

Håkon Buhagen Breines

# Public Opinion In the European Union Following the COVID-19 Pandemic

Bacheloroppgave i European Studies with English

Veileder: Anna Brigevich

Mai 2023



NTNU

Kunnskap for en bedre verden



Håkon Buhagen Breines

# **Public Opinion In the European Union Following the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Bacheloroppgave i European Studies with English  
Veileder: Anna Brigevich  
Mai 2023

Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet  
Institutt for historiske og klassiske studier



Kunnskap for en bedre verden



# Abstract

This research paper focuses on the Covid pandemic and its effect on both the public and the European Union. It is looking at the statistics made by the official European Union survey, the Standard Eurobarometer, which focuses on public opinion on the EU and the things happening within the EU. This research is important because this pandemic is the first large scale pandemic in the current age and because of this, many people and organizations such as the EU, went into this pandemic unknowingly. This pandemic is still very fresh on our minds as we just came out of it and it is important to look back at how the pandemic was dealt with in order to figure out how to deal with future situations in similar fashion. The public opinion is one of the major driving factors of any political institution so it is important to determine whether the current measures and general development is satisfactory to the public. This paper aims to figure out and determine how public opinion has developed over the course of the pandemic by looking at the Standard Eurobarometers done between 2018 and 2023. It also aims to show that the EU as a crisis management force has gained public favor because of the pandemic and how it was handled. It also aims to discuss the new institutions and plans made during the pandemic and inform how they may affect the future of the EU.

# Sammendrag

Dette forskningspapiret fokuserer hovedsakelig på Covid pandemien og dens effekt på både det offentlige, men også på den Europeiske Unionen. Dette papiret skal gjennomgå statistikken lagd av det offisielle undersøkelses departementet til EU, Standard Eurobarometer, som fokuserer på offentlig mening om EU og det som skjer innenfor EU for å sjekke hvilken effekt pandemien har hatt på offentlig mening men også på institusjoner og løsninger for pandemien. Dette temaet er viktig fordi Covid pandemien er den første store pandemien som har truffet verden i nyere tid og det er derfor mange mennesker og politiske organisasjoner som EU som gikk inn i denne pandemien ubevisst. Denne pandemien er fortsatt veldig fersk i tankene våre og det er derfor viktig å se på hvordan effektene av denne pandemien har hatt både på EU og på offentlig mening om EU slik at de kan forbedre strategien mot en eventuell framtidig pandemi. Dette forskningspapiret forsøker å finne ut hvordan offentlig mening har endret seg gjennom pandemien ved å se på statistikk gjennomført av Eurobarometer gjort mellom 2018 og 2023. Dette papiret skal også vise at EU som en krisehåndtering organisasjon har hatt en positiv økning i offentlig mening og hvordan pandemien ble håndtert, men også å diskutere nye institusjoner og planer lagt for fremtiden av EU.

# Table of Contents

<b>List of Abbreviations</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2. The EU and Covid Pandemic</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1 Covid's effect on society and economy in Europe	4
2.3 Covid's effect on politics in Europe	5
2.4 Covid's effect on the EU/EEA and their response to Covid	6
<b>3. Public opinion on the EU before, during and after the covid pandemic</b>	<b>7</b>
3.1 Before the pandemic (2018-2019)	8
3.2 During the pandemic (2020-2021)	10
3.3 After the pandemic (2022-2023)	14
<b>4. Discussion</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>5. Conclusion</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>21</b>

# List of Abbreviations

Anti-vaxxers - People who refused vaccination during the Covid pandemic

COVID-19 - The SARS-CoV-2 virus also known as Coronavirus or Covid

EC - European Commission

ECDC - European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control

EEA - European Economic Area

EHU - European Health Union

EP - European Parliament

EU - The European Union

HERA - European Health Emergency preparedness and Response Authority

NGEU - NextGenerationEU

SURE - Temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency

UK - United Kingdom

WHO - World Health Organization



# 1. Introduction

At the end of 2019 a virus commonly known as COVID-19 (Covid) emerged and spread across the world quickly, with more than 450 million cases reported worldwide and over 100 million cases in the European Union (EU) alone (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 2023). This virus changed the common lives of many people as well as international trade and the free movement within the EU. Social distancing and working from home became the new norm in many European countries and by April of 2020 most countries were under some form of a Covid lockdown (Koh, 2020, pg. 322). Many countries within the EU shut down stores, sports facilities, clubs and workplaces and eventually created more restrictions for leaving and entering the countries (Koh, 2020, pg. 322). In this research paper we will take a look at how the Covid pandemic affected the EU and its Member States, focusing mainly on the public opinion on how the EU dealt with the pandemic and the restrictions created by it. The Covid pandemic affected everyone within the EU and because of this it is important to review how the EU handled this pandemic in order to determine how they would deal with a potential future pandemic. This pandemic also affected international trade and travel which could potentially hurt the economic growth of countries within the EU and it is important to determine where the EU could improve and where it did good. In this research paper we will be looking at the statistics on public opinion within the EU in regards to vaccinations, the fight against Covid, satisfaction with the restrictions and more.

We are going to research the EU's handling of the pandemic by looking at the statistics made by the Standard Eurobarometer regarding general public opinion of the EU and how the EU dealt with the Covid pandemic and lockdowns. By doing this we can also determine where they could improve and how to deal with this going forward and what went right. This research paper will be trying to determine how public opinion has changed within the EU during the Covid pandemic as well as potential improvements it could make by looking at different surveys within the Eurobarometer as well as studies made by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). We will be looking at the Covid pandemic on a smaller scale in order to determine how it has affected the people as well as on a larger scale in order to see how it has affected different institutions within the EU. We will also be looking to compare the statistics on

voter opinion before, during and after\*<sup>1</sup> the pandemic. After looking at the statistics and facts this paper will argue that Covid has overall helped the EU in terms of the public and it will determine how Covid has affected the EU's many institutions. The goal of this research paper is to review the ways that the EU dealt with the Covid pandemic in order to determine how the EU could change their approach on a potential future pandemic, as well as review the public's opinion on the EU and determine what effect the pandemic has had on public opinion in the EU.

## 2. The EU and Covid Pandemic

SARS-CoV-2 also commonly known as Covid is an infectious virus that in 2020 caused nearly the entire world to close down and change the way they operated to some extent (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023a). This virus can for some people mean extreme illness and even death and because of this the world had to take measures in order to try and control the spread of this disease (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 2023). The ECDC started tracking Covid in 2019 when it was first discovered in China and very early in 2020 many countries started measures in order to prevent the mass spread of the virus, for example Italy issued a decree of social distancing in March of 2020 meaning people were recommended to stand at least one meter apart if in public and that most people should work from home if they could (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 2020). On March 11th, 2020, World Health Organization (WHO) declared Covid a global pandemic and many countries followed this up by taking measures in order to prevent the spread of Covid (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 2020). Following the pandemic the European Commission (EC) created a response that would create measurements at both national and EU level doing things such as making sure there was a steady supply of medical equipment and supporting research on vaccines and treatment (European Commission, 2021). The EC was actively working on helping its Member States with prevention measures and funding in order to combat the Covid pandemic and we will go more in depth on what they did and how it was received in this paper (European Commission, 2021).

---

<sup>1</sup> After\* - While the pandemic itself is not over, most restrictions and the daily lives of people have gone back to normal during 2022 (Powder, 2022).

## 2.1 Covids effect on society and economy in Europe

The Covid pandemic changed the fundamentals of many people's daily lives when it arrived. It changed the way people lived because the measurements taken against Covid required it (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023a). Some of the prevention methods taken were adding antibacterial soap to stores so you could wash your hands before entering, as well as selling masks in most stores that would prevent the spread of Covid (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023b). Wearing masks became a common thing where before it was not and people were recommended to keep their distance and avoid crowded areas. Getting tested regularly and staying home after tests was also normal (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023b). However the largest change from the normal day to day lives of people was the lockdown and by April of 2020 around one third of the global population was under some form of Covid lockdown (Koh, 2020, pg. 322). What this means is that already in early stages of the Covid pandemic, most people were working or studying from home as well as many facilities and stores being closed in order to avoid large gatherings of people (Koh, 2020, pg. 322). Some examples of these restrictions are; Italy enforced nationwide lockdown closing all stores except grocery stores and pharmacies as well as enforcing police permission in order to travel, The UK followed this and banned all gatherings of more than two people, Germany shut down Shops, Churches and sports facilities, and Spain allowed only essential workers to go to their respective workplaces (Koh, 2020, pg. 322).

The terrifying truth of Covid was that it is also a deadly virus with countries like Italy having up to 189 582 recorded deaths, France having 162 603 recorded deaths and Germany having 172 635 recorded deaths as of 26. of April 2023 (World Health Organization, 2023). There is an even larger amount of people that have had Covid meaning it is not always deadly but people in high risk groups such as elderly. Globally there have been reported 6 915 286 deaths total proving that this virus has been impactful not only on the EU/EEA but also globally (World Health Organization, 2023).

As for the effect that Covid has had on workers and students during the pandemic we will be looking at a study made by BMC Public Health on German and Swiss workers. They state that around 31% of employees surveyed in this study perceived the pandemic as having a negative impact on their work life, where workers who had lost their job had a more negative impact on their life (Tušl et al., 2021, pg. 2). On the other hand around 10% of employees

surveyed in this study perceived a positive impact on their work life where people working in home offices felt the most positive impact (Tušl et al., 2021, pg 2.). Unemployment in Europe rose dramatically during 2020 and by closing down so many shops and creating a larger percentage of unemployed people, the economy in most EU Member States have taken a large hit (Su et al., 2022, pg. 1761). Industry and service sectors were also ceasing their production activities during this period as the risk of spreading Covid and lockdown essentially shut them down (Su et al., 2022, pg. 1761). As for students, a study made by BMC Medical Education on students studying at a British university showed that many students felt anxiety, stress and worry with about 84% of the students in the survey saying they were worrying too much about different things (Gadi et al., 2022, pg. 4). The students in this survey also felt a struggle with completing learning outcomes with around 65% saying they struggled with online delivery (Gadi et al., 2022, pg. 4). What these studies tell us is that Covid's effect on society was very negative in terms of lifestyle and choices and because of this it is important to review the effect it had before looking at the studies regarding public opinion on the EU during the pandemic.

### 2.3 Covid's effect on politics in Europe

While Covid had a massive impact on society and the economy, it also tested the EU on its crisis management and what being in the EU meant for its Member States as well as questioning the EU's place in global politics as a whole (Quaglia & Verdun, 2023, pg 599). The EU tackled this pandemic by creating a response plan to Covid and ensuring that the main institutions within the EU worked together in order to create a more coherent and impactful solution (Quaglia & Verdun, 2023, pg. 601). As for their plan they worked on a "European Health Union" (EHU) which was unclear as to what it was, however they did promote legislative proposals in order to increase the EU's role in the field of health as well as strengthening their capacity on emergencies (Quaglia & Verdun, 2023, pg. 602). They increased the capacity and competence for the ECDC as well as funding the development for a vaccine and the EU rolled out a "Digital Covid Certificate" meant to create clearer and better information sharing between countries (Quaglia & Verdun, 2023, pg. 602-603).

During the pandemic when countries started issuing out vaccines for the Covid virus, some people started doubting the vaccines and people who refused to take the vaccines were often called “Anti-vaxxers” (Burki, 2020). A lot of misinformation on the vaccine was spread across the internet and profiles posting the misinformation gathered a lot of followers creating almost an anti-vaccine movement which held strong during the pandemic (Burki, 2020). A lot of people doubted the legitimacy of the vaccine when it first rolled out because of the misinformation spread across the internet talking about side effects and some even went as far as creating a conspiracy saying the Covid vaccine was a ploy for the rich to make more money on false vaccines (Burki, 2020). The Centre for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) surveyed 1663 people and found that people relying on social media for information on Covid were more prone to be hesitant on the vaccine (Burki, 2020). This adds another layer to the surveys done by Eurobarometer on the public opinion on Covid countermeasures and the EU that we will be looking at later in this paper.

## 2.4 Covid's effect on the EU/EEA and their response to Covid

One of the core principles of the EU is free movement within the EU between Member States and this principle was one of the first victims of the Covid pandemic as EU Member States began closing their borders and introducing border restrictions during the initial phase of the pandemic (Quaglia & Verdun, 2023, pg. 603). This did however not last long as these restrictions were mostly lifted after the summer of 2020 and were avoided during later waves of the pandemic meaning people could move freely between borders within the European Economic Area (Quaglia & Verdun, 2023, pg. 603). Even if the restrictions were mostly lifted, some new ones were implemented such as the need for a Covid test or vaccination proof, yet they kept one of the core principles of the EU/EEA open (Quaglia & Verdun, 2023, pg. 603).

Because of the socio-economic crisis that Covid caused, the EU had to create new policies and establish temporary solutions to problems, such as unemployment, and through this came the temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE), a specific pandemic credit line with lowered conditionality that was made to provide loans and financial means to Member States in order to fight the negative consequences that Covid brought on their economic and social problems (Quaglia & Verdun, 2023, pg. 603-604). SURE worked as a second line of defence with supporting short-time work and similar structures in order to help

Member States protect jobs and employees against the risk of unemployment, and it could also finance health-related measures at the workplace to make sure that a safe return to normal economic activity was possible (European Commission, 2023). The EC has also launched a European Health Emergency preparedness and Response Authority (HERA) in order to detect, prevent and quickly respond to future health emergencies which is a shared resource for Member States in order to better prepare for cross-border health issues and threats (European Commission, 2021). HERA will work as a preventative measure that will anticipate future threats and potential health crises and use this to ensure the development, production and distribution of medicine and vaccines as well as masks if need be and is therefore a key pillar of the EHU (European Commission, 2021).

The EU developed a recovery plan called "NextGenerationEU" (NGEU) which is a €800 billion temporary recovery plan that aims to make the EU greener, healthier, digitalized, stronger and equal (European Union, 2021). This recovery plan is meant to make the EU Member States emerge stronger from the pandemic and in order to do this the EU wants to focus on improving environmentally-friendly technologies, funding of online training courses and improving on digital technology, invest more in research to develop vaccines and treatments for existing and future diseases, create equal opportunities for all and more (European Union, 2021).

### 3. Public opinion on the EU before, during and after the covid pandemic

In order to determine how Covid the EU's response to Covid has affected the public's opinion on the EU we will be looking at multiple surveys done by the Eurobarometer which host many public opinion surveys within the EU (European Union, 2023). The Eurobarometer is a polling instrument used by the EC, the European Parliament (EP) as well as other EU institutions in order to monitor the state of public opinion in Europe on issues that are related to the EU (European Union, 2023). We will be taking a look at the Standard Eurobarometer as this is conducted twice a year and focuses on monitoring key trends relevant to the EU as a whole and will be focusing mostly on the surveys related to the EU and not national governments (European Union, 2023). As for the methods that the Eurobarometer uses to interview their participants, they use a combination of face-to-face, phone call and online surveys in order to get

good results for their surveys (European Union, 2023). We will be taking a look at Standard Eurobarometer surveys done before Covid, meaning around 2018 and 2019 in order to determine how the public already felt about the EU going in to the pandemic, then moving on to Standard Eurobarometer surveys conducted during the pandemic meaning 2020-2022 as well as other surveys done in this time related to the Covid pandemic, then we will finish by looking at Standard Eurobarometer surveys done after Covid meaning around the end of 2022 through 2023 in order to perceive how public opinion has changed during the pandemic as well as try to figure out where the EU possibly did better and where it possibly did worse.

### 3.1 Before the pandemic (2018-2019)

Firstly we will be taking a look at the Standard Eurobarometer 90 of Autumn 2018, a survey on Public opinion in the EU and we will be taking a look at the First results from this survey (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2018). Looking at the first part of this survey regarding Europeans and Political Institutions their first survey is in regards to Trust in national governments and parliaments in the European Union and this survey shows that as of spring 2018, more than four in ten Europeans *trust the European Union* (roughly 42% of those surveyed) (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2018, pg. 5). This is the highest level since autumn of 2010 however the majority (at 48%) tend not to trust the EU meaning overall public opinion shows a lack of trust in the EU (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2018, pg. 5). Looking at point two in this survey article, “Trust in the European Union: national results and evolutions” we can see that Lithuania, Denmark and Sweden have the highest amount of people that “tend to trust” the EU, while Greece, United Kingdom (UK) and Czechia have the lowest proportions in regards to trust in the EU (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2018, pg. 6). This section also shows us that in 17 Member States, the majority of respondents say they trust the EU (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2018, pg. 6) Moving on to point three “The image of the European Union” we can see that 43% of Europeans have a positive image of the EU, while 36% have a neutral image and 20% have a negative image of the EU (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2018, pg. 8). The overall image and trust in the EU was in 2018 trending upwards and it seems that the public opinion on

the EU was moving in a positive direction (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2018).

We will now be taking a look at the Standard Eurobarometer 91 of Spring 2019, a continuation of the public opinion surveys (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2019a). Looking at point one on this survey “Trust in national governments and parliaments and in the European Union” we can see that since 2018 the trust in the EU has gone up by two percent from 42% to 44% and distrust of the EU has decreased by two percent from 48% to 46% meaning overall distrust is still larger than trust, but the trend is going in a positive direction (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2019a, pg. 5). As for point two “Trust in the European Union: national results and evolutions” we can see that the number of Member States where the majority trusts the EU has gone up by three (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2019a, pg. 6). Lithuania and Denmark is still among the top three in terms of trust with Sweden swapped out by Estonia, and as for distrust the UK and Greece are still in the bottom three however France has replaced Czechia where all three countries have a large majority on distrust of the EU (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2019a, pg. 6). Moving on to point three “The image of the European Union” we can see an increase in amount of people having a positive image of the EU up from 43% in 2018 to 45%, 37% of Europeans had a neutral image of the EU and 17% had a negative image down from 20% in 2018 (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2019a, pg. 8).

Lastly we will be looking at the Standard Eurobarometer 92 regarding Public opinion in the European Union conducted in Autumn of 2019 (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2019b). Looking at the first point regarding “Trust in national governments and parliaments and in the European Union” we can see that trust in the EU has decreased by one percent from 44% to 43% while distrust has increased by one percent from 46% to 47% since spring of 2019 (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2019b, pg. 5). As for point two regarding “Trust in the European Union: national results and evolutions” we can see that the amount of Member States where a majority of respondents say they trust the EU has gone down by two from 20 Member States to 18 since Spring of 2019 with Lithuania, Denmark and Bulgaria being in the highest percentage of trust while the UK, France and Greece remain most distrusting of the EU (European Commission &



Directorate-General for Communication, 2019b, pg. 6). Moving on to point three regarding “The image of the European Union” we can see that the positive image of the EU has lost three percentage points from 45 down to 42%, 37% remain a neutral image of the EU while the amount with a negative image of the EU has increased back to 20% from 17% in Spring of 2019 (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2019b).

We can conclude that in 2018 and 2019 the EU was on an uptrend with the public according to the surveys done by the Eurobarometer however by the end of 2019 the overall public image of the EU had gone down by a few percentages. While most Europeans distrusted the EU and even if the trend remained similar in the years looked at, the overall percentage is up from earlier years. This was following a crisis on jobs according to Eurobarometer 90 where unemployment rate was falling and continuing a downward trend which is also a consequence of the pandemic coming in the later surveys (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2018, pg. 2). By the end of 2019 the EU and the UK were also moving forward with Brexit meaning that the overall support for the EU in the UK likely fell during this time (Prosser, 2020). Moving on we will be looking at the first Standard Barometer survey done after the Covid pandemic hit.

### 3.2 During the pandemic (2020-2021)

First we are going to take a look at the Standard Eurobarometer 93 published Summer of 2020 regarding public opinion in the EU (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2020). In this survey, and the following surveys we will not only be looking at the first chapter regarding “Europeans and Political Institutions” as we have with the earlier surveys, but we will also take a look at the eighth chapter regarding “The EU and the Coronavirus Outbreak” which covers satisfaction and trust regarding EU’s measures to fight the pandemic (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2020). Starting at the first point we can see that trust in the EU has remained at 43% marking no change however the distrust of the EU has increased by one percent from 47% to 48% (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2020, pg. 6). As for the second point, the amount of Member States with a majority trust has gone down from 18 Member States to 15 with Ireland, Denmark and Lithuania having the most positive respondents, and Italy, France and Greece having most distrust in the EU (European Commission & Directorate-General for

Communication, 2020, pg. 7). Continuing to point three the overall positive image of the EU has decreased from 42% to 40%, the neutral image of the EU has increased to 40% from 37% and the negative image of the EU has gone down by one percent from 20% to 19% (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2020, pg. 9).

We are now gonna take a look at chapter eighth in this survey regarding “The EU and the Coronavirus Outbreak” starting with the first point regarding “Satisfaction with the measures to fight the crisis” (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2020, pg. 31). As of summer 2020, most Europeans were divided regarding the measures taken by the EU to fight the outbreak with 45% saying they were satisfied and 44% saying they were not satisfied, with 11% saying they did not know (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2020, pg. 31). In 19 Member States a majority of respondents were satisfied with the measures taken by the EU institutions with Ireland, Hungary, Romania and Poland having the most positive response, while France, Czechia and Italy were mostly dissatisfied with the measures taken (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2020, pg. 31). Moving on to the second point “EU priorities in its response to the coronavirus outbreak” which focuses on public opinion regarding the main priorities for the EU’s response where the two main priorities ended up being developing financial means to find a treatment or vaccine as well as establishing a strategy for facing a similar crisis in the future both with 37% with the third runner up being developing a European health policy at 30% (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2020, pg. 32). 20% of people surveyed also thought that the EU should provide more financial support to the most affected regions within the EU and that there should be stricter control of the external borders of the EU, while 19% think that investing more money in the economy for a sustainable, inclusive and fair recovery in all EU Member States should be prioritized (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2020, pg. 32). Other priorities mentioned in this poll were also related to relocation of industries, state aid, encouraging dialogue between Member States, ensuring coordination between Member States financially, reviewing the principle of free movement and increasing the budget of the EU (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2020, pg. 32). Moving on to point four regarding “Trust in the EU to make the right decisions in the future” the question was “Thinking about EU's response to the Coronavirus outbreak, to what extent do you trust or not the EU to make the right decisions in the future?”

with 62% of the people surveyed trusted the EU to make the right decisions, with 7% of those being “totally trust” and 55% being “tend to trust”, on the other hand 36% of people surveyed do not trust the EU with 7% being “do not trust at all” and 29% being “tend not to trust” (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2020, pg. 35).

Lastly we will be taking a look at the Eurobarometer 95 from spring of 2021 regarding public opinion in the EU (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2021). Starting at chapter one looking at the first point regarding trust we can see that 49% of the people surveyed trust the EU meaning a 6% increase from summer of 2020 while distrust of the EU lays at 42% meaning a 6% decrease from summer of 2020 (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2021, pg. 9). Moving on to the second point we can see that a majority of people surveyed in 21 Member States say they trust the EU increasing from by 6 Member States from summer of 2020 with Portugal, Ireland and Lithuania being the most trusting, while Greece, France and Slovakia were the most distrusting of the EU (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2021, pg. 10). Looking at point three regarding the image of the EU we can see that 45% have a positive image of the EU up from 40% in summer of 2020, 38% have a neutral image of the EU down from 40% in summer of 2020 and 16% have a negative image of the EU down from 19% in summer of 2020 (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2021, pg. 12).

Moving on we are taking a look at chapter five regarding “The EU and the Coronavirus pandemic / attitudes towards vaccination against Covid 19” which contain some different questions regarding Covid as the pandemic situation had changed during this time (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2021, pg. 30). Starting at the first point regarding satisfaction with the measures to fight the crisis, 51% meaning more than half of people surveyed were satisfied with the measures taken up from 45% in summer of 2020, while dissatisfaction was at 41% down from 44% in summer of 2020 (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2021, pg. 31). In 21 of the EU Member States the majority of people surveyed were satisfied with the measures up from 19 in summer of 2020, looking at this survey we can also see that it was down to 13 Member States in winter 2020-2021 (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2021, pg. 32). Malta, Ireland and Portugal had the highest observed amount of people satisfied with the measures while Greece, Slovakia and Czechia had the highest amount of dissatisfied respondents (European

Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2021, pg. 32). Looking at the second point regarding “Trust in the EU to make the right decisions in the future”, 65% of people surveyed trusted the EU to make the right decisions with 7% saying they totally trust the EU and 58% saying they tend to trust the EU (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2021, pg. 34). On the other side 32% say they don't trust the EU with 6% saying they don't trust the EU at all while 26% say they tend not to trust the EU showing that trust in the decision making is up and distrust is down from summer of 2020 (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2021, pg. 34).

The fourth point in chapter five changes from the earlier barometer and it contains what people think of the NextGenerationEU recovery plan that the EU initiated in order to come back from the pandemic stronger (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2021, pg. 37). 57% of respondents think that NGEU will be effective with 8% thinking it will be very effective and 49% thinking it will be fairly effective, on the other hand 35% think it would not be effective with 6% thinking it would not be effective at all and 29% think it would not be very effective (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2021, pg. 37). Moving from this point to point six regarding “Interest in getting vaccinated against Covid-19” we can see that 69% of people wanted to be vaccinated against Covid as soon as possible or had already gotten the vaccine at the time, while 9% would like to get vaccinated some time in 2021, 11% would prefer to wait and get vaccinated later while 10% say they would never get vaccinated and the remaining 1% said they did not know (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2021, pg. 40).

We can see that over the course of the pandemic, overall trust in the EU has increased and more people support the measures the EU has taken against the pandemic. We can also see that the EU institutions prioritized the points that the people surveyed thought needed focus by increased funding of the vaccine as well as a recovery plan. The NGEU recovery plan also had a majority of people surveyed believing it will be effective and the majority of respondents also trust in the EU to make the right decisions going forward.

### 3.3 After the pandemic (2022-2023)

We are now going to take a look at the last few surveys conducted in 2022 and 2023 which is in this context considered after the pandemic. While Covid is still around, the restrictions on society, travel and economy are almost completely gone. Starting with the Standard Eurobarometer 97 from summer of 2022 we will start by looking into the first chapter regarding “Europeans and Political Institutions” (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2022). Starting with the first point regarding trust, we can see that in 2022 49% of people surveyed say they trust the EU which is the highest it has been since Spring of 2008, while 43% of people surveyed distrust the EU (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2022, pg. 9). Moving on to the second point we can see that in 18 EU Member States the majority of people surveyed trusted the EU with Malta, Lithuania and Portugal having the highest percentages of trust, on the other hand Greece, Cyprus and France have the highest percentage of distrust (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2022, pg. 10). Looking at point three regarding the image of the EU we can see that 47% have a positive image of the EU being the highest level since autumn of 2009, with 36% having a neutral image and only 16% have a negative image of the EU (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2022, pg. 11).

Lastly we are taking a look at chapter five regarding “The EU and the Coronavirus Pandemic” starting with the first point regarding “Satisfaction with the measures to fight the crisis” where 56% of people surveyed were satisfied having a 5% increase since Spring of 2021 while 37% were dissatisfied down 4% since Spring of 2021 (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2022, pg. 45). Moving on to the second point regarding “Trust in the EU to make the right decisions in the future” we can see that 63% of people surveyed trust the EU to make the right decisions with 6% totally trusting them and 57% tending to trust them, on the other hand 34% do not trust the EU to make the right decisions with 8% not trusting them at all and 26% tending not to trust them (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2022, pg. 48).

The last survey we are going to take a look at is the Standard Eurobarometer 98 from winter 2022-2023 which does not contain any questions regarding the Covid pandemic however we will be taking a look at the general trust in the EU as with the other surveys (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2023). Starting with the first chapter

point one regarding trust in the EU we can see that 47% of people surveyed said they trust the EU which is 2% less than summer of 2022, on the other hand distrust has increased slightly to 45% of people surveyed (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2023, pg. 9). In 17 Member States the majority said they trust the EU going down one from summer of 2022 with Denmark, Portugal, Lithuania and Malta having the highest majority of respondents saying they trust the EU, and Greece, France and Slovakia having the highest majority of distrust in the EU (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2023, pg. 10). Moving on to the second point regarding the image of the EU we can see that the amount of respondents reporting a positive image of the EU is down from 47% in summer of 2022 to 45%, while the neutral image is stable at 36% and the negative image has gone up two points to 18% since summer of 2022 (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2023, pg. 11). Lastly we are taking a look at point three regarding the future of the EU 62% of people surveyed feel optimistic about the future going down 3% from summer of 2022, while 35% feel pessimistic about the future going up 3% from summer of 2022 (European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication, 2023, pg. 13).

The amount of trust within the EU had in 2022 reached its highest point since 2008 at 49% of people surveyed saying they trust the EU. 47% of the people surveyed also had a positive image of the EU and 56% of people were satisfied with the measures taken to fight the pandemic. This might indicate that the people within the EU were somewhat pleased with the new institutions and policies made to fight the pandemic as well as the measures taken to make sure the EU Member States would come out of the pandemic stronger. The EU maintained a high percentage of trust at 47% in winter of 2022-2023 and the overall positive image of the EU also maintained a high percentage at 45%. Continuing that we can see that 62% of people trust in the EU to make the right decisions going into the future of dealing with the aftermath of the pandemic.

## 4. Discussion

The text “The COVID-19 pandemic and the European Union: politics, policies and institutions” written by Lucia Quaglia and Amy Verdun states that the EU has acted as a proficient crisis manager according to three criteria (Quaglia & Verdun, 2023, pg. 605). These three criteria are; the detection of potential threats and gathering analyzing information on those threats, mobilization of scarce resources and a legitimate response to the crisis (Quaglia & Verdun, 2023, pg. 605). Over the course of the pandemic the EU has, according to those criteria, acted as a proficient crisis manager; however how has the public opinion within the EU helped shape the future of the EU during the pandemic and are they satisfied? Starting with the surveys done in 2018 and 2019 we can see that the overall trust of the EU was low, with more people distrusting of the EU. The EU still maintained a positive image, yet this was a time where Brexit was getting closer to happening and the UK was among the most distrusting of the EU. We can however see that the trust in the EU did not increase when the UK eventually left by looking at the 93rd Standard Eurobarometer. Trust in the EU remained at 43% going into the pandemic meaning Brexit had little effect on the public opinion of the EU. The overall positive image of the EU also went down in 2020 with more people having a neutral image showing a somewhat increased amount of skepticism within the European people.

A new chapter was added to the Eurobarometer with the 93rd edition being “The EU and the Coronavirus Outbreak” which asked questions regarding the pandemic and measures taken against it by the EU. The poll on satisfaction with the measures taken was roughly equal with 45% said they were satisfied while 44% said they were not and considering the lockdown regulations within the countries as well as a short border lockdown within the EU it makes sense that a lot of people were dissatisfied with the measures however the EU also asked what priorities it should take when fighting the pandemic. The two highest voted priorities were to develop financial means to find a treatment or vaccine, and establish a strategy for facing a similar crisis in the future.

During the Covid pandemic, the EU invested a lot into vaccination development and through the ECDC also developed a Covid certificate in order to create an easier way for people to show they were vaccinated against the virus. The EU did not only want to fund the development of a vaccine but ensure that development continued as the virus developed and in

order to combat a potential future threat like this and as a response they developed HERA. This department was created to ensure a larger supply of medicines, vaccines and other medical countermeasures for potential future pandemics as there was a lack of those items during the Covid pandemic. The EU also created SURE as another response to the Covid pandemic, meant as a way for Member States to protect jobs and try to mitigate the rise of unemployment during the start of the pandemic. Lastly mentioned in this research paper the EU developed NGEU meant as a recovery plan and a development plan in order to create a better and stronger united EU coming out of the pandemic with funding of development towards not only health, but a digital future, greener technology and equality.

Following these developed institutions we are going to take a look at the response the public made in the 95th, 97th and 98th Standard Eurobarometers conducted in 2021, 2022 and winter of 2022-2023 respectively in order to determine how the public felt about the future of the EU. Starting with the 95th Eurobarometer we can see that trust in the EU had increased by a huge amount from 43% in 2020 to 49% in 2021 while distrust was at 42% meaning the EU gained a large positive increase during the pandemics most important time. The overall positive image of the EU had also increased a lot since summer of 2020 with 45% having a positive image while only 16% had a negative image. As for satisfaction with the measures taken against the pandemic, 56% were satisfied while only 37% were dissatisfied showing that the EU was moving in the right direction and making the right calls when attacking the pandemic in the eyes of the public. Following this, 65% of people believed the EU would make the right decisions going forward while only 32% did not believe so. This survey also included a questionnaire about the NGEU recovery plan where the majority of people said they thought this would be an effective response to the economic fallout after the pandemic was over. People trusted the EUs decisions likely because the EU followed the points that the public voted on in the poll, while this might have happened without the poll, it certainly helped.

One of the key talking points in social media during the Covid pandemic was vaccination against it. While most people wanted to get the vaccination, with as much as 69% of people in the 95th Eurobarometer said they would get it as soon as possible, there were still a lot of people that did not, and 10% in the poll even said they never would. The anti-vaxxer movement during the pandemic had a loud presence in social media and this caused a lot of doubt during the pandemic with some people choosing to believe social media over government issued



information. While the majority of people believed in and got the vaccine, the amount of misinformation and lack of focus on informing the public every step of the way on the vaccine is something that could be considered when thinking about a plan for future pandemics, and this will likely be one of the priorities of HERA.

The 97th Eurobarometer is the last survey done by the Eurobarometer to feature polls on the pandemic marking what this research paper has determined as “after” the pandemic. Trust in the EU has again risen back to 49% maintaining a positive position with the Europeans and the overall positive image rose to its highest point since 2009 at 47% of people having a positive image of the EU. As for the satisfaction with the measures taken, 56% of people surveyed satisfied with the measures meaning that at the end of the pandemic, most of the public were satisfied with the policies, institutions, departments and plans that the EU has created in order to fight the pandemic and ensure a recovery after the pandemic was over. As for the last Eurobarometer covered in this paper, the 98th, we can see that trust in the EU maintained a majority even while dropping a little. The same goes for the image of the EU with 45% still having a positive image of the EU and only 18% having a negative image. As for the future, the respondents have remained optimistic in the future of the EU throughout the pandemic.

How has the pandemic affected the institutions within the EU? At the start of the pandemic, many people struggled with unemployment because of the lockdown regulations placed by many countries. As a result of these lockdowns, many of the borders across the EU also closed down in order to mitigate spread of the Covid virus. The EU needed a solution for the pandemic and chose to invest in health and medicine, and the EU also needed a recovery plan for the aftermath of the pandemic. With this came SURE, a temporary support made available for Member States in order to mitigate unemployment rates increasing and in order to help people maintain jobs. The EU also developed HERA, a department meant to prevent, detect and respond to possible health emergencies in the future. HERA has become a key pillar within the EHU and will be there to help in the terms of future pandemics. Lastly the EU has developed a recovery plan in the form of NGEU. A plan meant to ensure an economic recovery, but also increase development for the future within the EU. As a result of the pandemic, the EU has created multiple resources and institutions in order to create a safer future for the people within the EU as well as ensuring a plan for the future. The institutions have been working towards a solution throughout the pandemic and as a result a recovery from the pandemic has been made easier. As

for the NGEU, even the public is in majority support of this solution with a high percentage of people thinking it will be effective.

When looking at the statistics, how has the pandemic affected public opinion in the EU? During, and after the pandemic, public opinion has been stable at a very high percentage compared to earlier years giving credit to the EU's decision making during the pandemic. Trust in the EU has remained high, the public image of the EU has remained high and the satisfaction with measures taken against covid has risen during the pandemic. It is clear that the pandemic has had a positive effect on the public image of the EU because of how the EU handled the pandemic and we can see that the countries most dissatisfied with the EU have almost always remained the same even before the pandemic. The survey asked people what should be prioritized when fighting the pandemic, and when given a response, the EU followed through and focused on increasing funding for vaccines as well as creating contingency plans through SURE, HERA and NGEU. The EU has worked hard as a crisis management force in order to fight the pandemic, and the public agrees. The way that the EU handled the pandemic has been positive all the way with the public, while it started with a near 50/50, it ended up with a large majority being satisfied with the measures. In the eyes of the public, the pandemic has had a positive effect on the EU as a working force in crisis management and public opinion as a whole.

## 5. Conclusion

At the start of 2020, a virus would spread across the world creating a global pandemic that would not only affect a large amount of people, but also large political organizations like the EU. The Covid virus took the lives of many people and forced nearly the entire world into lockdown making a lot of people lose their jobs and it changed their entire day to day lives. Lots of people had to work from home, study from home and could not leave to see their loved ones.

Throughout the pandemic, the EU has worked hard to fight the pandemic and its many obstacles, creating solutions such as SURE, a temporary aid to help fight unemployment and support short time workers, HERA as a preventative force that works to detect, prevent and support future pandemics, and NGEU, a recovery plan to help the EU's Member States recover after the pandemic as well as develop technology and more to help Member States. This research paper has focused a lot on statistics made by the Standard Eurobarometer polls which are held twice a year that focuses mainly on public opinion on things that happen within the EU. We have been looking at statistics before, during and after the pandemic and have determined that the overall public trust and image of the EU has increased over the course of the pandemic, showing us that the EU has handled the pandemic in a positive way in terms of the public. By the end of 2022 the people surveyed had an overwhelmingly positive reaction to the measures taken to fight the pandemic and the general trust was at its highest point in a long time. During this paper we have looked at the statistics and the measures taken by the EU and determined that the overall public opinion on the EU has had a significant increase over the course of the pandemic, and that the pandemic has helped the EU create a better public opinion on it because of the plans, institutions and work it has done in order to fight the pandemic. From listening to the public opinion when asking about priorities, to working out solutions on an individual scale, the EU has solidified itself as a crisis management force. While lack of information is something that can be clearer, the anti-vaxxer movement was always a vocal minority and will likely persist no matter the crisis. As a final note, the EU has created multiple fixes but also plans for the future and according to the polls, the people will likely feel safe in the hands of the EU if another pandemic would hit the world.

## References

- Burki, T. (2020, October). The online anti-vaccine movement in the age of COVID-19. *The Lancet Digital Health*, 2(10), 504-505. DOI:  
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S2589-7500\(20\)30227-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2589-7500(20)30227-2)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023a). *Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) | Disease or Condition of the Week | CDC*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved April 26, 2023, from <https://www.cdc.gov/dotw/covid-19/index.html>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023b, January 26). *How to Protect Yourself and Others | CDC*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved April 26, 2023, from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>
- European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. (2020, March 8). *Timeline of ECDC's response to COVID-19*. ECDC. Retrieved April 26, 2023, from <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/covid-19/timeline-ecdc-response>
- European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. (2023). *Situation updates on COVID-19*. ECDC. Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/covid-19>

European Commission. (2021, June 15). *Overview of the Commission's response*. European Commission. Retrieved April 26, 2023, from [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/coronavirus-response/overview-commissions-response\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/coronavirus-response/overview-commissions-response_en)

European Commission. (2023). *EU SURE social bond*. Economy and Finance. Retrieved April 30, 2023, from [https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/eu-financial-assistance/sure\\_en](https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/eu-financial-assistance/sure_en)

European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication. (2018). *Standard Eurobarometer 90 - Autumn 2018 "Public opinion in the European Union, First results"*. European Commission. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2775/104>

European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication. (2019a). *Standard Eurobarometer 91 - Spring 2019 "Public opinion in the European Union, First results"*. European Commission. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2775/718901>

European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication. (2019b). *Standard Eurobarometer 92 - Autumn 2019 "Public opinion in the European Union, First results"*. European Commission. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2255>

European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication. (2020). *Standard Eurobarometer 93 - Summer 2020 "Public opinion in the European Union, First results"*. European Commission. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2775/460239>

European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication. (2021). *Standard Eurobarometer 95 - Spring 2021 "Public opinion in the European Union, First results"*. European Commission. 10.2775/933107

European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication. (2022). *Standard Eurobarometer 97 - Summer 2020 "Public opinion in the European Union, First results"*. European Commission. 10.2775/081396

European Commission & Directorate-General for Communication. (2023). *Standard Eurobarometer 98 – Winter 2022-2023 "Public Opinion in the European Union – First Results Report"*. European Commission. 10.2775/460956

European Union. (2021, June 11). *NextGenerationEU - European Union*. NextGenerationEU. Retrieved May 4, 2023, from [https://next-generation-eu.europa.eu/index\\_en](https://next-generation-eu.europa.eu/index_en)

European Union. (2023). *Eurobarometer – Public opinion in the European Union*. European Union. Retrieved May 1, 2023, from <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/screen/home>

Gadi, N., Saleh, S., Johnson, J.-A., & Trinidad, A. (2022). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lifestyle and behaviours, mental health and education of students studying healthcare-related courses at a British university. *BMC Medical Education*, 22(115), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-022-03179-z>

Koh, D. (2020, July). COVID-19 lockdowns throughout the world. *Occupational Medicine*, 70(5), 322.

Powder, J. (2022, December 15). *Covid Year in Review*. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2022/covid-year-in-review>

Prosser, C. (2020, June 12). The end of the EU affair: the UK general election of 2019. *West European Politics*, 44(2), 450-461. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2020.1773640>

Quaglia, L., & Verdun, A. (2023). The COVID-19 pandemic and the European Union: politics, policies and institutions. *JOURNAL OF EUROPEAN PUBLIC POLICY*, 30(4), 599-611. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2022.2141305>

Su, C., Dai, K., Ullah, S., & Andlib, Z. (2022, May 12). COVID-19 pandemic and unemployment dynamics in European economies. *Economic Research-Ekonomska Istraživanja*, 35(1), 1752-1764. DOI: 10.1080/1331677X.2021.1912627

Tušl, M., Brauchli, R., Kerksieck, P., & Bauer, G. F. (2021). Impact of the COVID-19 crisis on work and private life, mental well-being and self rated health in German and Swiss employees: a cross-sectional online survey. *BMC Public Health*, 21(741), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-10788-8>

World Health Organization. (2023, April 26). *Germany: WHO Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)*

*Dashboard With Vaccination Data*. WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard.

Retrieved April 29, 2023, from <https://covid19.who.int/region/euro/country/de>



