The refugee and the economic crises of the past years, the security threats coming from neighbour countries, as well as Brexit, are putting both European values and the EU political system under strain. In this scenario, the public’s desire for effective responses may turn into hostility towards political elites and the European project, especially if people feel their voices are unheard by their representatives in their national capital, or in Brussels. While competing to get their messages across to voters, politicians are often accused to misunderstand people’s concerns and priorities, citizens being increasingly seduced by parties promoting a fierce opposition to established governmental authorities and the EU.

The EUENGAGE project sought to address some of these hurdles by offering a sample of European citizens and national MPs the opportunity to interact and discuss the challenges the EU is currently facing in a moderated virtual arena. Online deliberation combined the need for more interaction – both amongst citizens, and between people and politicians – with the need for a mediated, responsive and more informed environment, where people and policy makers could engage in a constructive dialogue. The e-Voice event was set up to explore, test and develop innovative tools to address the elite-citizens gap, as well as to boost civic engagement.

From 17th to 27th October 2016, e-Voice involved about 300 citizens from 10 European countries (Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom).
Participants were randomly recruited from a pool of about 2,000 interviewees per country who had participated in the first wave of the EUENGAGE mass panel survey, carried out by the University of Siena, in partnership with Kantar Public, in June/July 2016. The survey sample provided sufficient size and diversity to recruit a well-balanced sample of participants for the online deliberation. By logging into an ad-hoc online platform provided by Krea-links through the use of personal usernames and passwords, participants could access the group they were assigned to (groups A, B, or C). Each group received different inputs, thus allowing to test different experimental conditions of public engagement. The content analysis of the verbatim records of the group discussions shows that immigration superseded all the other topics under debate—even if moderators, from time to time, encouraged participants to address the other issues as well. This result is confirmed by the results of the pre- and post-event questionnaires, administered to the participants via the online platform, with illegal migration to Europe being perceived as the most worrying problem both before and after the event (figure 1).

Figure 1. “To what extent are you concerned about ...?” (%) e-Voice pre- and post-deliberation surveys; (%; n=261).

There was only small change after participation in the e-Voice experiment in people’s awareness of the need to pursue a more coordinated action at the EU level in order to address the challenges in economy, migration and security. Overall, burden-sharing and EU scope of actions were considered as preferable for migration and security, while for the economy the authority of the Member States was instead preferred. The deliberation experiment did not produce any significant variation in those figures [figure 2]. Similarly, there was little change in participants’ opinion about the process of European integration, with people mostly placing in the middle when asked whether, on a 0-10 points scale, the unification of the EU has gone too far (0) or should be taken further, both before (average score = 5.3) and after the event (average score = 5.8).

The contents of the discussions, as well as the answers to the pre- and post-deliberation surveys, clearly revealed a prevailing concern for migration and economic issues. Participants showed also a great interest for the process of European integration, the legitimacy of the EU institutions and its mechanisms of decision-making. While some criticisms emerged, there was also awareness about the necessity of a more accountable and democratic Union which could effectively address the complex crises that the European continent is currently facing.
Given the exacerbation of the mass/elite divide within the democratic system, similar events could not only allow researchers and politicians to ascertain which issues are perceived as most pressing, but also to gauge the gap between the views of citizens and those of political leaders, understand their antecedents and consequences, and hopefully reconcile the specific interests of different national populations with the requirements of a large supranational Union.

To learn more about the E-Voice experiment see Basile et al. (2018), Mind the Gap: Effects of Online Deliberation on Citizens’ Participation and the Public-Elite divide, available as EUENGAGE WP at this link.

**Figure 2** Preferred level of action on migration, economy and security (%; n=261, pre- and post- deliberation surveys)
Divides over the EU migration and asylum policy among Europeans

The recent flow of irregular migrants to Europe has brought to light a potentially fatal divide among European Union (EU) member states. On the one hand, there are countries exposed to greater pressure either because they are at the border, that is, migrants’ main gateways to Europe, or because they are seen as favoured destinations; both demand a fair sharing of the ‘migrant burden’ among all EU member states. On the other hand, other countries reacted to the increasing influx of people to Europe by building fences at their borders and/or refusing to share the responsibility of hosting refugees with their overloaded neighbours. Against this backdrop, we explore the attitudes of public opinion and political elites towards a common EU migration policy grounded on solidarity and burden-sharing. Using data from the EUENGAGE mass and elite survey, we investigate patterns of convergence – or divergence – on the European Asylum and Migration policy (EAM) both within and across countries. Our analyses show that publics and leaders shape their preferences according to the level of their country’s exposure to the crisis. While in countries under pressure the EU is likely to be perceived as a ‘problem solver’ under emergency conditions, thus boosting claims for measures of burden-sharing, people in the least affected countries tend to reject the idea of bearing the costs of someone else’s crisis.

In order to assess whether citizens and political elites support a EU-wide, solidarity-based approach to the migration crisis, we examined how our samples answered to three different questions capturing both the general scope and two specific measures of the EAM.

The first question (scope of policy action) that we examined concerns the appropriate level (national vs. European) at which decisions about migration should be made, asking respondents whether their country or the EU should decide the yearly number of immigrants to be hosted, thus posing mandatory rather than voluntary quotas. The other two questions focus on solidarity, asking respondents about their level of approval of two different burden-sharing measures included in the EAM: financial help to countries under pressure and a relocation scheme aimed at alleviating the burden on frontline and destination countries. All questions used a 0-10 point scale with ‘0’ denoting a less ‘pro-European’ (in the case of scope of policy action) or ‘pro-solidarity’ (in the cases of financial help and relocation) option and 10 otherwise.

Francesco Olmastroni
Values on the right are mean differences (Δ=mass public–political elites) and t-values for a two-tailed t-test for independent samples (±95% confidence interval).

Given the low number of cases for estimation at the national level, confidence intervals for political elites are bootstrap estimates from 500 replications (±95% level of confidence).

Figure 1 (first graph from left) shows the orientations towards a strengthening of EU authority on the yearly number of migrants each country should take. A country-based division among our respondents clearly emerges. A first bloc is represented by those countries that are less affected by migrant and refugee arrivals and, at the same time, oppose a transfer of national sovereignty to the supranational level in this policy area, namely the Eastern countries (Czech Republic and Poland) and the UK. In these member states, public and political leaders converge in disapproving an enhanced EU scope of action. The small size and statistical insignificance of the mean differences reveal a certain degree of consensus across the two groups. Moving upwards in the scale, we find France, the Netherlands and Portugal, expressing mild disagreement for a EU-wide policy. However, while French (Δ=1.93) and Portuguese (Δ=1.39) elites tend to lean more towards the pro-EU alternative than their publics, there is not a significant difference between the two groups in the Netherlands.

Finally, on the opposite side of the continuum we find the frontline and destination countries (Germany, Greece, Italy and Spain), which are more likely to support a strengthening of EU decision-making power than other member-states. It has to be noted that in all these cases the general public shows more moderate attitudes than their politicians, mostly leaning to the middle-lower values – with the Greek public displaying an average value of 3.9. On the contrary, the political elites of these countries seem to be more convincingly supportive of a EU-wide approach.

Shifting to people’s orientation towards burden-sharing measures, we first look at the item referring to the financial help to countries under pressure (second graph of Figure 1). It should be noted that it explicitly mentions the asylum seekers, thus introducing the frame of people who are in condition of special need. In this case, the public and elites of the Czech Republic, Poland and the UK show more moderate stances than in the previous question, although they still tend to disagree with the idea that the costs of providing asylum should be shared among all the EU members, with no relevant differences between politicians and citizens. France, the Netherlands and, for the mass sample, Portugal confirm also for this item a somewhat neutral stance. Then, the last group of countries under pressure is convincingly placed in the pro-solidarity side of the continuum. In all these countries, the political elites express slightly a greater sense of solidarity than the general public. The only exception is Germany, where the two groups show a similar position (Δ=0.03). The last item under scrutiny refers to the most contested measure of burden-sharing, namely the relocation of migrants from the countries of arrival (mainly Greece and Italy) to other EU members. As already described, this measure has been a source of harsh discord within the EU institutions, with Eastern countries lagging behind their obligations on relocation. Our public opinion and elite data confirm the divisions within the European Council (third graph on the right of Figure 1). The two Eastern countries of our sample (i.e., Czech Republic and Poland) and the UK firmly oppose relocation measures, although less sharply than in the item referring to the policy scope. In this case, however, there is not a neutral group, as all other countries, although to a different extent, support the idea that all EU members should be responsible for the hosting of migrants. In these countries, political elites are more favourable to relocation than their publics, with statistically significant differences in France (Δ=1.96), Greece (Δ=0.94), Italy (Δ=0.83), Portugal (Δ=1.46) and Spain (Δ=1.41).
Overall, these findings confirm that there are country-based divisions among European publics and elites on the migration and asylum policy, drawing a line between destination frontline countries on the one side and the least affected countries on the other. Indeed, the same utilitarian considerations that drive the political debate within the EU institutions are likely to apply to citizens and tend to be mirrored also among the national leaders.

*The EUENGAGE survey was conducted in 10 European countries (Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom) from April to October 2016.

A COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY?

Pierangelo Isernia and Davide Angelucci

After having sunk into oblivion for more than five decades, European defence is back on top of the European agenda. From 2016, a remarkable flurry of activities has revamped this policy area. It started in an admittedly untimely way, on June 28, 2016 – five days after the British Referendum to leave the EU – with the launching of the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) by the High Representative Mogherini. This was followed by the Bratislava declaration in September, the implementation plan of the EUGS and the European Defence Action Plan in November, the Prague High-level European conference on defence and security in June 2017. Eventually, this flow of events culminated, on December 11, 2017, with the formal approval of PESCO by the Foreign Affairs council and the launch of a long time envisioned process that should gradually lead to the completion of a Common Security and Defence Policy and, ultimately, to a common defence enabling the EU to carry out crisis management missions outside its territory.

In line with the Lisbon Treaty, the activation of the Permanent Structured Cooperation provides member states with common standards and a legal basis for binding commitments on security and defence, laying down the first stone in the process of convergence towards a common European defence. From this perspective, PESCO is coherently embedded in the tiny-steps rationale that has been guiding the EU integration process from its inception as it adheres to a post-functionalist approach to integration: member states start their cooperation moving from technical issues, hoping support for increased cooperation will follow later.

Though the survey data collected by the EUENGAGE project in 2016(1), we try to shed light on some structural conditions that might derail or impress a virtuous movement to the process of European integration in the defence area. Among these conditions there is, on the one hand, the different distribution of preferences on security and defence among Member States and, on the other, the role of public opinion and the possibility of it being politicised on this issue as it has been on others.

Therefore, we focus our attention on the elite-mass interactions across countries to compare different policy preferences of Member States and to assess whether these might hamper the deepening of integration in this policy area.
Further, we look at the elite-mass gap to evaluate how likely defence is to become an arena of political conflict.

To understand how elites (national legislators) and the public align themselves on security and foreign issues three main dimensions need to be explored: the unilateralism vs European multilateralism dimension; the pro-NATO vs pro-EU dimension; the supranational vs inter-governmental dimension.

We investigate countries’ preferences on PESCO and common defence by looking firstly at the elite position on these three dimensions and we then match the elite and mass positions, in trying to assess whether there is a gap, potentially exploitable by either domestic or international actors.

The second dimension, the NATO vs EU preferred institutional solution to a common defence, some countries (under the German aegis) do prefer a strong NATO while others (under the France leadership) do prefer a EU solution. On the third dimension, whether EU defence should be under an intergovernmental or rather supranational umbrella, we note a cleavage running from North to South. In the South, all elites lean toward the supranational pole, including countries like the Czech Republic and Poland. The Netherlands and UK lay on the intergovernmental pole, with France and Germany in between. We found evidence of two conflicting dimensions that might prevent PESCO from being a success: on the one hand,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Unilateral vs Multilateral</th>
<th>NATO vs EU</th>
<th>Supranational vs Intergovernmental</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>5.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>5.5</td>
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<td>3.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Rep.</td>
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<td>3.8</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>7.4</td>
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<td>4.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Dimensions of European defence (elites only)

The British public is definitely more multilateral than its elites. In all other countries, although elites are always more in favour of multilateralism than the general public, also the public leans toward the multilateral approach.

Lacking straightforward comparisons for the other two dimensions, we analyze the elite-mass
gap as proxied by their different distribution on the ‘National vs European Army’ question(2). Here we assume that:

- Those supportive of a “only European” army are strongly pro-EU and Supranational;
- Those supportive of both “European and national armies” are open to either a Supranational or an Intergovernmental solution;
- Those supportive of an “only national” army can only be open to Intergovernmental solutions (3).

Table 2 clusters countries in these three groups. A first group is made of the Netherlands and UK. At the elite level they both stand as pro-NATO and inter-governmentalists. Public opinion and elites are closer in UK than in the Netherlands. In the UK elites are more nationalist in their orientation than the public (71% of the elites prefer a National army, as compared to 55% of the public) but the distribution among the public is similar to the one for the elites. In the Netherlands, instead, the majority of the political elite is for a National army only, while a majority of the public is for some form of European army (46% for both a National and European army and 19% for a European army only).

In other words, Dutch elites face domestically a more pro-European public than the British elites. A second group is led by Germany and it includes Poland, Czech and Portugal.

This cluster presents a pattern characterized by similar distributions for the public and the elites, with ‘both national and European’ as the most favored option. In this respect, Germany is slightly different from the other three countries, being the only country in which at least a fifth of the public is in favour of a European army only.

The third and last group includes France, Greece, Italy and Spain, where the majority is in favour of a European only, or both a European and a national army. However, in Spain the distribution is pretty similar among elites and the general public, while in France, Greece and Italy the elite-public stances show some differences. Italy is the country in which a plurality of the political elites is in favor of a European only army, while the majority of the public is supporting the “both” option.
In France and Greece instead, while strong majorities of elites are in favour of a “both” option, they have to face a substantial minority (one fourth of the national public) that prefers instead the “national only” option.

To conclude, we found evidence of two conflicting dimensions that might prevent PESCO from being a success: on the one hand, cross-countries differences as to the desired level of policy coordination and the nature of the EU-NATO relations reveal a fracture between intergovernmentalists (Netherlands and UK) and supranationalists (all other countries), and between NATO supporters (Germany, Czech Republic, Poland, Portugal) and EU supporters (France, Greece, Italy, Spain). On the other hand, looking at the mass-elite interaction within each country, a potentially exploitable gap has emerged in the Netherlands, where a more sovereignist elite confronts a EU supportive general public; and in France and Greece, where a pro-EU elite has to face a substantial minority in favour of sovereignist solutions to problems of defence.

NOTES:

1. The EUENGAGE survey was conducted in 10 European countries (Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom) from April to October 2016.
2. “Some say that we should have one single EU Army. Others believe that every country should keep its own national army. Which of the following comes closest to your view?”
3. Based on our assumptions we should expect that the net support for the European only solution should be positive in France, Greece, Italy and Spain, whereas it should be close to zero in Czech Republic, Germany, Portugal and Poland (as the majority should be found among those who choose the “both national and European”). To test the robustness of our assumptions we compared the distribution of the elite sample on the ‘Army’ question with our expectations as derived by the elite position on the three dimensions analysed in this study. Resulting data broadly support our expectations.
Events

Euengage Workshop
“Measuring Euroscepticism”

January 27, 2018,
Unitelma Sapienza University of Rome
EU ENGAGE PROJECT

The EU ENGAGE project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. Its main goal is to inquire into the current tensions between supranational EU governance and popular mobilisation at the national level, critically questioning EU driven policies and EU legitimacy, and to propose remedial actions based on sound empirical research on the relationship between public opinion, national and supranational political elites.

“The EU ENGAGE project identifies in the conflicting messages emanating from the functioning of political representation a critical and urgent problem for the future of the EU”.

In this perspective it proposes to set up an interactive, dynamic, multilevel and replicable quasi-experimental research design. Using a variety of instruments and techniques, it will allow not only to study the process of representation in vivo, but also to experiment how innovative and efficient interactions between citizens and politicians can increase the awareness of citizens of the common problems of the Union, and the ability of the European leadership to respond innovatively to the discontent of public opinion.