drop is far smaller than the decline in any other political support indicator. According to these results, one can infer that people's sense of their European identity neither wanes over a short period of time nor because of the economic crisis. This interpretation also falls in line with the buffer hypothesis presented by Weßels (2007), according to which "identification with the political community creates a buffer" (p. 290) against any crisis or political skepticism.

The main crux of this study was to understand the video malaise and media mobilization effects on people's sense of their European identity. In line with the video malaise hypothesis, it is expected that using the TV to seek out information regarding the EU would have a negative effect on the citizens' European identity. This assumption stems from various research results that reveal the tendency of the media to mostly cover the EU negatively (Carey & Burton, 2004; Daddow, 2012; Galpin & Trenz, 2016; Schuck & de Vreese, 2006). Therefore, if the media usually portray the EU negatively, such coverage should increase specially amidst a crisis, amplifying the negative effect on the citizens' European identity, hence, it is logical to expect a malaise effect, especially in the most affected countries. However, the results only partially confirm this assumption presented in the second hypothesis. Firstly, in the case of the least affected countries, the given assumption has been rejected because the findings reveal that consuming information from the TV has not been found to have a negative effect on the citizens' European identity, in fact, the effects are significant and positive. Secondly, in the case of the most affected countries, the results partially fall in line with the assumption because they show that seeking information via the TV has a significant negative impact on the citizens' European identity, at least before the crisis, whereas after the crisis, this negative effect changes into a positive one.

These findings allow the researcher to speculate that information consumption via the TV is not associated with a generalized malaise effect; moreover, such an effect, if it does appear in some cases, is rather inconsistent, and finally, it does not amplify because of the crisis. One explanation for those results is that a European identity as an indicator of diffuse political support is resilient to temporal circumstances and perhaps changes when the crisis is rather more widespread. These results from the current investigation and the interpretation correspond to numerous past research studies conducted in different contexts but that reached similar

conclusions (see e.g., Holtz-Bacha, 1990; Newton, 1999; Norris, 2000; Pinkleton & Austin, 2002; Strömbäck & Shehata, 2010).

As for the mobilization effect, the findings confirm the third hypothesis which postulates that people get information regarding different political structures and issues from the media, that, in turn, increases their level of political information, and this informed-ness proves to be a better predictor of their identity. Thus, media consumption in general and TV in the present case can be attributed as having a positive effect on the citizens' European identity. Furthermore, the media mobilization effect does not change in the wake of a crisis.

### ***Limitations***

In the present study, a secondary data analysis was undertaken, which has its own typical problems. One limitation is that identity is a dynamic and flexible concept, but the operationalization is confined due to the availability of only one variable that could be deemed to be imperfect for measuring identity (Bruter, 2008). However, owing to the fact that such an operationalization is commonly used in empirical analyses on citizens' European identity (Westle, 2012), the author considers attachment as an appropriate indicator with which to measure this European identity. It also falls in line with social psychology theories that consider affective attachment as a key indicator of a collective identity (Tajfel, 1981). Despite the appropriateness of the indicator that was employed, multiple pointers should be used to estimate identity (e.g. the cognitive and evaluative identity dimensions can provide some useful indicators).

Furthermore, the operationalization adopted to examine the video malaise effect might be considered questionable, because malaise is associated not only with using the TV as a source of information but also with the nature of the content. This highlights the need for data that are based on a specific media content analysis and public opinion on that content, and future studies should take this into consideration. Similarly, the mobilization effect indicator that was used could also be argued to be inapt. However, the author defends the use of this indicator by arguing that people get information regarding political issues from the media. Consequently, their informed-ness is brought about via their media consumption and that is the media mobilization effect.

In conclusion, the author argues that this study fills the gap by adding to the literature on the effects of the media on political support, particularly in the context of the Euro crisis. The findings confirm that TV use does not lead to political cynicism and a decline in political support, but it instead makes people more informed about different political structures and issues. Furthermore, it also rejects the notion that people's sense of their European identity can only be explained through a cost-benefit calculus. On the contrary, it is embedded among Europeans on more abstract levels and serves as a buffer in times of political turmoil.

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**Annex****Real GDP growth rate - volume**

<b>Country</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>Average</b>
Belgium	2.7	1.8	0.1	-0.1	1.13
Czech Republic	2.3	2	-0.8	-0.5	0.75
Denmark	1.9	1.3	0.2	0.9	1.08
Germany	4.1	3.7	0.5	0.5	2.20
Estonia	2.3	7.6	4.3	1.4	3.90
Ireland	2	0	-1.1	1.1	0.50
Greece	-5.5	-9.1	-7.3	-3.2	-6.28
Spain	0	-1	-2.9	-1.7	-1.40
France	2	2.1	0.2	0.6	1.23
Italy	1.7	0.6	-2.8	-1.7	-0.55
Cyprus	1.3	0.3	-3.2	-6	-1.90
Latvia	-3.8	6.4	4	2.6	2.30
Lithuania	1.6	6	3.8	3.5	3.73
Luxembourg	4.9	2.5	-0.4	4	2.75
Hungary	0.7	1.7	-1.6	2.1	0.73
Malta	3.5	1.3	2.5	4.6	2.98
Netherlands	1.4	1.7	-1.1	-0.2	0.45
Austria	1.9	2.8	0.7	0.1	1.38
Poland	3.6	5	1.6	1.4	2.90
Portugal	1.9	-1.8	-4	-1.1	-1.25
Slovenia	1.2	0.6	-2.7	-1.1	-0.50
Slovakia	5	2.8	1.7	1.5	2.75
Finland	3	2.6	-1.4	-0.8	0.85
Sweden	6	2.7	-0.3	1.2	2.40
United Kingdom	1.9	1.5	1.3	1.9	1.65

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