Over three years, EUENGAGE has sought to explore the changing orientations of public opinion, parties, political leadership, and the media in times of crisis as they relate to the identity, cohesion, institutions, and policies of the EU. The project has pursued four main goals:

- To ascertain which aspects of the European integration project are seen more critically;
- To gauge the gaps between citizens and political leaders;
- To study ways to address these gaps; and
- To propose policy remedies to address the challenges the EU is facing, based on the insights provided by EUENGAGE data.

EUENGAGE addressed these goals through an interactive, dynamic, multilevel, and repeatable quasi-experimental research design, using a variety of both well-established and new observational instruments. This multi-method approach yielded a valuable amount of data, allowing for the triangulation of various data points.

Most of the data was collected in a subset of ten European countries: the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom. They were selected to cover the main dimensions of variation across the EU: North/South, more/less affected by the Eurocrisis and the refugee crisis, old/new member states, East/West, and Eurozone/not Eurozone. Further data was gathered in all 27 member states plus the UK.
The project generated 8 different datasets covering different aspects of EU polity such as public opinion, elite attitudes, party positions, social media, electronic media and deliberative democracy.

A public opinion panel survey, conducted in 2016 and 2017 with the same pool of respondents in the ten EUENGAGE countries, offers a thorough overview of citizens’ attitudes towards European integration (the “demand” side), with a focus on the issues of the economy, migration, and security, and shows how these views have evolved. It explores themes such as the surrender of competencies to the EU, the mechanisms and actors of political representation, Brexit, and citizens’ support for burden-sharing measures at the EU level. It also investigates attitudes on a wide range of issues related to the EU, as well as individual positions on tolerance, trust, solidarity, globalization, and ideology.

The “supply” side was explored with three research tools, each addressing a specific level of the political system, namely parties, political leaders, and political elites.

First, expert surveys were conducted in 2014 and 2017, and a content analysis of the party manifestos published before the EP elections of 2014 provided estimates of party positions on a wide range of issues, including those related to the EU. The 2014 expert surveys included data from parties in 28 member states plus Norway, Switzerland, and Turkey, and was supplemented by separate surveys conducted in the Balkan candidate countries; the 2017 expert surveys included data from the ten EUENGAGE countries plus Estonia, Hungary, Slovakia, and Sweden. Euromanifestos data was collected for all relevant parties, meaning those with at least one seat in the EP that were running in 2014 elections. Second, an analysis of speeches delivered between 2007 and 2015 by the leaders of the main European institutions and the International Monetary Fund, as well as the prime ministers of the ten EUENGAGE countries, offers an overview of leaders’ political discourse in times of crisis.

Third, waves of elite surveys were conducted in parallel with the two waves of the mass survey in the ten EUENGAGE countries to explore the attitudes of national parliamentarians, plus a small sample of European parliamentarians, and to gauge the areas of convergence and divergence with their respective constituencies.

In order to compare elites and public attitudes, and therefore to gauge gaps, the public opinion and elite questionnaires were mostly overlapping.

The research done on the supply side also sheds light on the ongoing transformations of the political system and the increasing importance of new vectors of political conflict.

The “media” side was explored through the analysis of social and online media, which provided an in-depth understanding of the public debate on the European Union.

Social media analysis collected tweets from, to, or mentioning EP candidates, and Twitter communication concerning the 2016 Brexit referendum. Online media analysis, meanwhile, examined the content of news articles from 30 of the most important media outlets from the ten EUENGAGE countries, covering topics like Brexit, immigration, security, and the economy.
Focus on EUENGAGE results

European citizens show a limited inclination to give the EU more authority on economic and migration policy, especially the Czechs, while Italians were more neutral on migration, and Spaniards on the economy. On the other hand, majorities within the EU thought that EU member states should respond to major security threats together rather than chart their own courses [Figure 1].

Parties

The portrait of party attitudes that emerged from the expert survey showed that Euroskeptic and anti-immigrant parties are also those paying more attention to Europe and immigration in their political discourse. This was confirmed by a content analysis of the party manifestos of European Parliament elections, which showed far-right parties putting more emphasis on issues related to the competences, legitimacy, and complexity of the EU than mainstream and far-left parties. These parties adopted very critical positions on the EU’s handling of migration policies.

Finally, an online deliberation exercise was carried out in October 2016 to explore the potential of participation to foster political awareness and public engagement at the EU level. The EUENGAGE online deliberation exercise created a mediated, responsive, and informed environment, where, for eleven days, a group of 285 people selected from the same pool of respondents as the public opinion survey could discuss Europe and the challenges it is facing, interact with experts and politicians on these themes, play role-playing games on distributive justice and public policy choices, and formulate policy proposals.

The research tools developed by the project should provide the scientific community with not only a rich database for the study of European integration, but also templates for future research that might find application in other contexts.
Focus on EUENGAGE results

European citizens seemed to support burden-sharing at the EU level on economic and migration issues.

When looking at national figures, however, the picture is more varied. There was general support for solidarity measures on migration, though it was stronger in those countries that are more exposed to the financial crisis first and the refugee crisis [Fig. 2].

LEADERS

A systematic analysis of leaders’ speeches revealed that, when electoral risk is high but governments’ policy options are severely limited, prime ministers tend to engage in blame-shifting – that is to say, their discourse on banks, EU institutions, other EU member states, and the Troika became increasingly negative. This does not bode well for burden-sharing.

FIG2. EU ENGAGE Mass survey July-August 2017. “For each of the following policy alternatives, please position yourself on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means that you fully support the policy on the left and 10 means that you fully support the policy on the right. If your views are somewhere in between, you can choose any number that best describes your position.”
-sents the last, concluding output of the EUENGAGE Project, providing policy input to the European Commission. The document will be also shared and disseminated to a wider audience, to contribute to the discussion on the future of European integration and to provide policymakers with indicators that would make them able to recognise an unfolding scenario at its early stages, and those factors and players that would make them possible or prevent them from happening.

The event was organized so as to encourage the participants, to discuss and share their opinions in a way that guarantees to all participants the possibility to express themselves and to collaborate with each other. For this purpose, participants were divided into 3 round tables, one for each scenario discussed, and each table supported by a facilitator from the EUENGAGE Staff (Linda Basile and Francesco Olmastroni – UNISI, and Olivier Parnet – Kantar). Participants were randomly assigned to scenarios, which were: Integration, Disintegration, and Business as Usual.

The working group sessions alternated with plenary sessions, where the results of group discussions were shared. Each group of participants discussed one of the three different scenarios for the future of Europe during two rounds of discussion. In the first round, the first question on the plausibility of each scenario, the main drivers, and the possible outcomes was launched. Results were then collectively discussed by all groups in the Plenary session. In the second round, the second question on the branching points that might lead each scenario towards one outcome or another was launched. Results were eventually collectively discussed by all groups in the final Plenary session.

The scenarios were designed on the basis of the documents prepared by Professors Stefano Bartolini (EUI), Robert Ladrech (Keele University), Jurg Steiner (UNC Chapel Hill), and Jan Zielonka (Oxford University), who sent to UNISI research team their insightful reflections on possible future scenarios for the European integration. These documents were further re-elaborated into a knowledge map, which was distributed among participants prior to the event. The knowledge map contained a short description of each scenario and the questions that will be addressed within each group discussion, as well as a short summary of the main findings of the EUENGAGE research, used as “food for thought” to inspire discussion. The original experts’ documents on scenarios were not distributed among participants, to avoid influencing discussion, while they represented the baseline background material at facilitators’ disposal.

The day was introduced by a welcome speech of the OSEPI’s director, Dr. Heather Grabbe, and the introduction to the event by Prof. Pierangelo Isernia (UNISI) and Dr. Iolanda Romano (Avventura Urbana). It followed a record of the interview to H.E. Ferdinando Nelli Feroci, president of the Institute of International Affairs (IAI) in Rome. The video with the full interview is available on Youtube and in the project’s website.

The event was organised with the methodological support and expert advice of Avventura Urbana (AU), an Italian company that has been working on collaborative processes and alternative dispute resolution for more than 20 years. Under the coordination of Dr. Iolanda Romano, with the assistance of Dr. Irene Garbato, AU supported the UNISI research team in the design of the event in line with the deliberative method. In the months preceding the event, AU and UNISI kept a constant communication for setting up the event, by providing advice on the schedule and the structure of the rounds of discussion for an effective deliberative process. AU also provided training to the events’ facilitators, who are part of the EUENGAGE research network and were recruited for their previous experiences in deliberative events. During the event, AU staff supported the UNISI team in delivering the discussions’ results and coordinating the plenary sessions.

The main results of the event are discussed in the following pages.
As EUENGAGE data shows, the EU is at a crossroads. The multiple crises have seriously challenged the European integration project, and have further exposed the weaknesses stemming from the EU’s perceived “democratic deficit” and its institutional inefficiencies. As a result, there is little support for further strengthening the EU’s authority or its solidarity measures.

It is impossible to predict the future of European integration with any certainty in a situation as complex as the one the EU finds itself in today. However, three possible scenarios for the near-term future of Europe (2030) warrant consideration: DISINTEGRATION, BUSINESS AS USUAL, and INTEGRATION. For each potential scenario, a group of researchers, think tankers, and stakeholders has sought to identify three key elements:

1. The main drivers that make the scenario more likely, meaning structural conditions and trends like migration flows and rate of economic growth;
2. The branching points, if any, that could shift Europe’s trajectory from one outcome to another within a given scenario, meaning the turning points, such as elections, referendums, surges of support for specific party families, unexpected natural disasters, and social upheavals; and
3. The possible outcomes of each scenario, that is to say the different “shapes” they could take.

**BUSINESS AS USUAL: Drivers, branching points, and outcomes**

A number of factors advancing a “business as usual” scenario are evident. First and foremost, a “status quo” is often easier than significant change; most political leaders have little incentive to undertake any dramatic change, especially as public opinion tends to be against it. Second, the EU has already survived serious crises without structurally changing. In this sense, Brexit has created a precedent: One country leaving will not mean EU disintegration. Third, there is still some consensus on the “founding baseline” of the Internal Market.

Other likely drivers include the rise of Euroskeptic parties, which push traditional parties to re-affirm their pro-integration positions.

Since a “status quo” is by nature a subjective notion, however, this scenario includes several possible alternative outcomes:

- A “Status quo minus,” meaning an EU shaped by conflict between national member states’ needs and the EU’s responses, leading to increasing dissatisfaction and diminished European ambitions;
- A “two-level EU,” with some member states driving the group towards deeper integration while others lean towards national sovereignty; and
- A “Status quo plus,” meaning an EU that has finalized the European Stability Mechanism, updated legislation governing the internal market, and provided funding to implement these tools. This scenario also assumes what could be called “easy solidarity,” which would rely on income from new taxes to increase the resources available to redistribute to member states.
**DISINTEGRATION: Drivers, branching points, and outcomes**

There are a number of drivers that could lead to a disintegration of the European project, even if such a disintegration might not be obvious, or even clearly observable, in the next ten years. The first driver is the fragmentation of political elites: Euroskeptic challengers are rising across Europe, and mainstream political actors have failed to effectively campaign for the EU, let alone address concrete issues like redistribution and transnational solidarity. The second driver is the EU’s seeming inability to incorporate public opinion in its decision-making processes, along with the lack of accountability of the EU institutions, which further alienates the EU from its citizens. The third factor is representation at the national level, with MEPs often considering themselves more accountable to their national constituencies and fellow citizens than Europe as a whole. Fourth, Germany and its leadership play a hegemonic role in the EU institutions, shaping decisions and policies at the EU level. Fifth, calls for new referendums to leave the EU, following the example of the United Kingdom. Sixth, structural transformations of capitalist economies and international markets, global migration, changes to transatlantic political norms, and rising global powers like China and Russia all alter the international environment in which the EU operates.

A possible response to these drivers is “re-integration”, that is, moving from interdependency to new forms of integration, including a multiple-speed Europe. This process might represent either a risk or an opportunity; it could further destabilize the existing EU institutional scheme, or provide an opportunity to build legitimacy and stronger connections between the peoples of Europe.

New constellations of power may also emerge: National disintegration, like that threatened in breakaway regions like Catalonia and Scotland, may create new opportunities for integration among the regions of Europe. Cities and megacities would form the center of this new scenario, acting as engines of innovation. In this institutional framework, integration would be chiefly functional rather than territorial, and networks of cooperation would often be global rather than European. Spontaneous, informal, and hybrid cooperative arrangements between numerous private and public actors would develop. The result would be a polyphonic neo-Medieval Europe, with states no longer able to respond to external conditions (i.e., economic shocks, migration, security etc.).

**INTEGRATION: Drivers, branching points, and outcomes**

Institutional drivers, like the European Parliament, the Commission, and the Council, as well as policy drivers, such as the financial, security, and refugee crises and globalization, might lead member states to pursue further integration. Other trends that could lead in the same direction include the increasing inequalities between EU member states and the emergence of pro-EU leaders, and also – albeit somewhat paradoxically – Brexit. For these drivers to lead to further integration, some crucial events will have to occur. For instance, Brexit could drive further integration if the UK cannot work out a deal that secures its position after it leaves the Union. Meanwhile, an open conflict between Turkey and the USA might spur on efforts to coordinate security policy more at the EU level. And all the other potential drivers (increasing inequality, the emergence of pro-EU leaders, the supranational efforts of EU institutions, the fallout of the Eurocrisis and the financial crisis, etc.) might compel states to further strengthen the Union, though only if national elections and the EP elections in 2019 produce favorable results for pro-EU parties; the electoral success of Euroskeptic challengers, on the other hand, would reduce the chances of further integration.

Further integration could lead to two possible scenarios: a more federal EU, with stronger supranational institutions like the EP, or a “two speed Europe” featuring an integrated core of countries and a periphery of less integrated member states.
The EUENGAGE 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 EUENGAGE 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.