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Public view on the social dimension of Europe 2020

Roman Kofmann

S1029460

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Supervisor

Dr. Michel Ehrenhard

Second Reader

Prof. Dr. Marcel Boogers

The Europe 2020 strategy has been analyzed from a political, economic, and social point of view. This thesis provides more insights on the attitudinal perspective of the social dimension of Europe 2020. What is the public opinion on the poverty reduction target of the Europe 2020 strategy and what are its determinants? A cross-sectional design using three Eurobarometer data sets will be used to revisit established theories on the determinants of individual opinion formation. The results confirm the self-interest argumentation of rational choice theory, the ideological consistency theory, and the welfare regime typology. However, the thermostatic model developed by Wlezien could not be confirmed. Finally, recommendations for future research are proposed.

Contents

I. Introduction 3
I.I Thesis structure 4
I.II Research Question 5
II. Theory 6
II.I The social dimension of Europe 2020 strategy 6
II.II Public opinion and policy 8
II.II.I Individual level theories 9
II.II.II National level theories 10
II.III Hypotheses 13
III. Methodology 15
III.I Research design 15
III.I.I Dependent variables 16
III.I.II Independent variables 17
III.II Data analysis 17
III.II.I Validity 17
IV. Analysis 18
IV.I What is the public opinion on the poverty target? 18
IV.II Determinants of public opinion on the social dimension of Europe 2020 20
IV.III Discussion 23
V. Conclusion 25
Bibliography 26
Annex 28

*"However poorly informed, psychologically driven, and 'mass mediated' public opinion may be, it is capable of recognizing and focusing on its own conception of what matters." (*Zaller, 1998, p.189)

I. Introduction

In 2010 the European Union has launched a new strategy to make growth more sustainable, smart, and inclusive. The rationale behind Europe 2020 is economic growth rather than social or environmental objectives, which play a subordinate role. The decision to implement this new governance architecture for the next ten years was elite driven. The European Parliament has pressured the European Commission successfully to include a social dimension into the strategy but until present day no achievement in poverty reduction was made. This thesis investigates the social dimension of Europe 2020 from an attitudinal perspective. What is the general public perception on the social dimension? To give a more detailed description of the public view, several hypotheses will be tested to understand the underlying determinants of the European public opinion.

The previous social strategies, Lisbon Strategy and Lisbon II, were inefficient to tackle income inequality, social exclusion, and poverty (Marlier & Natali, 2010). However, the past decade has only coordinated the national welfare policies through the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) without hard instruments. Now the member states of the Union agreed on a specified target, namely lifting twenty million out of hundred-twenty Europeans out of poverty or social exclusion until 2020. Although this target seems like a breakthrough in Social Europe, many academics have concretely criticized the embeddedness of social policy into an economic model (Vanhercke, 2011; Copeland & Daly, 2012). Copeland & Daly (2012) analyzed the decision-making process of Europe 2020 and came to the conclusion that the social target is a unique EU compromise and a continuation and selectivity of OMC measures because member states have not expressed any practical integration of the target in their respective welfare regime. The agreement on three measurements on poverty or social exclusion was the result of two blocks of member states. Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, France, Italy, Portugal and Spain

were in favor for the integration of social policies in the internal market while Sweden, United Kingdom, Ireland and the new member states expressed concerns about such a plan. The latter group argued that poverty is a contested concept and applying a one-dimensional approach stands in contradiction with previous OMC. The same applies to social exclusion which has multiple meanings. Consequently, the agreed program includes three measures of poverty or social exclusion and member states may choose one of them, all three, a mix, or even another relational measure. For that reason, Vanhercke (2011) called the social dimension of Europe 2020 an oxymoron because countries have to keep public debts low, decrease public expenditure if needed, and stimulate the economy to keep on track with the Growth and Stability Pact (GSP) but on the other side spend money on impoverished groups of society.

Despite the critique from academics, public opinion on the poverty goal has not been analyzed so far. Public attitudes are mostly used on European level to assess whether referendums for European constitutional change will not run against efforts of further European integration. More often, the public view is consulted to predict election outcomes and to understand which policies the public favors most. Do Europeans think that anti-poverty policy is important? Do they think that the target is set right? What determines their perception?

For that reason, the aim of this thesis is two-fold: first, the public perception on the poverty target of Europe 2020 from the start of the new strategy (2010) to most recent available data from 2012 will be presented. The comparison allows to show attitudinal trend towards the social dimension of Europe 2020. Secondly, hypotheses testing will reveal why some societal groups are more likely to perceive anti-poverty policy as more important than others.

I.I Thesis structure

The introduction part will end with the research question and the relational sub-questions. The following chapter sheds light on the theoretical considerations. This entails a more detailed description of how the social dimension of Europe 2020 is intended to function, what public opinion is and how it has been applied in previous studies. This literature review will reveal which factors lead to different opinions on anti-

poverty policy which in turn will be used to deduce the hypotheses. The final section of the theoretical framework concludes with theses hypotheses. The methodology chapter describes in detail the research design and how the data is going to be analyzed. The former includes a detailed description of the data sets used, the units of analysis, and the variables. The data analysis section will present the choice for the statistical test and the validity and reliability of the results of it. Afterwards, the analysis chapter will provide a short description of the public opinion on the poverty target in two points in time and between different groups. This trend study is followed by the hypotheses testing of the factors shaping the public opinion. The final chapter summarizes the findings and gives recommendations for future studies.

I.II Research Question

The previous part has shown that the European Union has failed on the social targets of the Lisbon strategies and is very likely to continue this path with the Europe 2020 strategy of 2010. The agreement on three indicators for poverty and social exclusion was a "gentlemen's agreement" (Copeland and Daly, 2012, p.279) and the result of a social integration momentum in the wake of the economic crisis. This decision was however highly contested. Member states and their respective welfare regime have a long history of poverty reduction through welfare provisions and thus are highly sensitive when it comes to social policy harmonization. The research question investigates this sensitivity from public attitudinal perspective and further looks into the factors determining the respective position. It is formulated as following:

> **What is the public opinion on the social dimension of Europe 2020 and which factors determine it?**

The subsequent sub-questions refer to the two aspects of the general research question.

Is the public perception on the poverty target of Europe 2020 as pessimistic as in the academic literature?

Do established theories on determinants of public opinion also hold true for anti-poverty policy?

II. Theory

This section will give a better understanding on the social dimension of Europe 2020 and how it is intended to function. Afterwards, a suited concept of public opinion on policy is provided. A literature review will show how past studies have deployed public opinion on welfare and which conclusions have been drawn from their finding. Their findings will serve as an argumentation for the selection of my hypotheses.

II.I The social dimension of Europe 2020 strategy

The Lisbon Treaty, coming into force in December 2009, gave the European Union more competences to streamline social policies. Article 9 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union is commonly referred as the horizontal social clause gives the Union the competence to consider "high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health" when implementing policies. Additional, social rights of citizens of the Union have been added to the Charter of Fundamental Rights next to civil, political, and economic rights.

Directly after one year, the European Commission proposed the replacement of the highly criticized Lisbon strategies from 2000 to 2010, which had proven to be neither efficient nor sustainable to tackle social exclusion, income inequality, and poverty (Erixon, 2010; Marlier and Natali, 2010; Borrâs and Radaelli, 2011; Cantillon, 2011). Even if the consequences of the economic crisis had been absent, the objectives of Lisbon would not have been reached (Leschke, Theodoropoulou and Watt, 2012). The Europe 2020 strategy as new governance architecture consists of ten headline targets, seven flagship initiatives, and ten integrated guidelines. Similar to the Open Method of Coordination of the Lisbon strategies, member states agreed to common guidelines, coordinated monitoring, national action plans, and to recommendation for reform from the European Commission.

However, for the first time in the history of Social Europe, Europe-wide targets have been set rather than just national ones. In a narrow sense, the target to lift twenty million Europeans out of poverty or social exclusion until 2020 is the main social objective, whereas increasing employment to 75 per cent of European average for citizens aged

20 to 64, decease the school leave rate below ten per cent, and the target to increase the share of thirty to thirty-four year old European having a tertiary or equivalent education to more than forty per cent can be seen as supplementary. According to Ravallion (2013) there are two types of anti-poverty policies: protection and promotion. Promotion policies have the aim to provide risk groups the required relative skills to overcome poverty in the long-run. This thesis however emphasizes the protection of vulnerable groups so that their living standard does not fall below the agreed indicators.

The poverty or social exclusion target is composed of three indicators: the classic income risk-of-poverty threshold set at sixty per cent of the national median income after social transfers, the non-monetary conception of material deprivation where one is perceived as poor when more than four out of nine deprivation items are missing, and the cultural perception of poverty where people aged from zero to fifty-nine are counted as poor when they live in households with very low work intensity. Low work intensity means that the adults of that household worked less than twenty per cent of their work potential in the past year.

Member states have the freedom to choose one indicator, a mix of two, all three, or with reasoned argumentation another related indicator. In Table 1, one can see that the majority of member states decided to reduce poverty according to all three indicators. Many new member states agreed to focus on the monetary indicator; Ireland applies a mix of the monetary and the non-monetary indicator; others applied related indicators such as long-term unemployment in the case of Germany or child poverty in the case of the United Kingdom. The remaining countries had not decided on the preferred indicators at the beginning of Europe 2020 enforcement.

The new annual communication procedure, European semester, is issued each year followed by an Annual Growth Survey (AGS) summarizing all National Reform Programmes. These trends are then synchronized with the Stability and Convergence Programmes of the Stability and Growth Pact to prevent future financial distortions and to indicate how much leverage is left for national public spending. Although more coordinated as past strategies, Figure 1 shows that the social dimension plays a subordinate role in Europe 2020. For instance, the first AGS of 2011 makes no

references at all to social cohesion or social inclusion. Poverty is briefly portrayed in Annex 1 of the report in connection to labour market participation, although this approach has been proven to be ineffective during the Lisbon strategies.

The social dimension of Europe 2020 is poorly integrated in this rather economic construct. The fusion of poverty and social exclusion into one general target with three indicators is best seen as a "unique EU compromise" (Copeland and Daly, 2012, p. 283) where member states have selected the most applicable indicators from the Open Method of Coordination to show at least some progress in European social integration. In a following article Daly (2012) expressed that the "broad church approach" (p.275) of three indicators of poverty is just a "basic floor […] to be protected in the context of far reaching welfare state cutbacks and reforms" (p.283). In the same vein, Leschke and Theodoropoulou (2012) came to the conclusion that social exclusion is likely to increase in the next years and the fiscal austerity bias or "obsession with fiscal deficits and public debt" (p.260) will not lead to a reduction of poverty in the European Union in the coming years.

Despite the pessimistic academic projections for poverty reduction in the European Union, Ravallion (2013) argues that in the 'second' modern view on poverty, policies against poverty are "an important element" (p.73) for economic growth. Is this view consistent with the European public?

II.II Public opinion and policy

Public opinion refers to collective judgments outside the government which influence political decision making (Price, 1992 in Worcester, 1997). In simpler terms, public opinion is the general perception of a representative sample of a concrete population. Public opinions are important in any political system but especially in representative democracies since political actors want to keep their voters satisfied. In current times, the relationship between public opinion and policy becomes even more crucial when economic disturbances have eroded public support for the Euro and the European Union membership of their country in general. Public attitudes manifest themselves through lobbies, elections, and public protests (Gabel, 1998). In connection to the

European Union, public opinion became important with further European integration and the ratification processes of European constitutional changes.

Whereas most scholars have analyzed European integration from economic, political, and from a social point of view, public opinion studies on European integration focus on the attitudinal perspective of integration (Howstone, 2011). Mathew (1980) argued that the opinion of the mass about European integration was neglected by many scholars, because the public was lagging behind the efforts of the political elite to establish a unique cooperation between European nations. Contrary, Hallstein and Coombes argued in the early seventies that decisions made by the European Community were lagging behind the general European public opinion (see Howstone, 2011, p.18). These findings led Putnam (1983) to understand public opinion as leading or lagging indicator for political decisions.

Several theories have been established in the past thirty years which have been tested on a national basis. With this thesis, I argue that these theories can also be applied on a European level and more in-depth on poverty rather than general welfare provisions. Since 1974 the European Commission collects public opinions from citizens of the member states. These data sets will be used to test the following assumptions of public opinion towards policy: the self-interest argument, the ideological belief assumption, the thermostatic model, and the welfare regime typology. The first two theories are on the individual level whereas the latter ones represent the national level.

II.II.I Individual level theories

The self-interest argument derives from rational choice theory. The reasoning behind this approach is that people who have benefited from welfare provisions in past or consider themselves to be benefiting in the future from redistributive policies, are more likely to respond positively to welfare policies. In this case, unemployed, divorced parents with child, elderly, young adults and the working class should reply that EU poverty policy is highly important.

The most prominent study analyzing attitudes towards welfare policy and class, gender and sector is Svallfors' Comparison of Eight Western Nations (1997). He used three

dependent variables for attitudes towards redistribution policies and applied gender, class, and the working sector as independent variables. His data from the International Social Survey have shown that there is evidence for status, gender, and class differences in their view towards welfare policies. For instance women tend to be more in favor for redistributive welfare provisions than men. Blekesaune and Quadagno argued that women are "more likely to be recipients of benefits as widows or single parents and more likely to be employed by the welfare state" (2003, p. 417).

From these finding I can draw multiple hypotheses. The dependent variable whether respondents think that it is important to help the poor and the socially excluded as included in the Europe 2020 strategy answered in a Likert scale from 1 (not at all important) to 10 (very important) gives clues about respondents' welfare attitude. The independent variables shall be gender (male / female), social class (working class / liberals / conservatives), and single parent (yes / no).

The ideological belief assumption presumes that individual's view is shaped by their value system, which implies that respondents have a certain perception on equality, democracy, capitalism. Once individuals have endorsed a certain ideology, in the case of Feldman and Zaller's study (1992) on political understanding as conservatives or democrats of Americans and their perception on policies, they have to adopt a consistent view on other topics as well.

Coming back to the study of Feldman and Zaller (1992), the authors used a two-wave panel design with a random sample of 450 American citizens. Respondents have filled out survey questions on welfare policies to which open-ended questions have been added asking them to state their ideas leading them to their response on the survey question. They concluded that Americans have indeed consistent views and were able to defend these perceptions by relying on either social equality ideas (democrat) or economic individualism (republican).

II.II.II National level theories

The thermostatic model was developed by Wlezien (1995) and captures the dynamic relationship between policy and public opinion by assigning the public opinion the

function of a thermostat and the function of a policymaker to an air conditioner. For example, when a policy has proven to reduce poverty as is expected from the social dimension of Europe 2020 then the public preferences towards more policies on poverty reduction will decrease and vice versa.

In his study, Wlezien found evidence for this model in Canada, the UK and the United States. However, he stressed the fact that the model works only for salient policy domains such as education, health, or welfare. In more recent study, Wlezien and Soroka (2012) applied the model successfully to OECD countries where they used the International Social Survey Program "Role of Government I-IV cumulative file" which contained variables asking respondents about their preference for government spending cuts, their ideological stances (to filter out their preferred policy), and general support for government action. Other variables have been added as well concerning characteristics on the political institutions, which goes beyond this study here.

For this thesis, a hypothesis will be constructed for the thermostatic model. Under this assumption countries which have performed well in poverty reduction according to the three indicators in past years will be assigned to one group and vice versa. It is expected that respondents from countries which have performed well in poverty reduction, will be more likely to answer that the target was set to modestly.

The welfare regime typology predicts that public opinion on welfare is shaped by the respective national application of welfare systems, which have been shaped by the "historical and institutional compromises between the state, the market, and the family" (Wendt, Mischke and Pfeifer, 2011, p.15). Each national welfare regime type has developed an own logic of societal integration, stratification, and organization (Arts and Gelissen, 2002). Initially, Esping-Andersen (1990) identified three particular types of welfare regimes on the basis of two criteria: decommodification and stratification. The former is understood as the degree to which a service is perceived as social right and the latter refers to the degree to which social classes can be differentiated by means of power, status, and privilege. The social democratic model has high decommodification and low social stratification and thus has developed a welfare state based on universalism. The conservative welfare regime has medium decommodification and

high social stratification and therefore provides certain welfare provisions based on schemes of labor market participation. The last type refers to the liberal or Anglo-Saxon welfare type and has low decommodification and high social stratification. The welfare provisions are lowest here and serve as safety net for the deserving needy. Many scholars distinguished more types such as the post-communist or the Mediterranean type but for the sake of simplicity I will only use the three initial types. It should be noted that liberal regimes within the European Union are non-existent since the UK or Ireland have rather mixed welfare provisions which can be categorized to all three models. Therefore I will focus on the conservative and social democratic welfare regime. The former can be found in Germany, France, and Austria whereas the latter consists of all Scandinavian countries.

There are plenty empirical analyses on how welfare regimes types influence public opinion. Blekesaune and Quadagno (2003) summarized past findings and came to the conclusion that there are causal and conceptual flaws in these studies. Conceptual flaws result from the wrong placement of types, which are in its Weberian ideal form non-existent. For instance the UK was often seen as liberal type, but Van Oorschot (2006) has shown that the health care system represents a rather social democratic welfare regime. The causal problems arise because it remains ambiguous whether public opinion causes shifts in regime pattern or regime pattern cause certain welfare attitudes (for further discussion see Blekesaune and Quadagno, 2003, pp.417).

Despite this criticism and contradicting findings, I would like to include this typology in my hypothesis testing. By forming one block of Scandinavian countries[1], I assume to find that respondents from these countries tend to state that poverty requires government action than respondents from other European countries. In Table 5, one can observe the initial index of Esping-Andersen and the revisited decommodification index by Bambra (2006). Although Denmark scored comparably lower than Finland and Sweden, it was on an equal footing in the index of 1980 with these countries. Secondly, respondents from Austria and Germany are expected to assign higher scores on the

[1] Denmark, Finland, and Sweden

government action against poverty variable. Finally, respondents from the UK and from Ireland are more likely to have lower scores on the same variable.

The following part will be present the hypotheses derived from this literature review.

II.III Hypotheses

Through an intensive literature review of public opinion on policy, several theories have been identified which shall be quantitatively tested. The first three hypotheses refer to the self-interest argument from rational choice theory. The fourth hypothesis refers to individual's ideology assumption. The fifth hypothesis reflects the thermostatic model developed by Wlezien. Finally, the remaining hypotheses mirror the welfare regime typology of Esping-Andersen.

On the individual level, the literature review filtered two distinct theories, namely the self-interest argument and the ideological coherence theory. Both reflect the first four hypotheses. These are:

Ho1: There is no difference between male and female respondents on their perception on helping the poor and socially excluded and enable them to play an active part in society.

> Ha1: Female respondents are more likely to express that helping the poor and socially excluded is important than male respondents.

Ho2: There is no difference between social class and the view on the importance to help the poor and socially excluded and enable them to play an active part in society.

> Ha2: Respondents who consider themselves as working class are more likely to assign more importance to the poverty target than other social classes.

Ho3: There is no difference between single parents with one child or more and other marital and parental constellations in regard to the importance of helping the poor and socially excluded and enable them to play an active part in society.

Ha3: Single parents with one child or more are more likely to assign more importance to help the poor and socially excluded and enable them to play an active part in society than respondents with other statuses.

Ho4: There is no difference between respondents with specific political ideological beliefs on fair wealth distribution policies.

Ha4: Respondents with left political ideology are more likely to favor fair wealth distribution policies than respondents with liberal or conservative ideology.

On a national level, past studies have applied the thermostatic model and the welfare regime typology. The constructed hypotheses are worded as following:

Ho5: There is no difference between respondents living in countries where poverty and socially exclusion have decreased and respondents from countries where poverty and social exclusion has increased or remained stable on their opinion whether the Europe 2020 target has been set rightly.

Ha5: Respondents from countries which performed well in poverty reduction are more likely to perceive the target as too modestly set than respondents from countries which have not reduced poverty in the past few years.

Ho6: There is no difference between respondents embedded in a national social democratic welfare regime and respondents from countries with other welfare regime types on their view whether poverty requires urgent government action.

Ha6a: Respondents from Scandinavian countries are more likely to think that poverty requires urgent government action than respondents from other European countries.

Ha6b: Respondents from member states with a conservative welfare model are more likely to think that poverty requires government action than respondents from other European countries.

Ha6c: Respondents from member states with an Anglo-Saxon welfare model are more likely to think that poverty requires government action than respondents from other European countries.

III. Methodology

This section starts with the chosen research design. Afterwards, the chosen data base will be described more in depth. Finally the data analysis part will shed light on how the hypotheses will be tested and how valid and reliable the results will be.

III.I Research design

The research design is two-fold: first, the trend on the poverty target of Europe 2020 of the public perception will be presented. This trend is descriptive only and uses two data sets from 2010 and 2012. After presenting the trend on the poverty target, a cross-sectional design was chosen to test the hypotheses derived from literature and past empirical studies.

Past research has shown that public opinion is best captured when large representative data sets are chosen. These allow reliable generalization of the findings. However, cross-sectional designs which use existent survey data have the weakness that the variables may not reflect the theories being tested. However, the choices made here follow the same logic as in past research. A subpart will discuss the validity of the variable selection and the reliability. Secondly, I may find associations between two variables but I cannot assure that the relationship is also causal. Certainly, it is difficult to explore or explain factors shaping public opinion in-depth with transnational inquiries but it serves best to describe pattern of public opinion towards specific issues and revisit established theories or assumptions.

This study uses three standard Eurobarometer from 2010 (74.2; 74.1) and from 2012 (78.1). Number 74.2 and number 78.1 serve to describe the trend in public opinion on Europe 2020. The newer data set will be used to test the hypotheses excluding the ideology H4, which will be tested with data from number 74.1. The reason behind it is that the other two do not contain a political ideology variable. Furthermore, for H6 to see whether countries have successfully reduced poverty after the start of Europe 2020, a

new variable has been set up. The data on poverty or social exclusion reduction has been taken from Eurostats.

Although the data sets cover also countries outside of the European Union, I will focus only on the 27 member states[2] since the respondents from the EU are also affected by Europe 2020. Henceforth, the units of analysis are national Europeans from the member states which are in total 26723 respondents (74.2) and 26622 respondents (78.1). The data set for the ideology hypothesis will be also tested on the basis of the 27 member states which in total have 26635 respondents (74.1),

Eurobarometer surveys are distributed through national private and public agencies. The original questionnaires in English and French are sent to national agencies for translation and resend to check for consistency. The Eurobarometer applies a random sample design with at least 100 sampling points in the respective countries to reach all NUTS2 regions of EU. Furthermore, rural, urban and metropolitan areas within the regions are covered equally. Interviews have been conducted face-to-face in the respondents' home.

III.I.I Dependent variables

Three dependent variables are going to be used. The first one is taken from Eurobarometer 78.1 and is applied in H1 to H3 where respondents ranked the statement "to help the poor and socially excluded and enable them to play an active part in society" from 1 (not at all important) to 10 (very important). The second variable is taken from the Eurobarometer 74.1 and is applied in H4 and H6. Respondents were ask to rank whether they think that poverty in their country is a problem that needs urgent action by the government from 1 (totally agree) to 4 (totally disagree). The third dependent variable refers to H5 and is taken from the newest Eurobarometer. Respondents are asked to rank the statement that "the number of Europeans living below the poverty line should be reduced by a quarter by 2020" with 1 (too ambitious), 2 (about right), and 3 (too modest).

[2] Croatia is left out of the study because it has not received recommendations how to improve national situation according to Europe 2020 strategy before its accession in 2013

III.I.II Independent variables

Six independent variables will be used to test the established determinants of public opinion. These are gender (male / female), self-assigned social class (working class / middle class / upper class), single parent with child (yes / no), political ideology (left / centre / right), successful poverty reduction since 2010 (yes / no), and Scandinavian (yes / no). To be assigned for 'yes' in successful poverty reduction since 2010 variable member states have to illustrate that poverty gradually declined since 2010. This is the case for Bulgaria, Ireland, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and the United Kingdom.

III.II Data analysis

The data will be analyzed by using SPSS version 20. Since the measurement levels of all chosen variables is low (nominal and ordinal), I will perform a Mann-Whitney U test. Although parametric tests would be more valid and accurate, the data sets do not provide variables with high measurement level. The nonparametric counterpart to the student's t-test can provide statistically significant results between of two independent samples. The significance level will be set at alpha = 0.05.

III.II.I Validity

As already stressed out the statistical conclusion validity is due to categorical variables rather low. The sample sizes are big which makes the result more valid. The sample sizes of the countries depend on the population they represent on the continent. For instance Germany has a sample size of around 1500, whereas for instance Luxembourg has only a sample size of 500.

The internal validity is also rather low because the nonparametric tests provide statistical evidence on the difference between the independent samples but not whether the relationship is causal or which variable precedes the other. Findings from other studies will increase the cause-effect relationship. To overcome that threat, data from 2010 will be taken to show that the finding in the data set of 2012 is persistent over time. Additional, the bivariate analysis of my hypotheses may mask spurious relationships. The deployment of different dependent variables will make it difficult to compare the results with previous studies. However, the third explanatory variable is

very likely to be used in future Eurobarometer surveys and thus can be revisited. Finally, two points in time represent the cross-sectional design. Therefore I cannot stipulate the same outcome on 2012 for instance if the data for the hypothesis is from 2010.

IV. Analysis

IV.I What is the public opinion on the poverty target?

Is the poverty target seen critically by the European public similar to scholars and experts? The Eurobarometer data sets of 2010 (74.2) and 2012 (78.1) will serve here to filter a general trend of public opinion on the poverty target. For that reason, I will describe the public opinion on the poverty target of Europe 2020 by using country, country group, gender, and community type variables. The questions in the two data sets have been worded the same way.

In 2010, the average EU-27 public perception whether the poverty target of Europe 2020 is set right was 48.2 per cent with respondents from Greece showing the lowest value (27.7%) and respondents from Romania the highest value (64.5). The EU-27 average respondent's rate for the other two values (too ambitious and too modest) is almost equally distributed – 25.7 per cent and 26.1 per cent respectively. In comparison to the 2012 data set, the average EU-27 view was that 49.1 per cent were thinking that it is set right. So there is an overall increase in the public opinion on setting of the poverty target.

The public view from country group perspective shows also interesting patterns. Whereas only 45.3% respondents from Euro zone countries thought that the poverty target was set 'about right', respondents from non-Euro zone countries had a rather more positive view with 52.1 per cent. In 2012, the public opinion on the same matter increased for both groups as shown in the table below.

When dividing the opinion on gender, 48.7 per cent of male respondents thought on EU-27 average that the target is set right while only 47.6 per cent of female thought the

same way. Interestingly, this pattern changed in 2012 where the female perception increased by 2 per cent while the male perception dropped by 0.2 per cent.

Finally, the community type variable shows also increases in the perception on the poverty target. It is stronger for rural and small/medium sized towns and only marginal for urban areas.

Table 1: Percentage of Europeans thinking that the poverty target is set 'about right' in the years 2010 and 2012 divided by country, country group, gender, and type of community

Characteristic	2010	2012	Difference (= 2012-2010)
EU-27	**48.2%**	**49.1%**	**+0.9**
Greece	27.7%	28.2%	+0.5
Romania	64.5%	65.2%	+0.7
Euro Zone	45.3%	46.6%	+1.3
Non-Euro Zone	52.1%	52.6%	+0.5
EU-27 Male	**48.7%**	**48.5%**	**-0.2**
EU-27 Female	**47.6%**	**49.6%**	**+2.0**
EU-27 Rural	48.3%	49.4%	+1.1
EU-27 Small/Medium town	47.8%	49.1%	+1.3
EU-27 Large town	48.5%	48.7%	+0.2

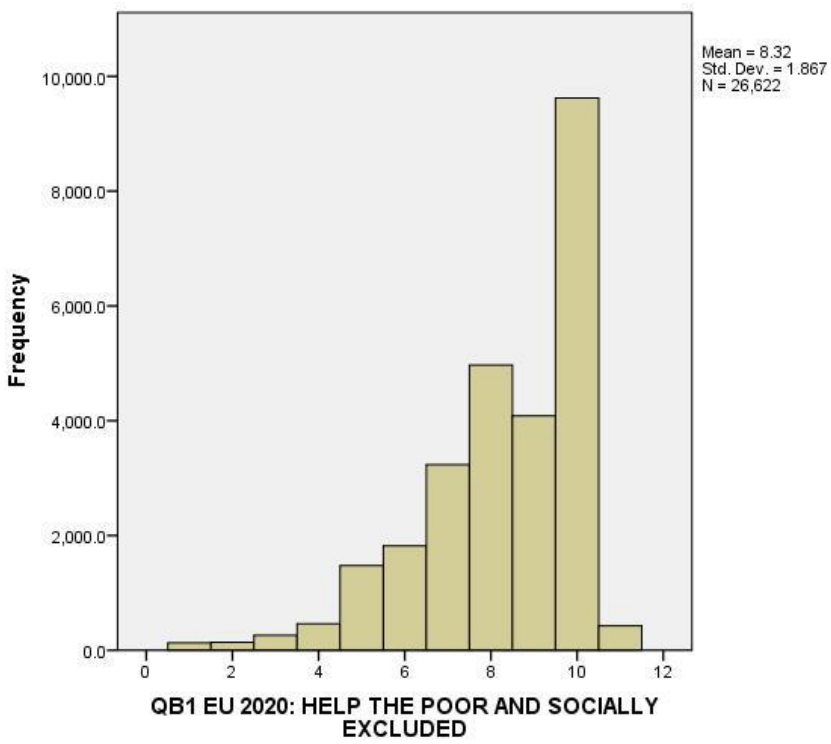
In Figure 1, one can observe that Europeans thought in 2012 that helping the poor and socially excluded is indeed a very important issue on the political agenda (mean = 8.32). Although less than fifty per cent think of European respondents think that the target is set right, more than half of the respondents agree on the fact that it is very important. To put it in a nutshell, Europeans agree that poverty in the European Union shall be tackled, but they are rather pessimistic that the target of twenty million is set right or in other words will be achieved.

Table 2: Percentage of EU-27 Europeans thinking that the eight targets of Europe 2020 are set 'about right' in the years 2010 and 2012

Target	2010	2012	difference
75% aged 20-64 in employment	59.1	58.6	-0.5
3% share of public budget for research & development	64.6	66.2	+1.6
Reduce greenhouse gas by 20%	56.2	58.4	+2.2
Increase renewable energy by 20%	60.6	62.1	+1.5
Increase energy efficiency by 20%	64.5	65.2	+1.7
School dropout rate at a maximum of 10%	54.2	53.8	-0.4
Minimum 40% of young European have a diploma	48.8	50.5	+1.7
25% less Europeans in poverty	**48.2**	**49.1**	**+0.9**

Compared to the other six target of Europe 2020, this discrepancy is observable here as well. Whereas on all other targets more than half of the respondents believe that the targets are set right, the public opinion on the poverty target is the least supportive.

Figure 1: Histogram of variable "help the poor and socially excluded and enable them to play an active part in society" from Eurobarometer 2012 with a Likert scale from 1 (not important at all) to 10 (very important)



Unluckily, the data sets do not provide comparable information on the other variables used to test the hypotheses. But they give a nice overview that the target is critically seen by 'ordinary' European citizens as well and not only by experts and scholars. However, there is an overall increase in the perception that it is set right. However, this decision was most certainly not caused by the fact that respondents have spent time to study poverty trends in Europe but rather by other factors. What are these factors determining the public perception? This will be analyzed in the following part.

IV.II Determinants of public opinion on the social dimension of Europe 2020

This section will provide the results of the empirical analysis on determinants of public opinion.

The first hypothesis assumed that there are significant differences between male and female respondents on whether the poor and the socially excluded should be helped though governmental institutions. The result of the Mann-Whitney U test confirms this demographic assumption ($U = 80791266.5$, $p<0.001$) with an alpha of five per cent. The mean rank of female respondents (= 13652.85) is significantly higher than the mean rank of male respondents (= 12912.29).

The second hypothesis was divided into two tests to check for differences between the working class and the liberal and conservative class separately. The result of H2a confirms the alternative hypothesis ($U = 650893223.5$, $p<0.001$) that respondents who perceive themselves as working class are more in favor that poor and socially excluded should be helped (mean rank = 13125.92) than middle class (mean rank = 11642.68). The same result was found in H2b when the working class was compared to the upper class ($U = 2858231.5$, $p<0.001$).

The third and final hypothesis based on the self-interest argument of rational choice theory also found strong evidence to reject the null hypothesis via the Mann-Whitney U test ($U = 31731755$, $p = 0.006$). Single parents, including divorced and widowed, assign more importance to help the poor and socially excluded than all other statuses (singles, couples with or without child, divorced but without child, etc.). Interestingly, if female respondents are filtered out, respondents from group 1 (single male parents) and group 2 (couples and other status) have statistically no different position with an alpha of 5 per cent on the same dependent variable ($U = 1547093$, $p = 0.071$). Subsequently, female respondents show higher statistical significance to reject the null hypothesis ($U = 8642770.5$, $p = 0.005$).

The fourth hypothesis based on the ideological belief was similarly divided into two tests as the class hypothesis. The result is that there is a difference between left and centre ideology ($U = 25544009$, $p<0.001$) but interestingly respondents with a left ideology have a lower mean rank (= 7225.36) than respondents who placed themselves in the middle of the political spectrum (mean rank = 7542.59). Therefore respondents with centre ideology favor the statement that poverty needs urgent government action more than left wing respondents. The same applies when left and right ideological beliefs are

compared (mean ranks are 5394.23 and 6442.21 respectively). This finding stands in contradiction with the assumption!

On country level, the thermostatic model represented by H5 could not be confirmed (U = 53537130.5, p= 0.0905). Therefore there is no difference between 'well performer countries' and 'bad performer countries' regarding poverty reduction.

Finally, the welfare regime typology H6 is divided in three alternative hypotheses representing each type of Esping-Andersen's welfare models. Respondents from Finland, Denmark, and Sweden which stand for the social democratic welfare regime agree statistically significantly more on the question whether poverty needs urgent government action (U = 22955811, p<0.001). The mean ranks differ strongly between respondents from social democratic welfare regimes and respondents from the other twenty-four member states of the Union (17030.85 and 12615.59 respectively). The null hypothesis is also rejected with an alpha of five per cent for respondents from Austria and Germany (conservative welfare model) but as in H4 respondents from other member states have a higher mean rank (= 13187.24) than the 2565 respondents from Germany and Austria (mean rank = 12463.82).[3] Finally, respondents from Great Britain, Northern Ireland, and Ireland responded significantly more in favor that poverty needs governmental action (U = 26409048, p = 0.017) than respondents from other member states. As the p-value already signifies the difference in the mean ranks is not as high as for respondents from social democratic welfare states (13440.38 and 13085.89).

To sum up, all (alternative) hypotheses on the individual level have been found to be statistically significant with the Mann-Whitney U test. Apart from H3, all even show very high statistical significance with a p-value of <0.001. Surprisingly, the ideological assumption does hold true for right wing respondents rather than left wing respondents, which is contrary to the hypothesis. Therefore I can conclude that public opinion on poverty reduction is framed by gender, social status, political ideology, and by marital and parental status.

[3] See Table 4 for Mann-Whitney U value and p-value

When looking at the national level hypotheses H5 and H6, the nonparametric test has shown that H6 is statistically significant but again surprisingly respondents from conservative welfare models are less likely to favor the statement that poverty requires urgent government intervention. The results from H6c were also not as expected. The only hypothesis where the null hypothesis could not be rejected is H5. Henceforth, the analysis has provided ambiguous evidence that individual opinion is shaped by the national welfare regime type and could not approve the association between 'well performer' countries and the individuals' point of view on the Europe 2020 poverty or social exclusion reduction target.

The next section will critically discuss the findings and provide some explanation for the outcome.

IV.III Discussion

The findings presented in the previous section require some explanation. To do so, other explanatory academic articles will be consulted.

The finding that male and female have different views on welfare in general and poverty in particular is called the "gender gap phenomenon" and the "feminization of poverty" (Gidengil et al., 2003, p.141). It can be explained from two perspectives: on the one hand the structural and situational factors contribute to different experiences between men and women and on the other hand socialization in childhood has shaped a certain gender role, which is commonly referred to as socio-psychological differences. The structural factors are explained by the gender difference in employment and material discrepancy (see for instance income). Furthermore as the traditional roles (working men and housewife) erode, working women foster more provisions safeguarding a proper reconciliation of work and family hood (Manza and Brooks, 1998 in Gidengil et al., 2003). Socio-psychological explanations for the gender difference on poverty focus on the moral imperatives. Men, independent from their origin, tend to place individual self-fulfillment above all other values whereas women give primacy to relationships. Women regard the society as "a web of connection[s]" and men endorse a "hierarchical conception of society" (Gilligan, 1982 in Gidengil et al., 2003, p.142).

Svallfors (1997) analysis has shown that “class and gender differences are clear-cut and persistent across various national contexts” (p.295) when it comes to redistributive policies and public opinion. The confirmation of the first two alternative hypotheses on anti-poverty policy reflects these findings. The classes are defined by their income and hence individuals with relative small income (e.g. working class) are more in favor for anti-poverty policy since he/she is more at risk of becoming poor according to the indicators of the poverty target of Europe 2020.

The status hypothesis shows two interesting patterns: first, the confirmation of the alternative hypothesis suggests that single parents may also count themselves as risk group to become poor or socially excluded and thus may support anti-poverty policy more than respondents with other status. Secondly, the gender gap shows itself here as well. For future research this finding may serve as starting point for the explanatory power of the gender difference, which is even above the individuals’ respective marital and parental status.

The ideological belief hypothesis has also revealed interesting pattern. Why do politically left respondents do not favor the statement that poor and socially excluded should be helped? Certainly, individuals with political right ideology are also expected to favor anti-poverty policy since they are more supportive for a ‘strong’ interventionist state but the finding that individuals in the centre of the political spectrum are even showing more support than left wing individuals is extraordinary. This pattern may be the result of the relatively low validity of the statistical test.

The thermostatic model could not be approved through the design and analysis of this study. It may be that the result falsely confirmed a wrong null hypothesis (type II error) since the p-value has been relatively small. However, it might be too early to see actual results on poverty reduction according to the combined three indicators. Revisiting this assumption in the next few years with more valid statistical tests might lead to different findings.

Finally, the welfare typology hypotheses have shown contradictory findings. As in past studies, applying welfare typology has causal and conceptional flaws as already

stressed out in the theoretical framework. First, there are no ideal types and political actors do not have the intention to approximate one of the three types. Secondly, according to Cantillon (2011) Western countries independent from their welfare regime type have adopted a social investment strategy for public welfare expenditure since the 1990s where not equal outcomes were pursued but rather equal opportunities. This strategy can be partially blamed for the negative poverty trends in Europe because economically viable individuals are promoted rather than the "free riders" of social welfare. Paired with the on-going economic crisis, protection policies become more and more expensive and economically less attractive.

V. Conclusion

The analysis of the public opinion on anti-poverty policy and the social dimension of Europe 2020 has shown that Europeans think that poverty and social exclusion has to be tackled (see Figure 1), but on the other hand the majority does not believe that the poverty target of the European Union is set right. The academic critique of the social dimension of Europe 2020 is therefore also mirrored in the public opinion on the target.

Furthermore, the hypotheses testing has approved past findings on welfare provision by applying them on one particular part, namely poverty. Gender, class, political ideology, and parental and marital status move one's opinion on poverty on individual level according to the results of the Mann-Whitney U test. Country characteristics however, could not be approved (thermostatic model) or provided rather ambiguous results (welfare typology).

Nonetheless many aspects have not been considered as for instance how media influences public opinion. Hewstone (2011) argued that public opinion surveys for analysis are more valuable when the role of the general public attitude is limited. Asking Europeans whether the reduction of a quarter of impoverished and socially excluded Europeans is set right requires a good understanding of poverty in Europe. Page et al. (1987) argued that most people don't have the incentive to invest effort and time to follow technocratic debates on alternative policies. Thus individuals tend to act or reply

on instinct rather than balance alternative policies against each other in their mind before answering.

For future research direction I propose to investigate the thermostatic model more in-depth. The Europe 2020 strategy started three years ago and hence more data on public opinion will be available soon. A longitudinal design may provide enough evidence to demonstrate how public opinion has pressured national policymakers to implement not just targets but more importantly actual policies against poverty.

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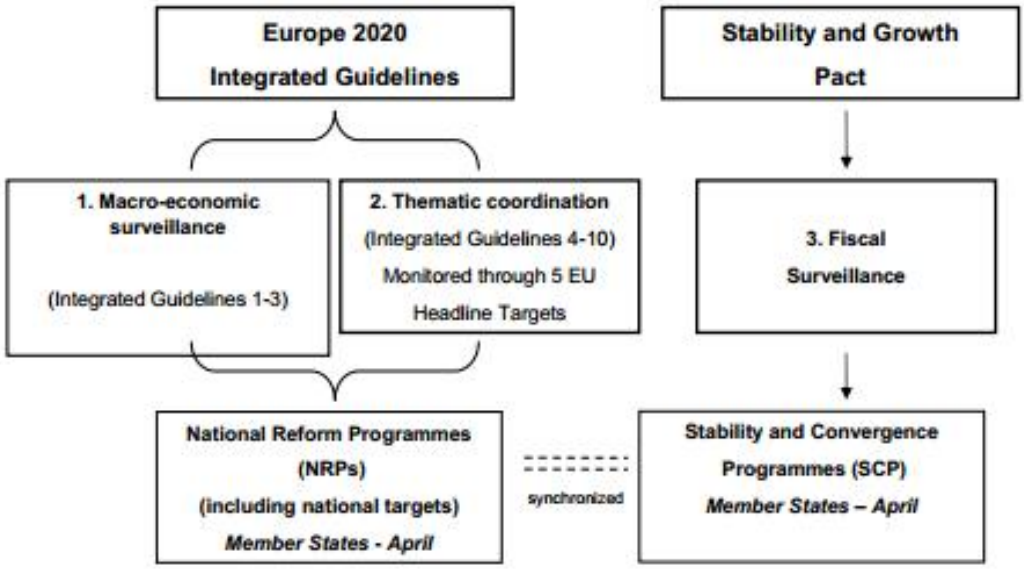
Annex

Figure 2: Functioning of Europe 2020


Europe 2020
Integrated Guidelines
Stability and Growth
Pact
1. Macro-economic surveillance
(Integrated Guidelines 1-3)
2. Thematic coordination
(Integrated Guidelines 4-10)
Monitored through 5 EU
Headline Targets
3. Fiscal
Surveillance
National Reform Programmes
(NRPs)
(including national targets)
Member States - April
synchronized
Stability and Convergence
Programmes (SCP)
Member States – April

	Reduction of poverty in number of persons (estimated contribution[4] to EU target)	Indicator(s) used	Total number of people at-risk-of poverty or exclusion (2008)
AT	235,000	Same as EU target	1,530,000
BE	330,000-380,000	Same as EU target	2,190,000
BG	260,000 (500,000)	At-risk-of poverty rate	3,420,000
CY	18,000	Same as EU target	174,000
CZ	30,000	Same as EU target	1,570,000
DE	330,000 (660,000)	Long-term unemployment	16,350,000
DK	22,000	?	890,000
EE	49,500	At-risk-of-poverty rate	290,000
EL	450,000	Same as EU target	3,050,000
ES	No target in NRP		10,340,000
FI	150,000	Same as EU target	910,000
FR	1,600,000 [5]	Anchored at-risk-of poverty	11,240,000
HU	450,000-500,000	Same as EU target	2,790,000
IE	186,000	Overlap between the risk-of-poverty and material deprivation	1,050,000
IT	2,200,000	Same as EU target	15,100,000
LT	170,000	Same as EU target	980,000
LU	3,000	Same as EU target	72,000
LV	121,000	At-risk-of poverty rate	760,000
MT	6,560	Same as EU target	79,000
NL	No target in NRP		2,430,000
PL	1,500,000-2,000,000	Same as EU target	11,490,000
PT	200,000	To be defined	2,760,000
RO	580,000	At-risk-of poverty rate	9,420,000
SE	No quantitative target in NRP		1,370,000
SI	40,000	Same as EU target	360,000
SK	170,000	Same as EU target	1,110,000
UK	Existing child poverty target	Risk-of-poverty of children + children in JLH	14,060,000

Source: Draft NRPs

Figure 3: Poverty reduction indicator of each member state

Table 3: Decommodification in old-age pension, sickness benefits and unemployment insurance (1980 and 1998/99) retrieved from Bambra (2006, p.75)

Esping-Andersen decommodification index[a] (1980)					*Updated decommodification index[b] 1998/99*				
	Pensions	Unemployment	Sickness	Combined		Pensions	Unemployment	Sickness	Combined
Australia	5.0	4.0	4.0	13.0	N. Zealand	6.5	2.5	2.5	11.5
USA	7.0	7.2	0	13.8	Australia	6.5	–	2.5	13.5[c]
N. Zealand	9.1	4.0	4.0	17.1	USA	7.0	7.0	0	14.0
Canada	7.7	8.0	6.3	22.0	UK	5.4	4.6	5.4	15.4
Ireland	6.7	8.3	8.3	23.3	Japan	4.6	7.6	–	18.3[c]
UK	8.5	7.2	7.7	23.4					
Italy	9.6	5.1	9.4	24.1	Ireland	9.8	6.6	5.7	22.1
Japan	10.5	5.0	6.8	27.1	Italy	10.7	6.2	10.7	27.6
France	12.0	6.3	9.2	27.5	Germany	7.6	9.2	10.9	27.7
Germany	8.5	7.9	11.3	27.7	Canada	10.5	8.1	–	27.9[c]
Finland	14.0	5.2	10.0	29.2	Netherlands	10.5	9.1	8.4	28.0
Switzerland	9.0	8.8	12.0	29.8	Denmark	9.1	9.1	10.8	29.0
Austria	11.9	6.7	12.5	31.1	Switzerland	9.9	–	–	29.7[c]
Belgium	15.0	8.6	8.8	32.4	Austria	15.1	7.1	8.9	31.1
Netherlands	10.8	11.1	10.5	32.4	France	15.3	8.5	7.7	31.5
Denmark	15.0	8.1	15.0	38.1	Belgium	14.3	10.0	7.6	31.9
Norway	14.9	9.4	14.0	38.3	Norway	13.4	10.3	10.3	34.0
Sweden	17.0	7.1	15.0	39.1	Finland	16.4	9.1	9.1	34.6
					Sweden	13.9	10.4	10.4	34.7
Mean	10.7	7.1	9.2	27.2	Mean	10.4	7.9	7.4	25.7
SD	3.4	1.9	4.0	7.7	SD	3.7	2.2	3.5	7.6

Notes:
[a] Esping-Andersen, (1990: 52).
[b] Bambra (2005b).
[c] Insufficient data to calculate some of the component index scores and so the combined score represents an average of available scores (for details see Bambra, 2005b).

Table 4: individual-level hypotheses testing

Name	Year of data set	Group variable	Dependent variable	Statistical test	Mann-Whitney U value	Significance (1-tailed)	Null hypothesis
H1	2012	Sex	Importance to help the poor and socially excluded	Mann-Whitney U test	80791266.5	<0.001	Reject
H2a	2012	Working class / middle class	Importance to help the poor and socially excluded	Mann-Whitney U test	650893223.5	<0.001	Reject

H2b	2012	Working class / upper class	Importance to help the poor and socially excluded	Mann-Whitney U test	2858231.5	<0.001	Reject
H3	2012	Single parent / couple and other status	Importance to help the poor and socially excluded	Mann-Whitney U test	31731755	0.006	Reject
H3a	2012	Single male parent / couple and other status	Importance to help the poor and socially excluded	Mann-Whitney U test	1547093	0.071	Confirm
H3b	2012	Single female parent / couple and other status	Importance to help the poor and socially excluded	Mann-Whitney U test	8642770.5	0.005	Reject
H4a	2010	Left political ideology / Centre ideology	Poverty requires urgent government action	Mann-Whitney U test	25544009	<0.001	Reject[4]
H4b	2010	Left ideology / Right ideology	Poverty requires urgent government action	Mann-Whitney U test	14244064.5	<0.001	Reject[5]

[4] Alternative hypothesis was confirmed but in the other direction. Respondents with centre and right ideological belief favor governmental action against poverty more than respondents with right political ideology.
[5] See above

Table 5: country-level hypotheses testing

H5	2012	Well performer / bad performer country	Europe 2020 poverty target too ambitious / about right / too modest	Mann-Whitney U test	53537130.5	0.0905	Confirm
H6a	2010	Social democratic welfare regime / other	Poverty requires urgent government action	Mann-Whitney U test	22955811	<0.001	Reject
H6b	2010	Conservative welfare regime / other	Poverty requires urgent government action	Mann-Whitney U test	28678800	<0.001	Reject[6]
H6c	2010	Liberal welfare regime / other	Poverty requires urgent government action	Mann-Whitney U test	26409048	0.017	Reject

[6] Same as in H4: Respondents from conservative welfare models (here Austria and Germany) do agree less on the question whether poverty requires urgent government action than all other member states of the Union.