Citizens' beliefs on political actors' responsibility and responsiveness
The (de)politicisation of the EU socio-economic governance « at the bottom »

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FIRST DRAFT – PLEASE DO NOT CIRCULATE

Abstract

The ongoing transformations of the European socio-economic governance are embedded in a legitimacy crisis whereby the weak linkage between citizens and the EU polity has long been problematic. Against this background, the way in which citizens articulate their beliefs towards EU socio-economic governance is too often overlooked in the existing research over the politicization of EU matters. In particular, we argue that the implications of Mair's thesis of growing institutional constraints, and the related constriction of the policy space (Schäfer & Streeck, 2013), need also to be addressed at the level of citizens' beliefs. To do so, this paper builds on an understanding of 'responsiveness' and 'responsibility' as political constructs deployed in citizens' political discourse on the EU. This text provides an in-depth diachronic secondary analysis of four qualitative data sets collected in Belgium, France and the UK at different points in time between 1995 and 2019 and across social groups by using an abductive analytical approach. Our analysis therefore demonstrates how political agency and (denial of) political choice is key in the articulation of the responsiveness-responsibility nexus and shapes citizens' beliefs over democracy and socio-economic governance in the EU. Drawing from our empirical findings, we propose a complementary theoretical approach of (de)politicization at the bottom.

Introduction

According to Peter Mair, and the strand of research that emerged from his book *Ruling the Void* (2013), the response to the Euro crisis has resulted in a widening gap between political leaders' 'responsiveness' towards their electorate, on the one hand, and their 'responsibility' stemming from commitments through economic and political interaction and integration amongst nation-states, on the other. Mair submitted that because of growing institutional constraints, and the related constriction of the policy space (Schäfer & Streeck, 2013), member-states governments have increasingly tended to favour responsible decisions over responsive choices (Mair, 2013); thereby transforming the classic debate about how governing parties ought to combine the tasks of political representation with good government (Sartori, 1976) into an ever-acute dilemma.

The implications of Mair's thesis looming so large, the scholarship has empirically probed the existence of this dilemma at the national and European level. Studies of governing parties at the national level (e.g. Damhuis & Karremans, 2017; Karremans, 2021; Karremans & Lefkofridi, 2020; Lefkofridi & Nezi, 2020) and decisions and reforms of the EU socio-economic governance (e.g. Laffan, 2014; Mérand, 2021) have provided empirical support to his analysis. Recently, however, decision-making around New Generation Europe particularly has launched a discussion on the possibly evolving balance between responsibility and responsiveness as concerns about citizens appear to have gained more leverage in EU-level politicians and actors discussions (Crespy, Moreira Ramalho, & Schmidt, 2022; see also Mérand, 2021).

Yet, we believe that the implications of Mair's thesis loom even larger than the current scholarship has considered as it raises the issue of the legitimacy of the EU from the perspective of ordinary citizens. As the EU divides decision-making between different level of government Hooghe and Marks, 2003, 2016), attribution of responsibility matters more and more. The literature on the attribution of responsibility has been notably advanced by Hobolt and Tilley (2014) who argued that perceptions of EU responsibility are important conditioning variables to explain performance voting in line with Costa-Lobo and Lewis-Beck (2012) at both the national and EU level. This has led to a burgeoning literature (Page, 2016; Le Gall, 2018; Devine, 2021). Moreover, in Mair's theory, making responsible decisions ties elected leaders' hands and, at the same time, allows EU-level actors to influence their domestic choices (Laffan, 2014, p. 273). Crucially, research has shown that perceptions of constraints on governments' autonomous decision-making are likely to depress participation by devaluating the act of voting in the eyes of citizens (e.g. Hellwig, 2020; Steiner, 2016; but see Vowles, 2008) and negatively impacts their satisfaction with democracy (Ruiz-Rufino & Alonso, 2017). Despite the stakes, it is striking that we know so little about how citizens perceive responsiveness and responsibility, in particular of the socio-economic governance of the EU (SEGEU).

In this article, we ask: what are citizens' beliefs on the responsiveness and responsibility of political actors as expressed in citizens' discourses on the socio-economic governance of the EU? We adopt a constructivist perspective to assert whether ordinary citizens across European member-states actually discuss the SEGEU with reference to responsibility and responsiveness of political actors; the meanings they associate respectively to political actors' responsibility and responsiveness in the context of the SEGEU; and, last, what dilemma, if any, they see between their responsibility and responsiveness. After all, the dilemma exists only to the extent that ordinary citizens frame and conceive responsibility and responsiveness as we, scholars, define them, which thereby lends support for a positive approach to the issue.

Our study rests on a comparative and longitudinal design whereby we performed a qualitative secondary analysis of interview data from four primary datasets generated in 1995-

1996[1], 2004-2005, 2016 and 2019 covering Belgium, France and the United Kingdom. Each address the issue of citizens' relations to the process of European integration. The primary datasets include research participants from different socio-economic backgrounds and political leanings. Our analysis is abductive in nature (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014; Vila-Henninger et al., 2022) and, thereby, is oriented toward theory-building on citizens' beliefs on political actors' responsiveness and responsibility in the context of the socio-economic governance of the EU. Our reanalysis of qualitative data provides an opportunity to gain access not only to certain political beliefs or attitudes, but also to identify the underlying context in which they develop – subsequently enabling an understanding of how participants think about responsiveness and responsibility and not only of what they think.

We show that ordinary citizens in our dataset do discuss political actors' responsiveness and responsibility in the context of the SEGEU although in different ways. While the principle of political actors' responsiveness toward the citizenry is a widely upheld principle, research participants discuss the reality of its implementation. Most concur that the elite are not responsive to them, but to the market and the economy and discuss whether this reflects a political choice or a mere necessity. In contrast, they question the very principle of responsibility, which they understand as a set of institutional constraints stemming from the EU. They discuss the consequences of political actors' responsible decisions and disagree on whether the compliance to institutional rules is a choice or a justified necessity for political actors. Last, some research participants recognize the dilemmatic relationship between political actors' responsiveness and frame it as one where responsibility undeniably prevails over political actors' responsiveness to their citizens.

The remainder of the article is organized in four sections. Section 1 presents the state of the art. Section 2 discusses our data and methods of data analysis. Section three focuses on our empirical analysis and section four presents our discussion and conclusions.

Theoretical framework: Citizens' beliefs on EU responsibility and responsiveness

Peter Mair's (2013) elaboration on the dilemma between responsibility and responsiveness revived a classic debate about how governing parties ought to combine the tasks of political representation with good government (Sartori, 1976). Based on the empirical analysis of the Irish government during the 2008 economic crises, he submitted that because of growing institutional constraints, and the related constriction of the policy space (Schäfer and Streeck, 2013), member-states governments have increasingly tended to favour responsible decisions over responsive choices (Mair, 2013). The implications of Mair's thesis for democratic governance loom large.

Thus far, the literature has focused on one, arguably very significant, aspect, pertaining to the empirical features of governments' dilemma between responsibility and responsiveness both at the EU and national level. Parts of Mair's argument have been thereby confirmed. At the EU-level, fiscal discipline became a dominant guiding principle not only of the response to the crisis in the Eurozone, but also in the reforms of the socio-economic governance of the European Union (Laffan, 2014). In addition, studies of governing parties at the national level indicate a similar evolution, with responsibility gaining prominence over time in national governments decision-making and their justifications thereof (Karremans and Damhuis, 2020), and particularly during the Eurozone crisis (Karremans, 2021). However, recent developments put to a test Mair's thesis as concerns about citizens appear to have gained more leverage in how EU-level politicians and actors discuss their decision-making (Mérand, 2021). Similarly,

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[1] At the moment of writing this paper, the analysis of Belot's dataset (1995-1996) was not yet completed and thus included in the results presented here.

there is evidence that in the years following the Eurozone crisis, responsiveness has featured more prominently in how EU member-states have justified their budgetary choices (Karremans, 2021). These observations have sustained a discussion on the possibly evolving balance between responsibility and responsiveness.

His argument is thus that governments today have become more responsible and less responsive than in the past (Karremans and Damhuis, 2020). In Mair's theory (2013), this development, in turn, is affecting electoral competition and has considerable implications for the relationship between political actors and citizens. Crucially, another aspect, equally significant, has thus been overlooked: it relates to how citizens themselves perceive the responsiveness and the responsibility in the socio-economic governance and whether they understand the two principles to be dilemmatic. Of course, the question has not been absent from the existing literature – even if to our knowledge not asked in Mair's terms directly. In particular, at the individual level, the existing literature has demonstrated that perceptions of responsiveness and responsibility are paramount to comprehend citizens' electoral connection. Overall, different bodies of scholarship indicate indeed that perceptions of EU responsibility should affect citizens' electoral connection.

First, a burgeoning strand of literature has recently argued that attribution of responsibility to the EU can affect electoral behaviour. This literature has been notably advanced by Hobolt and Tilley (2014) who argued that perceptions of EU responsibility are important conditioning variables to explain performance voting in line with Costa-Lobo and Lewis-Beck (2012) at both the national and EU level. Most notably, studies have shown that perceptions of EU responsibility are likely to moderate government accountability at the national level (Costa-Lobo and Lewis-Beck, 2012; Hobolt and Tilley, 2014; Le Gall, 2018) or at the European level (Page, 2016; Magni-Berton et al., 2021)[2]. The question of how voters attribute responsibility to the EU is here key (Hobolt and Tilley, 2014; Wilson and Hobolt, 2015).

Another burgeoning literature also suggests that the loss of autonomy of governments entailed by international integration – thus by their responsibility – can impair representation (Hellwig, 2020). In that respect, the literature highlights the role of economic integration in the weakening of the capacity and/or willingness of elected actors to represent their constituents and, thereby, in citizens' beliefs that their concerns are taken into consideration in policymaking (Rohrschneider, 2005; Holmberg, 2014, 2020). Specifically, the loss of political actors' autonomy arguably weakens two important facets of representation: the extent to which policy outcomes reflect citizens' preferences and the degree to which citizens' interests are voiced in the public sphere. Indeed, empirics indicate that the loss of autonomy fosters convergence of party platforms (Haupt 2010; Steiner and Martin 2012; Nanou and Dorussen, 2013; Sen and Barry, 2020), eventually contributing to the detachment of voters toward politics by limiting political alternatives (Martin and Steiner, 2012). Echoing Mair's argument, ultimately, this results in the decline of responsiveness because parties become increasingly aligned with external actors' preferences (Ezrow and Hellwig, 2014; Damhuis and Karremans, 2017).

The literature on political constraints stemming from economic integration predicts also that constraints will decrease turnout by lowering the perceived benefits derived from the act of voting. Here, the rationale is straightforward: if elected officials lack political efficacy to

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[2] We are well aware that numerous comparative studies have shown the complex institutional structures that blur the lines of responsibility make it difficult for citizens to hold government account (e.g. De Vries, Edwards, & Tillman, 2011). However, our argument follows work of Wilson and Hobolt who demonstrate that, highly politicized environments result in more correct allocations of responsibility (2015). Moreover, Hobolt and Tilley have also demonstrated that citizens' attribution of responsibility corresponds to the institutional context (2014). Finally, when it comes to our argument, correct attribution of responsibility does not really matter for the mechanism that we would like to explore. Rather what matters is the perception of who is responsible for EU socio-economic governance that will be key for our argument.

implement policy decisions due to the constraints they are facing, then voters will have less incentives to participate in elections. More importantly, in this perspective, not only does this perception reduce citizens' incentives to vote, but it also undermines their beliefs on the value of voting (Steiner, 2016; but see: Vowles, 2008). Empirically, this negative relationship between international integration and electoral participation has been confirmed at the aggregate level (Steiner, 2010; Marshall and Fisher, 2015). This association between external constraints, governments' political efficacy and turnout has also been accounted for in the literature dealing with the 2007 debt crisis (Ruiz-Rufino and Alonso, 2017; Häusermann et al., 2018; Schraff and Schimmelfennig, 2019: Turnbull-Dugarte, 2020; but see, Devine, 2021). Finally, Hobolt and Hoerner (2020) also demonstrate how political choice – in terms of polarisation and congruence – has a mobilizing effect on citizens' turnout.

Thus, while some strands of literature hint that citizens' perceptions of responsiveness and responsibility may have an influence on electoral behaviour, they draw from distinct conceptualizations of the EU. Indeed, from the perspective of the literature sketched in this section, there are thus two dimensions to the responsibility of the EU: attribution of responsibility in policy-making – are national or European political actors in charge? – and responsibility as a constraint – are the decisions taken following accepted procedural norms and practices? We build on these different strands of the literature to develop our theoretical argument that, in a constructivist perspective, citizens' beliefs are integral to assessing the extent to which governmental choices are considered to hurt political representation and/or to sustain a good government, as is their interpretation of governmental policies that grounds whether and how governments are responsible and responsive. In particular, a key feature of the debate pertains to the definition of responsibility and responsiveness, an issue that has proved contentious (Bardi et al., 2014). Most debated definitions are objective definitions that adjudicate between the many dimensions of the concepts of responsibility and responsiveness, respectively. Taking a complementary approach to the existing literature on attribution of responsibility and economic integration as a constraint, this paper examines to what extent citizens perceive the socio-economic governance in terms of responsiveness and responsibility and how they construct their discourses on EU socio-economic governance around those concepts. The scenario sketched by Mair is interpreted here as one (potential) aspect of the (de)politicisation of EU socio-economic governance from the bottom.

2. Data and methods of analysis: Operationalizing citizens' beliefs on political actors and the socio-economic governance of the EU

In this section, we discuss how we operationalized citizens' beliefs about what political actors do and do not do when it comes to the SEGEU, in view of analysing the possibly dilemmatic relationship between their responsibility and their responsiveness. First, we present our comparative design, the case selection and our qualitative secondary datasets. Second, we discuss our abductive approach to data analysis.

Qualitative Secondary Analysis and Case Selection

This article relies on secondary analysis understood as '*a research strategy which makes use of pre-existing […] research data for the purposes of investigating new questions or verifying previous studies*' (Heaton, 2004, p. 16). We performed a secondary qualitative analysis of four qualitative datasets of individual and collective interviews collected in Belgium, France and England from the mid-1990s to 2019. We used 40 non-directive (semi-structured) face-to-face interviews realized at Durham (Tyne and Wear, UK) and Guildford (Surrey, UK) between May

and June 1995 and in Grenoble (France) and Boulogne-sur-Mer (France) between February and April 1996[3] (Belot, 2000). The topics were going from the personal experience of the interviewee in other countries, the meaning of Europe, and the principal problems that they faced currently to the role of France/UK in Europe to capture citizens' attitudes towards European integration. Céline Belot interviewed young people between 15 and 30 years old and the sample was diversified according to age (3 classes), gender and education.

Second, the CITAE – Citizens Talking about Europe data includes focus groups, organized in Brussels, Oxford and Paris between October 2005 and June 2006 (Duchesne, Frazer, Haegel, & Van Ingelgom, 2013). It focuses on citizens' reactions to European integration. It is based on 24 focus groups involving four to six participants selected to be socially close (working class, white collars, managers and activists) but politically diverse. This research includes 133 participants.

Third, Heidi Mercenier dataset includes 6 focus groups involving 35 young people leaving in Brussels that took place between November 2013 and May 2014 (Delmotte, Mercenier & Van Ingelgom, 2017). Research participants were aged 16 to 26, and had lived most of their life in Brussels or were born in Belgium. These focus groups of three and a half hours each included 4 to 7 participants who did not know each other but lived in each case in the same area of the city. Considering the spatial segregation of Brussels (Kesteloot and Loopmans 2009), the choice of the neighbourhoods was instrumental to recruiting interviewees with diverse socio-demographic features[4]. The research focuses on young people's perceptions of the EU and their relationships to politics.

Fourth, building explicitly on the previous datasets, the RESTEP dataset was designed to study how citizens structure their discourses on Europe, when and how the European issues are politicized and whether citizens' opinions are by specific cleavages across social groups and national contexts (Beaudonnet et al., 2022). 21 focus groups were organized with different socio-economic groups in four countries (France, Belgium, Portugal, and Italy) during a four-month time span in 2019. Only those conducted in France (Grenoble) and Belgium (Louvain-la-Neuve) were kept to be analysed as part of our secondary corpus, including 14 focus groups and 69 participants.

The four primary datasets that our qualitative secondary analysis corpus encompasses are well-suited to the purpose of this article. First, they study ordinary citizens' attitudes towards and representations of the EU – a main concern of this article. This thematic similarity assures that the content of our corpus is sufficiently homogeneous. Because we are empirically interested in meaningful commonalities across time, place and socio-economic backgrounds, the remaining heterogeneity in type of data collection and primary research questions may strengthen rather than weaken findings which emerge from otherwise independently collected and designed primary data sources. Importantly, in neither of the primary datasets were research participants prompted to discuss the socio-economic governance of the EU, or any other public policies for that matter[5].

Second, our corpus includes datasets collected at different points in time, starting in the early 1990s to 2019. This enables a longitudinal approach of citizens' beliefs about political actors in the context of the SEGEU – which provides meaningful empirical grounds to examine whether the dilemma between political actors' responsibility and responsiveness has grown more acute in citizens' views. Each primary dataset also offers socio-economic and political variation as participants were selected based on both criteria.

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[3] In this version of the paper, this dataset has not yet been analysed.
[4] This design enabled to collect contrasted experiences of living and belonging in Brussels rather than to establish a representative sample.
[5] There is one exception only in Belot's research where one question on environmental policies is asked (2000).

Third, our corpus includes three country-cases: Belgium, France and the United Kingdom. These countries are most likely cases of political actors at the EU level being responsible as they are creditor countries. It has been shown that in creditor countries, the responsibility of EU actors is articulated with their longer-term responsiveness to citizens' preferences with the rationale that responsible measures are necessary to protect EU's ability to respond in the middle/long-term to citizens' preferences (Linde & Peters, 2020). However, the country cases also display variation in their average support for the EU and their membership to the Eurozone, as well as the political leaning of their governing coalition in the different points in time.

This qualitative secondary dataset thus allows for the study of how citizens perceive political actors' responsiveness and responsibility when discussing EU socio-economic governance when not prompted to do so. It fits our orientation towards theory-building as it includes variation on country- and individual-level features.

Abductive Analytical Approach and Operationalization

We apply an abductive approach to qualitative analysis (Peirce, 1934; Tavory & Timmermans, 2014; Vila-Henninger et al., 2022). Abduction is instrumental to building theory as it combines deduction and induction. Specifically, our approach is driven by the theorization of citizens' beliefs of political actors' responsibility and responsiveness in the context of the socio-economic governance of the EU. Our study is not designed to offer a representative description of these beliefs in different countries, time points and across socio-economic backgrounds. Instead, we use our comparative and longitudinal design to conceptualize what citizens believe with respect to political actors' responsiveness and responsibility in an EU setting, how they frame each notion and the meanings and realities they associate to each of them. There are numerous examples of qualitative data as a primary method in research about citizens' beliefs in politics (Akachar et al., 2017; Billig, 1992; Damay and Mercenier, 2016; Delmotte et al., 2017; Duchesne and Haegel, 2004a, 2010; Duchesne et al., 2013; Frazer, 1988, 1989; Gamson, 1992; Hopf, 2002; Jarvis and Lister, 2012; Marsh et al., 2007; Stocker et al., 2016; White, 2011). To this regard, qualitative data provide an opportunity for the researchers to gain access not only to certain political beliefs or attitudes, but also to identify the underlying context in which they develop – subsequently enabling an understanding of how participants think about political issues and not only of what they think. For example, in public opinion research, qualitative data are valuable in revealing the process of opinion formation, in providing glimpses of usually latent aspects of this process, and in demonstrating the social nature of public opinion' (Delli Carpini and Williams, 1994:62). In particular, by forcing participants to 'think out loud', focus groups enable an observation of the process of opinion-formation in action and in interaction with one another.

We coded transcripts using ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis software. In the first phase, we coded the four primary datasets using codes from a deductive team codebook (see Vila-Henninger et al., 2022). To operationalize research participants' discussion of the socio-economic governance of the EU, we draw from our policy codes that cover policy domains as identified in the comparative agenda project. We included five policy codes to identify participants' mentions of public policies that are linked to the socio-economic governance – banking and finance, economy, employment, Euro, and social policies. Admittedly, we adopted a broader understanding of the socio-economic governance of the EU than studies that focus on decision-making or policy-making. This is justified by our analysis of citizen interviewees' discourses about them, as opposed to expert discussion, in research settings where they were not prompted to talk about them. We chose to broaden the scope of the policies under consideration to make sure that we would not miss any reference to it. Our operationalization

thereby includes EU policies that cover both the core of the socio-economic governance of the EU (e.g. 'Euro' or 'economic' policy) as well as its policy implications (e;g. 'social policy', 'employment policy'). Concretely, segments of interview transcripts are coded under a specific policy code when at least one of four coding criteria are present: a direct experience with a given policy or that of a close one; mentions of (a group of) policy recipients or policy target; mentions of a specific policy measure or policy instruments; and, last, references to a policy rationale, that is, the cognitive logics that underpin a policy (Dupuy, Teuber, & Van Ingelgom, 2022). Alongside the policy codes, we also included another code group that describes the level of government at which policies are discussed. Specifically, we included the code 'Multilevel – EU' to make sure that the European level was indeed mentioned when discussing these policies. Last, we rely on a third code group that depicts any actor, institution or action that connects citizens to their political system. It is based on Easton's paradigmatic framework (1965). We thus created five deductive Democratic Linkage codes: Political Community, Regime Principles, Regime Institutions, Political Actors, and Citizen Participation (for further details, see Vila-Henninger et al. 2022). We specifically draw from the 'political actors' and 'regime institutions' codes, indicating respectively when participants speak of any elected political actors invested with formal political power by their office (political actors) or any governmental body or organisation (regime institutions)

Second, based on the aforementioned deductive codes, we identified interview segments where research participants mention political actors and institutions in their discourses on policies associated to the socio-economic governance of the EU. We used the 'Query Tool' from ATLAS.ti' to combine codes using the 'AND' and 'OR' function. Sub-equation 1 retrieved quotations where respondents discussed any political actor in relations to policies included in the socio-economic governance of the EU. Sub-equation 2 retrieved quotations where respondents discussed any institution as engaging in the EU socio-economic governance. Table 1 presents both sub-equations.

Table 1: *ATLAS.ti Query Tool Abductive Sub-Equation Codes*

Sub-Equation 1 Political actors in EU socio-economic governance	('Public policies – Bank' OR 'Public Policies – Economy' OR 'Public Policies – Employment' OR 'Public Policies – Euro' OR 'Public Policies – Social Policies') AND 'Political actors' AND 'Multilevel – EU' (12_PP_1_Bank | 12_PP_1_Eco | 12_PP_1_Empl | 12_PP_1_Euro | 12_PP_1_Soc) & 14_DL_4_Actors_Pol & (20_MLVL_3_EU | 12_PP_2_EU_Integr_Ev)
Sub-Equation 2 Institutions in EU socio-economic governance	('Public policies – Bank' OR 'Public Policies – Economy' OR 'Public Policies – Employment' OR 'Public Policies – Euro' OR 'Public Policies – Social Policies') AND 'Institutions' AND 'Multilevel – EU' (12_PP_1_Bank | 12_PP_1_Eco | 12_PP_1_Empl | 12_PP_1_Euro | 12_PP_1_Soc) & 14_DL_3_Regime_Institutions & (20_MLVL_3_EU | 12_PP_2_EU_Integr_Ev)

In total, we retrieved 36 quotes from sub-equation 1 and 99 quotes from sub-equation 2[6]. From these quotes, we eliminated 29 redundant quotes (that were both coded under 'political actors' and 'regime institutions' and, thereby counted twice). After a first round of analysis, we eliminated 24 false positives, that is, quotes that do not include the empirical phenomenon of interest, here discussions of the socio-economic governance of the EU. Typically, in these

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[6] Note that all the number indicated in this section should be updated once the last dataset is included in the sample.

quotes, the 'EU level' code was present because of policy codes other than the ones of interest in our study. Overall, we analyse 80 quotes. Note that a quote can go from a few sentences to a very large section of discussion in a focus group.

In a second round of analysis, we abductively coded for mentions of political actors' and EU institutions' responsiveness and responsibility. We started from very broad understandings of responsiveness and responsibility to identify quotes where discussions thereof were present. Responsiveness relates to the representative role of political actors and concerns their capacity and/or willingness to listen to and represent citizens' preferences in EU socio-economic policy making (Mair, 2013; Lefkofridi and Nezi, 2020). Responsibility pertains to the governing role of political actors following accepted procedural norms and practices, in particular those laid down in the framework of the socio-economic governance. We identified 51 quotes where a mention of either responsiveness or responsibility was present. We inductively interpreted the data, instead on applying a deductive codebook, to remain open to citizens' beliefs on responsiveness and responsibility and to the meanings research respondents give to these concepts and realities (Vila-Henninger, Dupuy and Van Ingelgom et al, 2022).

By way of illustration of our approach to coding and analysis, we take two examples. First, in the following extract from a CITAE focus group of young activists in Brussels in 2005, we coded that the participants discussed the Bolkenstein directive. They specifically mentioned political actors – the MEPs – who made the decisions on the matter. These deductive coding is underlined in the following quote. Our abductive coding is indicated in italics. Interestingly, the participants discuss the responsiveness of the European Parliament and its members by taking the Bolkenstein directive as an example where the MEPs listened to civil society. At the same time, they also converge on the view that it is complicated for individual citizens to feel connected to their MEP when their decisions and actions are not visible - as illustrated by Charles-Henri statement that '*one cannot identify oneself with someone whose action is not identified*' or by Ludovic statement that '*It's no longer elected officials who vote for people in general'.* This quote illustrates how the agency of political actors, or lack thereof, is crucial to build the linkage between citizens and their political representatives.

Extract 1: Focus Group, Activits, Bruxelles, 2005

Charles-Henri: You have to compare comparable things because at the time we didn't have the fight that we have now on Bolkenstein. The European Parliament has played another role, whether it is sufficient or not, but it is still ...
Brandon: It made headways. It had to fight for them for sure but.
Charles-Henri: I think so.
Brandon: It doesn't take away anything from the question of whether citizens feel they are close to their European member of Parliament. I don't think it discredits them in the same way. I mean they could hardly feel close to their European member of Parliament at the time when they were a direct national elected representative.
Vinciane: The European Parliament doesn't have tons of power either. I don't know.
Charles-Henri: *You can't identify with someone whose action is not identifiable.*
Vinciane: *Identifiable.*
Charles-Henri: You can identify with someone who is at European level but who doesn't do anything very ...
Vinciane: They are overshadowed by others. I think it's very complicated.
Charles-Henri: It seems to me that since the debate on Bolkestein and others, *we have seen a lot more mobilisation of the associative sector in particular (Vinciane agrees) to contact European parliamentarians and put forward their arguments in the debate.* So obviously these are both very technical debates, and we can come back to the question of experts (showing theboard table) (laughs)
Ludovic: *I do agree with that. They are no longer elected representatives who vote for people in general. Even the image they give in the media, they're no longer elected representatives, they're becoming experts. They no longer have the image that they have been elected by the people, but rather that they are experts on European issues.* But it's really so complicated. Nobody understands anything.

Another quote is illustrative of discussions on the responsibility of political actors in the context of the socio-economic governance of the EU. We coded that the participants were discussing the EU and in particular the monetary policy of the ECB. They were mentioning specifically political actors who were making decision on the matter. The discussion was also considered as being linked to the question of responsibility. In this example, when explaining the action taken by the ECB, Jean-Michel insists on the fact that it was indeed irresponsible to create money, by doing so he refers specifically to the responsible criteria that political actors in their governing role need to act from a sense of duty and moral responsibility, namely within the bounds of accepted norms of monetary and budgetary responsibility.

Extract 2 : Focus Group, Séquentiel Grenoble, 2019

Jean-Michel: Are we allowed to mention <u>the European Central Bank</u>? Because it's the great absentee. It has <u>created more than 2,400 billion euros ,of money in the last 24 months. That's the amount of France's debt. They have created 2,400 billion in quantitative easing.</u> *That's France's debt.*
Jean-Louis: Of what?
Jean-Michel: They call it quantitative easing. *In the street they call it money printing. Do you see?*
Jean-Louis: Oh, right.
Jean-Michel: I'm doing simultaneous translation.
Jean-Louis: Is it still happening?
Jean-Michel: But, let's be exact, so we'll talk about quantitative easing. *This is money creation that is grounded on anything.*
Pierre: Yes, yes.
Jean-Michel: *Money creation is just decided. That's it.*
Pierre: That's it!

3. Empirical analysis

What emerges if we unpack citizens' discourses on political actors' responsiveness and responsibility in the context of the socio-economic governance of the EU? We start with presenting how research participants discuss these actors' responsiveness and responsibility, respectively and, then, study how they think of the relationships between the two to analyse possible dilemmas in citizens' beliefs.

Political actors' responsiveness (1): Did they make these EU decisions in our name?

In our data, research participants frequently refer to the responsiveness of political actors or regime institutions when discussing the socio-economic governance of the EU. Interestingly, the idea that political actors and/or institutions should be responsive to citizens, the people or 'them' is not questioned: it forms the baseline of the discussion. Citizens' beliefs are structured on the principle of political actors' responsiveness to their preferences and needs. What is questioned, however, is the reality of that responsiveness. Most discussions examine two things: who exactly were the actors or institutions making consequential decisions and who were they responsive to?

Crucially, and at first seemingly disconnected from the issue of their responsiveness, political actors are constructed as a differentiated category from the people or the citizens. The distinction between both groups categories of actors is explicitly acknowledged. The following exchange from a focus groups conducted with young people living in Jette, a neighbourhood in Brussels at the middle-end of the socioeconomic spectrum, illustrates it.

Extract 3: Focus group, Jette (Brussels), 2017

Nathan: That's the problem, that Europe is very distant from the citizens. It's something that's in the clouds (pointing to the sky)
Gabriel: *In the end, whose decision was it?*
Moderator: What decision?
Gabriel: The European Union. Was it the people's?
Yusef: No, it was after the war, I think.
Lucie: It was just the first six countries, wasn't it?
Gabriel: Was it the people's or anyone else's?
Lucy: The leaders of those six countries then?
Catherine: Originally, I think it was an alliance between them to avoid trouble, they said well that's it.
Gabriel: Between whom?
Catherine: The leaders of the countries.
Nour: *But it's a good question that you raise in the sense that we are Europeans, we are in the European Union, but we don't even know who took these decisions. Is it the people? Is it, I don't know, the leaders?* It's still enigmatic.
Lucie: *But at the beginning it was purely economic because it was the coal and steel community. It was first for the money and the transfer of hardware. But afterwards, about the European Union,* I don't know.

Commenting on the on-going discussion on who decided to create the European Union, Nour (19, web design student) acknowledges that they are all Europeans and part of the EU, and still they do not know who took the decision of creating this Union. She then asks again if it was 'the people' or the political leaders, both groups being presented as mutually exclusive in her beliefs as in other participants'. Catherine suggests that the decision was made by the leaders of the founding countries of the EU and that they made the decision 'between them', to the exclusion of other considerations and actors. In this discussion, participants feel estranged from the decision to create the EU, because of their indecision concerning who actually did it. Also, when the possibility that governmental leaders may have decided to create the EU is discussed, what surfaces is that that 'people's' preferences were not part of that decision-making. At the end of the quote, Lucie mentions economic reasons, while Catherine suggested that the decision was taken to 'avoid trouble'. Citizens' inputs are nowhere present and the possibility of political representation is not even alluded to.

When discussing another important step of European integration, the common currency, participants to a focus group in Paris in 2005 also wonder who made the decision to create the Euro and, specifically, oppose the politicians to 'the people' or 'the populations'.

Extract 4: Focus group, Working class, Paris, 2005

Cédric: It's true that in relation to the populations, the Euro in relation to the populations, it was beneficial because we can actually travel around without changing…
Gérald: Yeah, well yeah, you lose money, an exchange commission.
Jean-Marie: That's nonsense.
Margot: ... Tourism
Gérald: The Euro doesn't prevent you from travelling. So, I don't think about it, I have to change (grimace), I don't travel.
Jean-Marie: *But it's not the people who asked for the Euro, it's the politicians who instituted it, it's got nothing to do with that (a bit vehemently). I'm sorry, it wasn't the people who asked for the Euro. It was the elected representatives, the politicians who wanted to do it. Well yes, it's not the people.*
Zahoua: *It's true, they didn't ask our opinion.*
Cédric: No, but I'm telling you that in relation to the people (pointing to the board), it did indeed bring ...
Jean-Marie: Mark it (pointing to the board), *it wasn't asked for by the people*
Moderator: I'm marking it (laughs) (.)
Gérald: *It was the politicians who wanted it.*
Zahoua: *They imposed it, that's all.*

> **Jean-Marie**: *The politicians wanted it.*
> **Moderator:** It wasn't requested
> **Jean-Marie**: By the people, by the peoples. There was no referendum.
> **Gérald**: Creating a currency, what a strange idea.
> **Jean-Marie**: Oh yes, there was a referendum. There was Maastricht. *Yes, there was a referendum, but people didn't expect it.* Anyway (takes his head in his hand and looks towards the ground)

Just like in Brussels in 2017, participants' views converge on idea that the elite made the decision and that they imposed their 'will' on citizens. As Gerald says, "*they wanted it*" and Zahoua concurs by adding that politicians forced their decisions on citizens – "*they imposed it*". In this conversation as well, the opposition between elected politicians and citizens is a self-evident and shared component of participants' worldview; and, instead of sustaining a reflection on political representation and how it works, the gap between elite and citizens grounds the understanding that decisions that politicians make are unrelated to citizens' preferences and needs. Interestingly, even when Jean-Marie acknowledges that politicians actually asked for citizens' preferences when he remembers that there was a referendum about the common currency, he is dismissive and argues that because "*the people did not expect it*", the referendum was not an effective way for politicians to hear citizens' voices. Even in the face of a referendum, the sheer possibility that politicians could have been responsive to citizens is ruled out.

In most discussions, the vagueness of the references to political actors as 'the politicians' or 'the elected politicians' is pervasive. It indicates a distance between the decisions they make in the context of the socio-economic governance of the EU and citizens' preferences and needs. More specifically, however, it reflects the absence of political representation as a possibility in most participants' discussions. A large majority of participants reported that they perceived political actors as one indefinite group, without distinguishing their ideological leanings or the many individuals that compose that group. In the extract below, from a focus group with working-class participants in Brussels in 2005, the lack of political actors' responsiveness towards citizens is explicitly tied to the absence of political representation. André recalls that '*all the politicians said 'yes' to the Constitution, 'yes' to Bolkestein and you see that there were 54 percent of French people who do not agree*'. Even when citizens did vote against it, the elites did carry on with their plans because they wanted to. While André explicitly acknowledges the principle of political representation, it is so far from the reality he knows about that he discusses it using the conditional form ('*if the elected representatives are our representatives…*') and that he reflects upon ways and instruments to have politicians listen to citizens and have a '*better communication*' between them. He talks about referendums as a possible way forward, even though he also mentions the results of the referendum in France about the Constitutional Treaty, disappointing results in his opinion.

Extract 5: Focus Group, Working Class, Brussels, 2005

> **André**: If the elected representatives are <u>our representatives,</u> there are some problems now in this society. I propose to publicly fund elections because unfortunately, elected politicians are obliged to have a relationship with companies to finance... So the ordinary people, the simple citizens don't have access to that. So: public funding. Secondly, the ideas of Switzerland that referendums take place more often because you see, for example in France, <u>*all the politicians said 'yes' to the Constitution, 'yes' to Bolkestein*</u> *and you see that there were 54 percent of French people who do not agree. So there is a communication problem between elected politicians and citizens.* So referendums or maybe another way to have *access to* <u>*our politician*</u> *because now they are not really our representatives unfortunately*.
> **Moderator**: Another access to our politicians who don't really represent us (André agrees). For example, referendums.
> **André**: For me, that's it: a public investment in elections and referendums. Two solutions.

Overall, the opposition between the 'elected' and the 'people' is typical for the discussions on responsiveness in general. In the light of their perceptions of the lack of responsiveness of political actors to their needs and demands, most respondents do construct a clear distinction between 'them' and 'us'. They also demonstrate a clear incorporation of the concept of responsiveness – even if most of time to acknowledge the lack of it.

Political actors' responsiveness (2): They are responsive to the economy and the market

While the category used to refer to political actors is most of time rather vague, the collusion between political elites and the economy is explicitly mentioned by many participants as part of the problem. Nathan who took part to the focus group conducted in Jette (extract 3) denounces this gap between the elites and the people. In the same discussion, when addressing the question of unemployment and the pensions, he declares: '*It's too much. It's taking the piss out of the world. It's like in Europe when you see the salaries of <u>the Eurocrats</u> and everything, it's sickening. They don't pay any taxes. They have a lot of advantages and they are the ones who say "the people are not happy". There's really a gap between <u>the political and financial elite, all the elites and the little people</u>'*. While Nathan put the political and the financial elite side by side, other interviewees treat them as distinct, but nonetheless argue that the former do consider market actors' preferences when making their decisions. As André puts it (Excerpt 5), the representatives '*are obliged to have a relationship with companies, finance*'.

The next extract (Extract 6) from a focus group with working class participants in Brussels in 2005 illustrates the unequivocal responsiveness of political actors to the market and the economy in the context of the SEGEU.

Extract 6: Working class, Brussels, 2005

Farouk: and now the market is investing the minimum to earn the maximum (.) that's the point of view of the current market
Sophie: I don't understand, before to get money you had to invest
Farouk: to have money the aim is that: in economics class it's (.) to have a fund to invest and afterwards you get back the profits from your investment now the idea is to invest the minimum to have the maximum (.) a competition
Moderator: it's to invest the minimum to get the maximum back (.)
Farouk: use the minimum amount of labour to get more money
Sophie: use (.) the minimum of labour (.) for a maximum of money
Farouk: it's like the Bolkenstein law (.) the worker from another country comes to work in Belgium and pays his taxes in his own country (.) I'll say that it's the opening up of the market, it's the market: (.)
Ming: (towards Farouk) excuse me when a worker comes to work here, for example, and he's from another country [his taxes are: they are paid
Moderator: [that's normal (sound of K7 turning over)
Farouk: That's what they want to do with the opening of borders, that a worker comes, a company comes, they opens their so : their company here already that : in there's already a German van company, they come to work in Belgium with their own cash-in-transit vehicles and everything and p : and they pay the minimum of taxes here, they pay their taxes in their own country and :
Moderator: that was the Bolkenstein directive (.) more or less not (.)
Farouk: that's why the French voted no (.) when we asked them about Europe and everything here we weren't given a choice, well, I'm going to say that I have a bit of a trade unionist attitude, I'm a trade union delegate
Dona: ah [that's it

Farouk presents the Bolkenstein directive is a stylized manner, drawing from a neoclassic understanding of economics whereby market forces prevail national economic interests since "*the worker from another country comes to work in Belgium and pays his taxes in his own country*". Farouk observes that "the Bolkenstein law" was opposed by the French exactly because it is tilted against the common interest of a country citizens as foreign workers

"*pay the minimum of taxes here, they pay their taxes in their own country*". This is the result of politicians' own decision-making "*That's what they want to do with the opening of borders*". For him, this choice to favour the market over citizens' preferences is not only the story of the Bolkenstein directive and the French, but more generally of European integration and other European citizens as "*we weren't given a choice*".

Crucially, political actors' responsiveness to the market and economic actors is largely discussed as a matter of political actors' own political agency. In the next quote (Extract 7), from a focus group with managers conducted in Paris in 2005, Gabriel further develops the idea that political actors are responsive to the market and market actors. He states that '*elected officials are obliged to take the market into account*' while, at the same time, acknowledging that they have the power.

> Extract 7: Focus group, Managers, Brussels, 2005
>
> **Gabriel**: Because normally the market has no power. *On the other hand, <u>elected politicians</u> are obliged to take the market into account* when they deal with a situation. In addition, <u>elected politicians</u> generally only talk about the economy now. That's the area they know the least about, but that's where they intervene the most, eh? (They smile at each other, but no one speaks)
> **Inès**: Officially (smiling).
> **Moderator**: Excuse me
> **Serge**: To talk about the market, we should already see what a company is.
> **Gabriel**: On the European subject, there is a discussion about the 5.5% VAT on restaurants (Céline or Inès approve). Every time, it annoys me (grimace, joking) because I don't see why it's an important subject. For example, because it seems to be blocked by the Austrians or whoever. And in any case, you have to realise that this 5.5% VAT on the restaurant business is a complete sham. Because anyway the restaurant owner, by definition, *the business people don't give a damn about the VAT rate because by definition you only pay it on the added value. It is the final consumer who pays the VAT, not the restaurant owner.* So whether it's 5.5 or 42.3, the restaurant owner will always get their, they will always have the same income excluding tax. So it's simple: it's a smokescreen for I don't know what. And to put Europe in there, to prove that there are some. I think that on this specific issue, the Austrians and the Germans must have told the French: listen, stop, get your restaurant owners to be quiet. *So who has the power? The power in this case is all* the finance ministers *and so on, i.e. <u>it's really people who have been elected</u> and who have the power to do or not to do something about this specific problem.* And in this case, I think they are doing well because, I mean, in France *it's an electoral argument*. It's a bit lame, we'll say. Because if we assume, and we're not changing the subject, but let's assume we reduce VAT to 5.5%, do you think that the prices of restaurant menus will decrease by 15 per cent?
> **Inès**: No, what <u>they</u>'re saying is that they'll be able to hire more people.

Discussing the responsiveness of political actors is mainly a question of political agency rather than of political orientation or ideological preferences. Gabriel says it explicitly in this extract: '*people who have been elected and who on this specific problem have the power to do or not to do*'. This echoes the discussion that took place in the Extract 1 when Charles-Henri, a Belgian activist, declares: '*One cannot identify oneself with someone whose action is not identified*'. Political agency is how citizens talk about the decision making in the EU socio-economic governance. There are many references to political agency such as the discussion on the Euro in Extract 4 illustrates '*It was the politicians who wanted it*', '*They imposed it, that's all*', or '*A will of elected politicians*'. In Gabriel's quote, political actors' agency in their responsiveness to market actors is exemplified by the fact that they decided the decrease the VAT rate on restaurant bills while actually "*the business people don't give a damn about the VAT rate*". This absurd decision, as Gabriel puts it, reflects his initial statement that the economy is "*the area they know the least about, but that's where they intervene the most*" as much as it stresses that "*elected politicians are obliged to take the market into account* when they deal with a situation" and, thus, the politics of constrained choice (Laffan, 2014).

Being Responsible: The Politics of Constrained Choice

In our data, research participants do discuss the responsibility of political actors and institutions in relation to the socio-economic governance of the EU. However, these discussions are less frequent than their mentions to these actors' and institutions' (non)responsiveness. Also, the nature of the discussions differs: when participants refer to political actors' responsibility, they do not take the principle of responsibility for granted. Instead, some participants question the very idea that governments should be responsible. Most discussions start with participants disagreeing about the virtue of the principle of responsibility and, sometimes, an agreement is reached that governmental responsibility in the framework of the SEGEU is detrimental to citizens. The core of these discussions zeroes in on the consequences of responsible decisions and policies. Interestingly, participants frame governmental responsibility in the context of the SEGEU in terms that are close to Mair's understanding: they point at the prevalence of institutional rules stemming from European integration.

In their discussions on the EU socio-economic governance, participants recognize that political actors conduct core areas of public policy within the framework of agreed rules that constrain their decision-making as illustrated (Extract 8) from a focus group with managers in Brussels in 2005.

Extract 8: focus group with managers, Brussels, 2005

Fabio: so: (.) well now: is cooperation a real feeling: that is felt by the population or is it a: how can I put it: (Bruno inaudible) de facto cooperation that has been imposed by force of circumstance
Judith: well, yeah, that's it
Bruno: a little bit by force of circumstance but I think it's easy for nations to give up part of their power for : something superior when they weren't necessarily obliged to
Fabio: no, it's not easy, and it's the proof that the European integration is not progressing as : we had hoped
Bruno: (points with his hand) it's obvious
Fabio: but this delegation of sovereignty was made: it was made again: because: we didn't have much choice and the states were dragged into a spiral that was beyond them (.)
Bruno: of course
Judith: what is it then that is beyond us (not very audible)
Fabio: well, it's simply by dint of: pooling certain sectors, first of all the economic sectors, little by little: we were forced to go beyond that because imbalances were appearing (Judith nods), so: at the same time we had to pool policies: then, well, the economy, as it affects all sectors: from ... little by little, it has spread to .... Etc etc etc there is a whole argumentation that has been put in place to frame all these policies and to : complement them and to make a coherent whole but : it's far : it's far from being completed yet and : there's a lot of work still to be done and : and I think that it's : it's always this spiral that : that : (gesture that underlines her point)

In this discussion, participants discuss explicitly the "*cooperation*" between EU member-states as constituting a "*delegation of sovereignty*" that has gradually gone out of their hands. They follow an almost functionalist line of explanation by suggesting that by "*pooling certain sectors, first of all the economic sectors, little by little: we were forced to go beyond that because imbalances were appearing (...)*". They insist both of the initial political choice to initiate the construction of the common market as well as on the constraints on governments' autonomous decision-making that follow and that come from external pressures. Thus, when the responsibility of political actors in EU socio-economic governance is discussed what is mainly at stake is what Laffan refers to as the politics of constrained choice (2014). The normative criterium of responsibility has been appropriated by a number of participants to assess political agency and in particular the lack of capacity of national political actors to autonomously make decisions. The vagueness of the category of political actors is present as well, but participants here mainly refer to them as 'Belgium' or 'Germany' or 'France' rather

than 'the elected politicians' or 'the politicians', indicating that they are referring to national political actors and suggesting that the pressures come from the supranational level.

Interestingly, the political orientations of political actors and their ideological choices come back into the picture, contrary to what we observed in their discussion of political actors' responsiveness. To challenge the principle of responsibility, some participants indeed stress that its consequences, once implemented, are in the end detrimental to citizens. This principle prevents political actors to do things that they should be able to do. In the following extract from a focus group conducted in France in 2019, Delta explains with some virulence that the constraints stemming from the EU socio-economic governance have huge consequences on national public policies, qualifying the ECB of a '*headless political hen*'.

> Extract 8: Focus group, Grenoble, 2019
>
> **Delta**: I have more of a problem with Europe. In particular, the treaties, um, well, for example *the fact that we can't go into debt beyond 3% of GDP, the fact that we can't modify these treaties, that the European Central Bank is independent, a sort of chicken without a political head that dictates all the monetary policies of each country, in fact. And it turns out that, well, these are the levers, um, that are vital for national public policies. Which can influence unemployment, well all the economic activity of a country, in fact, yes.* With the government, well with the governance of Europe mainly, yes.
> **Moderator**: Does everyone agree with that?
> **Golf**: *No, because if they do that, it's because there are good reasons. Like the 3% is to prevent countries from getting into too much debt and to avoid that it results in problems for the 27, and that it destabilises.*
> **Delta**: Well, that's one way of looking at it, but in fact it's mainly to increase competition and, finally, to participate in the dismantling of public services because, basically, if a state can't exceed that amount, it can't invest in public spending. If it can't do that, it's so that the market can compensate, in fact. At least, that's the regulation we think. To say that we shouldn't get into debt when we are in debt, well we are in debt but we are getting richer, it's paradoxical. The economic circuits are intensified, especially at the level of the state. So, um, I'm rather against Europe. Ha ha!
> **Golf**: So if I understand correctly, by limiting debt, investment in public services is prevented, so as to leave room for the private sector.
> **Delta**: Yeah.

The discussion between Delta and Golf about the acceptability of the principle of responsibility is heated. While they agree that national governments do face institutional constraints stemming from the EU, they disagree on whether there are good reasons to accept them and act responsibly or not. Golf presents the mainstream justifications of fiscal consolidation in response to Delta' argument that these rules result in the hollowing out of national governments' decision-making capacity and turn them into powerless actors who cannot fight unemployment or foster the country's '*economic activity*'. Delta further discusses Golf's argument by rejecting its common-sensical dimension – '*It's one way to look at it*', and by developing more precisely the negative consequences of the implementation of the rules of the Growth and stability pact (GSP): it is not possible to '*invest in the public service*'. Delta therefore makes clear how the compliance to the institutional rules of the GSP is a political choice made by national governments that has political implications. This reflects a general feature of participants' discussion of political actors' responsibility in the framework of the SEGEU where the possibility of political choice is part of the discussion.

Being responsive and responsible: a dilemma?

The question that remains to be asked is whether citizens perceive the responsiveness and responsibility of political actors in the socio-economic governance of the EU to be dilemmatic and in what terms. First, in our dataset, there are only a few discussions where political actors' responsiveness towards the citizenry and their responsibility are discussed side by side. This

reflects two results of our analysis: first, research participants do not consider that political actors are responsive to them, so it makes sense, then, that the dilemma is not prevalent; and, second, they question the very principle of responsibility, which limits discussions on the dilemma.

However, there are still instances where the dilemma between responsiveness and responsibility of political actors is observed in citizens' discourses on the EU socio-economic governance. As the following passage illustrates, the incapacity of Tsipras to hold his electoral promises and his submission to European decisions – '*Tsípras got elected saying he was going to solve the problem, and finally he was subjected*' – is denounced vigorously by Jean-Michel and Sophie, two participants to the focus groups organized in 2019 in Grenoble, whereas Nadine is stressing the fact that he had no choice as he was pressured by 'Europe'.

Extract 9: Focus Group, Grenoble, 2019

Jean-Michel: Well, Greece was a tourism power, an agricultural power and a naval armament power, and today, the port of Piraeus belongs to the Chinese.
Gilles: It belongs to the Chinese?
Nadine: Yeah, exactly.
Jean-Michel: I mean, the Euro killed their tourism and killed their agriculture.
Sophie: They sold to the governments...
Roger: Yeah.
Jean-Michel: Tsípras *got elected saying he was going to solve the problem, and finally he was subjected*, uh...
Nadine: *He couldn't do otherwise*.
Sophie: Well yes.
Roger: Well, that's obvious.
Jean-Michel: Ah, well... In any case, he made a lot of noise with his mouth and not much with his hands.
Roger: Well it's money, eh. Not the currency!
Sophie: Sure it's spectacular.
Nadine: *Well he didn't have the…*
Jean-Michel: Ha! *It's bordering on election fraud, what he did.*
Sophie: Yes.
Nadine: *Yes, but when Europe puts a knife at your throat, what do you do?*
Jean-Michel: You're right, you're right.
Sophie: No, but we were talking about incarnation earlier and it's true that *Tsípras is special because he really sold something that he didn't keep.* But despite everything, he continued on his way, he wasn't debunked.

Even if Jean-Michel is qualifying what Tsipras did as an '*electoral scam*', he does then agree with Nadine when she asked '*Yes, but when Europe puts a knife at your throat, what do you do?*'. The increasing pressure for responsibility during specific contexts such as the economic crisis in Greece goes hand in hand with the perceived inability of political actors to listen and respond to voters and to justify their responsible but unresponsive policies. This passage thus exemplifies how citizens do perceive that specific context such as the one faced by Greece and Tsipras in particular can intensify the emphasis on responsibility (Laffan, 2014; Lefkofridi and Nezi, 2020). At stake here is Tsipras' political agency to tackle the consequences that the adoption of the common currency had on his country. His political agency is perceived as existing but at the same time as constrained by the European decision making in particular by the EU socio-economic governance during the economic crisis.

Other discussions present the dilemma between responsiveness and responsibility in similar terms, like extract 10 from a focus group with young people that took place in Ixelles, a neighbourhood at the upper end of the socio-economic spectrum, in 2017.

Extract 10: Focus Group, Ixelles, 2017

Louis: There will be no change in the institutions, the organs of power that are the institutions. *You take the IMF or the <u>European Commissariats</u>, they are outside of any democratic direction. You are asked to vote for the European Parliament. <u>The European Parliament</u> can give guidelines. You can imagine how much that matters when you are a <u>European Commissioner</u>, a guideline from the <u>European Parliament</u>. So all these organs of power are going to say to Belgium "you are saving ten billion today to service your debt". They have no intention of changing this. You can't ask institutions to change. They are not going to change by themselves.* It's me who doesn't understand (Isabella laughs). It's the institutions, yes, in Europe, *but do you think <u>the IMF</u> will propose to dissolve itself? To leave more room for Belgium?*
Isabella: *No, I think that, I was just talking about the Belgian state which faces contraints, could not do what it wanted. So it was in a union yes. It's simple. For example, you are part of a group, you can't do what you want to do. You have to ask others.* You're on a board of directors, you have to ask the others, you can't lead on your own. So that's what I mean.

When Louis discusses the difficulty of institutions to change, he specifically refers to situations where governing political actors have to act within the bounds of accepted norms of monetary and budgetary responsibility. He cites the European Commission and the IMF as institutions that constraint 'Belgium' autonomous decision-making. Interestingly, he opposes them to the European Parliament on the ground that the former are '*outside of any democratic direction*'. However, the European Parliament is presented as a weak institution, despite the democratic legitimacy Louis entrusts it with: its impact on these supranational decisions seems very limited, if not absent. The balance of power is tilted toward the 'European commissioner' who, Louis suggests, is a position to dismiss whatever the European Parliament has to say. In line with that, the input of the EP is framed as very modest, a mere "guideline", thereby further emphasizing the EP lack of influence on decision-making about the SEGEU. Louis, just like Jean-Michel and Nadine in the previous extract, considers that responsibility prevails in political actors' decision-making and that responsiveness to citizens is sidelined. While Isabelle agrees that Belgium is constrained by these supranational institutions, she however nuances the negativity of Louis' assessment. She normalizes the situation that Louis presented in a vivid, negative tone, by suggesting that because Belgium is part of 'a group', it is only fair that other members of that group have their say. She thereby accepts, as Mair stated, that "in certain areas and in certain procedures, the leaders' hands will be tied' (Mair, 2013: 158).

Overall, while some research participants recognize the dilemmatic relationship between political actors' responsiveness, these discussions reframe the dilemma as one where responsibility, that is, constrained compliance to EU rules, undeniably prevails over political actors' responsiveness to their citizens, which is called "a scam" or even ridiculed ('*You can imagine how much that matters when you are a European Commissioner, a guideline from the European Parliament',* as Louis says*).*

Discussion and conclusion

This article started with the observation that the dilemma between responsiveness and responsibility in the context of the socio-economic governance of the EU is largely an unchartered territory when it comes to citizens' beliefs: how do they see political actors' responsiveness and responsibility when they discuss the SEGEU? What meanings do they associate with each term? And, importantly, do they frame the relationships between both as dilemmatic? Following our abductive approach, we will elaborate on two main points in turn: first, the significance of experienced and perceived public policies when accounting for citizens' understandings and attitudes toward the EU; second, a reconceptualization of the (de)politicization of the EU from a citizens' perspective that integrates centre-stage political agency and political choice.

First, our empirical analysis takes as unit of analysis what research participants' say about political actors and institutions when they discuss the policies associated to the socio-economic governance of the EU. Importantly, our qualitative secondary dataset is composed of primary datasets where no policy discussions were prompted. While the socio-economic governance of the EU is undeniably a complex and somehow technical issue, ordinary citizens from various socio-economic background, living in different countries and across time, do discuss it from specific angles and perspectives. This confirms that citizens are able to attribute responsibility to different political actors (Wilson and Hobolt, 2015). Crucially, their policy experiences or perceptions are instrumental to shape what they think about the EU, what the EU should be, and the process of European integration, and here, specifically, the socio-economic governance of the EU. Their discussions are neither limited to the benefits (or the costs) they themselves, or their country, may derive from their membership to the EU, nor to an assessment of these policies' performance. Instead, research participants' perceptions (and experiences) of EU policies constitute what they see from the EU and, thereby, ground their attitudes and relations to the EU.

Second, our empirical analysis reports that political agency is the prism through which research participants, across socio-economic divides, country and time, frame responsiveness and responsibility when discussing the socio-economic governance of the EU. Most participants concur in their observation that political actors *choose* to be responsive to the market and the economy. Whether this is out of necessity or because they wanted to, political actors made a choice according to research participants. In contrast, in the discussions about their responsibility, participants debate whether political actors can make a choice to follow or not to follow the institutional rules stemming from the EU. But, similarly to the responsiveness talks, these discussions are framed in the terms of their political agency. Evidence shows that discussions on the political actors' capacity to act under the politics of constrained choice, frame political agency in relationship with the EU as (in)existent, thus contributing to (de)politicize economic and social issues. The seeming absence of agency and the ensuing depoliticization of EU governance, in turn, feeds back into citizens' beliefs in the lack of responsiveness of political actors to their preferences. Echoing J. White's recent argument (2019), our analysis therefore demonstrates how, in times of crisis, political agency is key in the articulation of the responsiveness-responsibility nexus and shapes citizens' beliefs over the socio-economic governance in the EU. Equally importantly, the prevalence of political actors' agency in citizens' beliefs of the socio-economic governance of the EU signals that conceptualizations of the (de)politicization of the EU should include political actors' agency as a core element when citizens' perspective is to be accounted for. Thus, our analysis calls to consider political choice – and the absence of it – as a key mechanism of the connection between citizens and EU socio-economic governance. As underlined for the national level, political choice is central to understand citizens connections to their political system (Hobolt & Hoerner, 2020;

We therefore suggest that the politicisation of the EU should not only be understood in terms of salience, polarisation, and extension of actors (see de Wilde, 2011), but also by precisely looking at how EU-related issues are actually framed as political or apolitical (Dupuy & Van Ingelgom, 2019). We follow Hay's four-pillared conception of the political as entailing '… *choice, the capacity for agency, (public) deliberation, and a social context*' (2007, p. 65 – italics in original). The emphasis on public deliberation is largely similar to de Wilde's understanding of the political. To a lesser extent, the consideration that the political is embedded in social contexts (i.e. partly characterised by the collective consequences it yields at some point in time) is also congruent with prevalent understandings in EU studies. What makes Hay's (2007, p. 65) synthetic conceptualisation of the political distinctive and, in our view, stronger in terms of analytical traction, is the reasoning that politics occurs only in situations of choices, where 'actors possess and display the capacity for agency' (Hay, 2007, p. 67). This conception

of the political is instrumental to mapping the political realm and its different shapes. How then specifically could we define depoliticization and capture it empirically? Drawing from Hay, Wood and Flinders (2014, p. 135) offer insights for a concise and straight-to-the-point answer: anytime there is 'the denial of political contingency and the transfer of functions away from elected politicians'. By including choice and agency alongside public deliberation as defining features of the political, we are therefore able to account the dynamics of politicization and depoliticization as they are seen and understood by citizens. Discursive depoliticization occurs when discussions happen '… *alongside a single interpretation and the denial of choice*' (Wood and Flinders, 2014, p. 161 – italics in original). When public discussions on EU-related topics revolve around the lack of contingency, the issue at stake falls from the governmental or the public sphere into the realm of necessity – it is beyond the reach of national governments and politicians. The political vanishes. Our empirical analysis offers strong support to this conceptualization of the (de)politicization of the EU.

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APPENDIX 1

PRESENTATION OF DATASETS

Céline Belot's Dataset

Celine Belot's dataset gathers around 40 non-directive (semi-structured) face-to-face interviews realized at Durham (Tyne and Wear) and Guildford (Surrey) between 2 May and 22 June 1995. These interviews were realized in the framework of a comparative research with France. She interviewed young people between 15 and 30 years old and the sample was diversified according to age (3 classes), gender and education. The interviews begun by a biographical question 'Before talking about Europe, I would like to ask some general and personal questions to know you a little bit better. Can you talk to me at first about your education and your experience of work and unemployment if you had had these experiences? Then, the interviews continued on Europe in a non-directive approach. Celine Belot mobilized an interview guide and some supports. The topics were going from the personal experience of the interviewee in other countries, the meaning of Europe, and the principal problems that they faced currently to the role of France in Europe. 5 vignettes were also mobilized through the interviews. The details can be found in the methodological appendix of her PhD (Belot, 2000, pp. 63-71).

Main reference: Belot, C. (2000). *L'Europe en citoyenneté. Jeunes Français et Britanniques dans le processus de légitimation de l'Union européenne*. Thèse doctorale de science politique, University of Grenoble.

The Citizens Talking About Europe Dataset

The CITAE data set is based on data gathered from focus groups, conducted in Oxford, Paris, and Brussels between January and June 2006 (Duchesne and al., 2013). It is based on eight collective discussions (focus groups) involving four to six participants selected as socially close but politically diverse. In sum, these focus groups were conducted with British citizens from different socio-economic contexts (working class, white collars, managers and activists). Each focus group discussion lasted about three hours, and was organized around five questions only – in order to leave enough room for participants to lead the discussion in the directions that would interest them most. The five questions tried to cover different aspects of European integration: identity, institutions, benefit and membership, as well as political sophistication. The questions posed were as follows: 1. What does it mean to be European? 2. How should we distribute the power in Europe? With suggestions, in order to structure the discussion, and requests to discuss what would be desirable or undesirable about power resting with the Nations, with Experts, with MPs or with the Market (i.e. left to market forces). Then there was a PAUSE for refreshments. 3. Who profits from Europe? This question was posed to sub-groups, and their written responses were then discussed by the whole group; 4. For or against Turkey's entry into the European Union? This discussion was preceded by a yes or no vote by each participant individually. 5. For or against Turkey's entry into the European Union? This time participants were asked to answer this question from the point of view of political parties from the country in question – list of parties was suggested by the moderator. This question both cooled any conflict as answering it was a cooperative enterprise; and also serves as a kind of test of political knowledge.

Main reference: Duchesne, S., Frazer, E., Haegel, F. & Van Ingelgom, V. (2013). *Citizens' Reactions to European Integration Compared.* (Palgrave McMillan).

Heidi Mercenier's dataset

Heidi Mercenier's dataset consists of 6 focus groups with young people (16-26 years) living in different neighborhoods belonging to the Brussels Capital Region and also reflecting variation in economic affluence. The focus groups have been organized in 2014 with a total of 35 young citizens. The original study had been designed to better understand the perception of the EU by young citizens through the analysis of the citizens' discourses underlying the legitimacy and political credibility of the EU. Each focus group featured six questions. Each session started with the question on the most important problem (question 1) and a discussion on who was supposed to resolve these problems (question 2). In a second block, participants were asked about their perceived distance to different levels of power represented by a series of photographs (question 3) and what EU meant to them (question 4). In a third and last block on identity and belonging, questions were about identifying "groups of persons" to which participants felt belonging (question 5) as well as indicating different entities on different levels of power they felt attached and explaining the reasons thereof (question 6). Each focus group took about three hours with a 10 minutes break after question 1 and 2, i.e. after around 1 hour.

Main reference: Mercenier, Heidi. (2019). *« C'est compliqué ! » : L'Union européenne vue par des jeunes Bruxellois Contribution à l'étude des rapports des citoyens à la politique.* (Doctoral thesis), Université Saint-Louis – Bruxelles.

RESTEP dataset

These data were collected by RESTEP (RÉSeau Transatlantique sur l'Europe Politique), an international research network that involves researchers from 10 European and Canadian universities. Similarly to the other primary datasets, this data were designed to advance the understanding of citizens' relations to European integration. Altogether, 21 focus groups were organized in 4 EU members states (Belgium, France, Italy and Portugal) during the EP election year 2019. Focus groups were designed so as to cover 5 different socioeconomic backgrounds (Seniors; Student; Young unemployed; Young without diploma; White-collar workers). Each focus group featured 5 to 9 participants and some of them (Seniors) gathered 3 times over a 4-month-period from March to June 2019. Out of the 21 Focus Groups, we used those 14 organized in France (Grenoble) and Belgium (Louvain-la-Neuve).

Main reference: Beaudonnet, Laurie, Belot, Céline, Caune, Hélène, Dupuy, Claire, Houde, Anne-Marie, Le Corre Juratic, Morgan, Pennetreau, Damien, Silva, Tiago, & Van Ingelgom, Virginie (2022). Studying (De-)Politicization of the EU from a Citizens Point of View: A New Comparative Focus Group Study. *Politique européenne*.

APPENDIX 2

PRESENTATION OF PARTICIPANTS FOR EACH DATASET

1. Celine Belot's participants

Source: Belot, Celine. (2000). *L'Europe en citoyenneté : jeunes français et britanniques dans le processus de légitimation de l'Union européenne.* Grenoble 2.

[Note: this list only covers the selection of interviews used for reanalysis]

ID	Name	Age	Occupation	Place of interview
4	William	21	political science student	London.
5	Jennifer	30	former worker, training in the hotel industry	Durham
6	Jonathan	17	student in general section (social sciences option)	Durham
7	Andrew	22	technical training 'commerce and finance'	Leeds
10	Stéphanie	19	student in vocational training (commerce)	Guildford
11	Benjamin	19	technical training student (aerospace)	Guildford
12	David B.	29	former restaurateur, in training as a mechanic	Guildford
14	Heather	18	technical training student (tourism)	Guildford
15	Debbie	23	various jobs, in design training	Guildford
21	Tina	27	school secretary	Guildford
25	Clare	19	technical (design) student	Durham
27	Christine	30	unemployed, in vocational training (administration)	Durham
28	Steven	18	in apprenticeship (automotive mechanics)	Durham
31	Helen	18	English student	Glasgow
32	Alison G.	25	executive trainee in a bank	Durham
33	Philip	19	student in technical training (commerce)	Durham
38	Alexander	29	PhD in Physical Sciences, unemployed	Durham

2. CITAE Focus Group participants

Source: Duchesne, Sophie, Elizabeth Frazer, Florence Haegel, and Virginie Van Ingelgom, 2013. *Citizens' Reactions to European Integration Compared: Overlooking Europe*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

(Nick) name	Sex	Age	Education	Profession	Left right	Vote	Referendum	EU belonging	Identity	Origin
OXF Working Class 1										
Mina	F	48	A-Level, AS-Level	Private care assistant	7	Labour	DK	NGNB	World	Black Asian
Robert	M	32	GCSE or O'Level	Tankdriver (disabled)	7	NV	Y	G	NE	White
Ron	M	31	VCE, AVCE, NVQ L3	Technician (car industry)	5,5	Labour	DK	NGNB	N	Black Asian
Mary	F	54	GCSE or O'Level	School cleaner	7	Ind.	Y	NGNB	N	White
Brenda	F	37	GCSE or O'Level	Post person and receptionist	DK	NV	N	NGNB	N	White
OXF Working Class 2										
Vicas	M	29	VCE, AVCE, NVQ L3	Forklift driver	DK	NA	DK	NGNB	N	Black Asian
Esther	F	32	GCSE or O'Level	kitchen assist, catering, cleaning (unemployed)	3,5	NV	DK	NGNB	N	White
Ruth	F	48	GCSE or O'Level	Care assistant, office worker (unemployed)	8	Cons.	DK	NGNB	N	White
Bridget	F	52	GCSE or O'Level	Receptionist (unemployed)	9,5	NV	DK	NGNB	N	White
Anthony	M	53	GCSE or O'Level	Working man (early retired)	5,5	LibDem	DK	G	NE	White
OXF White Collars 1										
Nina	F	31	Foundation d°, NVQ L4	Care support worker	3	Labour	Y	G	EN	White
Pat	F	37	A-Level, AS-Level	Admin/secretarial work	4,5	Labour	DK	G	N	Black
Mel	F	51	A-Level, AS-Level	Receptionist (part-time)	5,5	DK	DK	G	NE	White
Kenneth	M	51	A-Level, AS-Level	Office support worker	5,5	Lib Dem	Y	G	NE	White
Mike	M	45	A-Level, AS-Level	Office manager	6	NV	N	B	NE	White
Kamal	M	24	BA, BSc, degree	Team leader in catering business	5	Ind	N	G	N	Black Asian
OXF White Collars 2										
Stephanie	F	33	VCE, AVCE, NVQ level 3 …	IT trainer	5	Cons	N	G	N	White
Kylie	F	33	BA, BSc, degree	Office worker (unemployed)	2	Ind	DK	NGNB	N	White
Lily	F	37	BA, BSc, degree	Homemaker (former HR manager)	5	Labour	Y	G	NE	White
George	M	22	BA, BSc, degree	Temp, office worker	3	Lib Dem	Y	G	EN	White
Emily	F	82	VCE, AVCE, NVQ L3	Clerical work (retired)	1	Labour	DK	G	NE	White
Jeremy	M	67	Foundation d°, NVQ L4	Director in engineering sector (retired)	5,5	Lib Dem	DK	G	N	White
OXF Managers 1										

(Nick) name	Sex	Age	Education	Profession	Left right	Vote	Referendum	EU belonging	Identity	Origin
Sundai	M	36	BA, BSc degree	Store manager	7	Labour	Y	G	NE	Black
Alexander	M	39	A-Level, AS-Level	Bank manager	8	Cons	N	NGNB	N	White
Derek	M	37	PhD or Dphil	Lecturer and researcher	3	Cons	DK	NGNB	NE	White
Ian	M	38	BA, BSc degree	Salesman	7	Cons	N	NGNB	N	White
Bansuri	F	42	VCE, AVCE, NVQ L3	Personal development trainer	5,5	NV	N	NGNB	N	Black Asian
OXF Managers 2										
Sanjay	M	24	BA, BSc, degree	Accountant	6	Lib Dem	DK	NGNB	N	Black Asian
Joe	M	27	BA, BSc, degree	Fundraising	3	Labour	DK	G	N	White
Alya	F	23	BA, BSc, degree	Office manager	3,5	NV	Nul	G	N	NA
William	M	67	Master degrees	IT consultant (retired)	3	Labour	Y	G	NE	White
Rebecca	F	52	BA, BSc, degree	School teacher (unemployed)	6,5	Lib Dem	DK	NGNB	N	White
Rachel	F	28	BA, BSc, degree	Human resources manager	5	NV	Y	G	EN	White
OXF Activists 1										
Bethany	F	79	Foundation d°, NVQ L4	Councillor	5	Labour	Y	NGNB	NE	White
Allison	F	57	Primary school	Housewife and volunteer	4	Lib Dem	Y	G	NE	White
Charles	M	71	A-Level, AS-Level	District councillor (ex IT consultant and finance advisor)	6	Cons	Y	B	N	White
Annabel	F	26	BA, BSc, degree	Campaign manager	3,5	Labour	Y	NA	NA	White
James	M	61	Master degrees	Company director	8	Cons	N	B	Other	White
Lewis	M	70	PhD or Dphil	County councillor (ex-health advocacy)	1	Green	N	DK	World	White
OXF Activists 2										
Kevin	M	20	A-Level, AS-Level	Student	3	Labour	Y	G	NE	White
Ben	M	19	A-Level, AS-Level	Student	5,5	Cons	N	B	N	White
Tim	M	23	BA, BSc, degree	Production editor	4	Lib Dem	Y	G	NE	White
Nick	M	21	A-Level, AS-Level	Student	6	Cons	N	G	NE	White
PAR Working Class 1										
Albert	M	42	Brevet/BEPC	Naturopath (unemployed)	5	NV	NV	G	World	White
Ghislaine	F	26	Brevet/BEPC	Care assistant	4	L. Jospin	NV	G	NE	Afro-Caribbean
Geoffrey	M	33	CAP ou BEP	Print worker	5	NV	N	NGNB	NE	White
Lionel	M	42	Brevet/BEPC	Security officer	DK	O. Besancenot	N	G	EN	White
Yasmina	F	35	Brevet/BEPC	Home-maker	DK	NV	NV	B	NE	Maghreb
Habiba	F	41	Bac general	Home-maker (and secretarial work for family business)	4	L. Jospin	No	NGNB	Other	Maghreb
PAR Working Class 2										
Jean-Marie	M	53	Brevet/BEPC	Auto mechanic (unemployed)	DK	C. Lepage	No	NGNB	NE	White
Cédric	M	38	Bac général	Charge nurse	DK	L. Jospin	Nul	NGNB	NE	White

(Nick) name	Sex	Age	Education	Profession	Left right	Vote	Referendum	EU belonging	Identity	Origin
Jeannette	F	25	Brevet/BEPC	Care worker in training (numerous jobs)	6	NV	NV	G	Other	Africa
Zahoua	F	45	Brevet/BEPC	Medical secretary (unemployed)	1	NV	NV	NGNB	N	Maghreb
Margot	F	40	CAP ou BEP	Lorry driver	DK	C. Lepage	NA	B	N	White
Gérald	M	37	CAP ou BEP	Heating engineer	DN	NV	NV	G	N	Other
PAR White Collars 1										
Laetitia	F	23	Bac +2	Sales engineer	6	J. Chirac	NV	B	N	White
Magali	F	28	Bac +2	Receptionist/tele marketing	DK	J. Chirac	NA	NGNB	NE	White
Victor	M	30	Bac +2	Higher technician, logistics	2	N. Mamère	N	G	E	White
Patrice	M	33	Bac tech/pro.	Butler	DK	NV	NV	NGNB	NE	White
Hadia	F	36	Bac +3 à +5	Project leader, advertisement (unemployed)	3	NV	NV	G	NE	Maghreb
Clélia	F	24	Bac+2	Receptionist/illustrator	5,5	NA	NV	?	?	White
PAR White Collars 2										
Pablo	M	43	Bac tech/pro.	Secretarial work (unemployed)	7	J. Chirac	No	G	N	Other European
Samira	F	26	Bac +2	Restaurant manager	5	L. Jospin	No	B	N	Maghreb
Paul	M	38	Bac, formation medical sales representative	Medical sales representative	5-6	NA	No	NA	NA	European
Aline	F	41	Bac +2	Sales engineer (unemployed)	6	J. Chirac	NV	B	E	White
Martin	M	46	Bac+2	Graphic designer (unemployed)	3	L. Jospin	Y	G	NE	White
PAR Managers 1										
Franck	M	35	Bac +3 à +5	IT professional	7	J. Chirac	Y	G	EN	White
Inès	F	39	Bac +2	Fashion designer	7	J. Chirac	N	G	NE	White
Fabienne	F	26	Doctorat	Doctoral student	3	M.-G. Buffet	N	B	World	White
Gabriel	M	59	Bac +3 à +5	Printing advisor	3	L. Jospin	Y	G	NE	White
Toufik	M	24	Bac +3 à +5	Engineer	4	NV	NV	G	NE	Maghreb
Serge	M	42	Bac +3 à +5	Chartered accountant	5	L. Jospin	N	B	EN	White
Céline	F	31	Bac +3 à +5	Translator	4	NV	N	G	NE	White
PAR Managers 2										
François	M	42	Bac +3 à +5	Computer/logistics manager	9	J. Chirac	Y	G	NE	White
Michel	M	46	Bac +3 à +5	Management controller	6	J. Chirac	N	NGNB	EN	White
Patrick	M	38	Bac +3 à +5	Tax law specialist, civil servant	DK	J. Chirac	Y	G	EN	White
Jean-Paul	M	60	Doctorat	Math professor, university	6	NV	Y	NGNB	NE	White
Louis	M	49	Bac +3 à +5	Teacher/photographer (ex-marine officer)	3	L. Jospin	N	NGNB	E	White
Stanislas	M	50	Bac +3 à +5	Information officer (medical)	5	J. Chirac	Nul	G	NE	White
PAR Activists 1										

(Nick) name	Sex	Age	Education	Profession	Left right	Vote	Referendum	EU belonging	Identity	Origin
César	M	35	Bac +3 à +5	Lawyer (unemployed)	6	J. Chirac	Y	NGNB	Other	Afro-Caribbean
Charles	M	21	Bac +3 à +5	Student (engineer)	8	NV	N	G	NE	White
Cheik	M	40	Bac tech/pro	Municipal agent	6	J. Chirac	NV	G	NE	Maghreb
Pierre-Antoine	M	23	Bac +3 à +5	Communications manager (party)	4	F. Bayrou	Y	G	NE	White
Déborah	F	30	Doctorat	Doctoral student	5	L. Jospin	Y	G	EN	White
Guy	M	59	Bac +3 à +5	Coach personal development / finance expert	2	N. Mamère	N	G	N	White
Dimitri	M	48	Bac +3 à +5	Principal private secretary (arrondissement mayor)	3	L. Jospin	Y	G	NE	White
PAR Activists 2										
Norbert	M	65	Bac +2	Journalist (retired)	10	J.-M. Le Pen	N	B	NE	White
Jules	M	46	Brevet/BEPC	Photographer	3	R. Hue	N	NGNB	World	White
Adrien	M	32	Bac +3 à +5	Editor/temporary teacher	2	N. Mamère	N	G	NE	White
Bertrand	M	47	Bac +3 à +5	Communications adviser	5	J.-M. Le Pen	N	B	N	White
Pascal	M	41	Bac +3 à +5	Engineer (researcher)	2	R. Hue	N	NGNB	NE	White
Emmanuel	M	29	Bac +3 à +5	NGO manager	8	J. Chirac	O	G	NE	White
BXL Working Class 1										
Justine	F	38	Humanités sup gén	Accountant (unemployed)	10	NV	DK	G	NE	Africa
Rose	F	27	In training (advertisement)	Receptionist	5	Cdh	DK	G	NE	White
Sidi	M	27	Humanités inf	Working man	4	Ecolo	DK	G	E	Maghreb
Marco	M	43	Humanités inf	Temporary worker	6	NV	DK	NGNB	NE	White
Saïd	M	24	Humanités sup gén	Youth activity worker (unemployed)	NA	PS	Y	G	N	Maghreb
Ali	M	32	Graduat	Care worker	2	PS	N	G	NE	Maghreb
BXL Working Class 2										
Christophe	M	24	Humanités sup pro/techn.	Working man (unemployed)	5	MR	N	G	NE	White
Farouk	M	28	Humanités sup pro/techn.	Security guard	4	PS	N	NGNB	NE	Maghreb
André	M	35	Humanités sup gén	Woodworker (black market)	5	NV	N	NGNB	World	Other European
Dona	F	56	Humanités sup pro/techn.	Caretaker	7	MR	DK	G	NE	Other European
Ming	F	24	Graduat	Waitress	3	PS	N	G	EN	Asia
BXL White Collars 1										
Faissal	M	27	Licences/Master	Temp/unemployed graphic designer	5	Ecolo	Y	G	EN	Maghreb
David	M	24	Humanités sup pro/techn.	Sergeant	4	PS	Y	G	EN	White
Victor	M	28	Humanités sup gén	Office worker	NA	Other	DK	G	N	White
Fabien	M	26	Licences/Master	IT adviser	7	MR	Y	NGNB	EN	White

(Nick) name	Sex	Age	Education	Profession	Left right	Vote	Referendum	EU belonging	Identity	Origin
BXL White Collars 2										
Michèle	F	26	Humanités sup gén	Temp food industry	7	MR	NV	G	NE	White
Jonathan	M	29	Humanités sup gén	Computer technician	6	DK	Y	G	E	White
Tina	F	32	Humanités sup gén	Sales assistant (unemployed)	5	PS/MR	Y	G	World	Maghreb
Maria	F	40	Humanités sup gén	Office worker (television)	3	NV	Y	G	NE	Other European
Pierre	M	54	Humanités sup gén	Foreman	3	Cdh	N	B	N	NA
BXL Managers 1										
Alban	M	28	Licences/Master	Engineer nuclear industry	8	MR	DK	G	N	White
Roger	M	59	NA	Executive electronics	4	PS	Y	G	EN	White
Jean-François	M	29	Licences/Master	NGO manager	3	Ecolo	Y	G	EN	White
Claire	F	51	Doctorat	General practitioner	7	Cdh	DK	G	EN	White
Franck	M	40	Humanités inf	Restaurant and shop manager	7	Ecolo	DK	G	NE	White
Valérie	F	45	Licences/Master	Journalist and researcher	6	Cdh	Y	G	NE	White
BXL Managers 2										
Bruno	M	29	Sciences politiques & Master en commu.	HR executive in SME	5/6	PS	N	NA	NA	Belgian
Fabio	M	26	Traduction & DES en études Européennes	Translator (unemployed)	2	ECOLO/PTB	N	NA	NA	Other European
Judith	M	44	Licence en communication	Office Manager – HR	4	ECOLO/PS	N	NA	NA	African
Gaston	F	60	Humanités	Self-employed	7	MR	N	NA	NA	Belgian
BXL Activists 1										
Aurélien	M	28	Licences/Master	Parliamentary attaché	8	MR	Y	G	NE	White
Stéphane	M	30	Licences/Master	Parliamentary attaché	7	MR	Y	G	NE	Asia
Clément	M	33	Candidatures	General practitioner	6	Cdh	Y	G	NE	White
Maxime	M	25	Licences/Master	Teacher	2	Ecolo	N	G	World	Maghreb
Simon	M	30	Licences/Master	Relations officer (party)	2	PS	N	G	NE	White
Romain	M	20	Humanités sup gén	Student	1	PS	Y	G	NE	White
BXL Activists 2										
Gérard	M	26	Licences/Master	Shopkeeper	5	MR	Y	G	NE	White
Brandon	M	27	Licences/Master	Musician	2	PS	N	G	EN	Other European
Ludovic	M	25	Graduat	Secretary	NA	PTB-UA	N	G	World	NA
Vinciane	F	29	Doctorat	Elected representative	3	Ecolo	N	G	Other	Asia
Charles-Henri	M	26	Licences/Master	Legal adviser	5	Cdh	Y	G	NE	White

3. Heidi Mercenier's participants

Source: Mercenier, Heidi. (2019). *« C'est compliqué ! » : L'Union européenne vue par des jeunes Bruxellois Contribution à l'étude des rapports des citoyens à la politique.* (Doctoral thesis), Université Saint-Louis – Bruxelles.

ID	Sex	Age	Education	Nationality	Employment status	Left-Right	Political interest (0-10)	EU belonging
FG Anderlecht								
Alexandre	M	20	ISCED 3	Others	Student	5	5	Good thing
Amina	F	19	ISCED 3	Belgian	Student	NA	0	Bad thing
Bilal	M	26	ISCED 5	Belgian	Student	5	7	Good thing
Ilias	M	18	ISCED 3	Belgian	Student	4	7	Neither a good nor a bad thing
Nabilla	F	19	ISCED 3	Others	Student	NA	4	Good thing
Nisrine	F	24	ISCED 5	Belgian	Student	2	6	Neither a good nor a bad thing
Waleed	M	17	ISCED 3	Belgian	Student	5	9	Good thing
FG Ixelles								
Aicha	F	25	ISCED 6	Belgian	Student & part time employed	5	6	Good thing
Danielle	F	17	ISCED 3	Belgian & other	Student	3	4	Good thing
Inaya	F	19	ISCED 5	Belgian & other	Student	5	4	Neither a good nor a bad thing
Isabella	F	22	ISCED 5	Belgian	Student	4	6	Neither a good nor a bad thing
Louis	M	17	ISCED 3	Belgian	Student	1	10	Bad thing
Maël	M	25	ISCED 3	Belgian	Employed part time	3	2	Good thing
Mun	M	20	ISCED 5	Belgian	Student & part time employed	3	7	Good thing
FG Jette								
Adil	M	21	ISCED 5	Belgian	Student & part time employed	4	7	Bad thing
Catherine	F	23	ISCED 3	Belgian	Student & part time employed	7	5	Good thing
Gabriel	M	21	ISCED 5	Belgian	Student	NA	5	Good thing
Lucie	F	17	ISCED 3	Belgian	Student	3	7	Good thing
Nathan	M	26	ISCED 5	Belgian	Inactivity	3	10	Good thing
Nour	F	19	ISCED 5	Belgian	Student & part time employed	7	0	Good thing
Yusef	M	23	ISCED 5	Belgian	Student & part time employed	NA	4	Good thing
FG Molenbeek								
Asma	F	17	ISCED 3	Belgian	Student	5	6	Neither a good nor a bad thing
Mariam	F	24	ISCED 5	Belgian	Employed part time	3	9	Good thing
Odomar	M	17	ISCED 2	Belgian	Student	4	0	Good thing
Yassine	M	16	ISCED 3	Belgian	Employed part time & student	5	10	Good thing
FG Saint-Josse								
Abdel	M	17	ISCED 3	Belgian	Student & employed	4	4	Good thing
Jordan	M	22	ISCED 2	Belgian	Employed	7	0	Bad thing
Lila	F	23	ISCED 5	Belgian	Student & employed	7	7	Good thing

Naima	F	24	ISCED 5	Belgian & other	Unemployed	4	3	Good thing
FG Uccle								
Elise	F	17	ISCED 3	Belgian	Student & part time employed	1	4	Good thing
Julie	F	24	ISCED 5	Belgian	Student & part time employed	5	7	Neither a good nor a bad thing
Nicolas	M	21	ISCED 5	Belgian	Student	7	7	Good thing
Sophie	F	22	ISCED 5	Belgian	Employed	4	3	Neither a good nor a bad thing
Théo	M	19	ISCED 5	Belgian	Student & part time employed	1	8	Good thing

4. RESTEP's participants

Source: Beaudonnet, Laurie, Belot, Céline, Caune, Hélène, Dupuy, Claire, Houde, Anne-Marie, Le Corre Juratic, Morgan, Pennetreau, Damien, Silva, Tiago, & Van Ingelgom, Virginie (2022). Studying (De-)Politicization of the EU from a Citizens Point of View: A New Comparative Focus Group Study. *Politique européenne*.

Name	Age range	Gender	Education	Average Left-right score	Attitudes EU
LLN_P_STU	20 to 24	4 men, 5 women	Students	2 left, 3 centre, 4 right	9 pro-EU
LLN_SEQ_1, LLN_SEQ_2, LLN_SEQ_3	59 to 82	3 men, 4 women	High	6 centre, 1 right	6 pro-EU, 1 don't know
LLN_WC	25 to 36	4 men, 3 women	High	3 left, 4 centre	7 pro-EU
LLN_YU	23 to 30	3 men, 3 women	High	5 centre, 1 don't know	5 pro-EU
LLN_YP	19 to 26	5 men, 1 woman	No diploma or professional	1 left, 3 centre, 1 right	4 pro-EU, 2 don't know
GRE_P_STU	18 to 26	5 men, 3 women	Students	6 left, 1 centre, 1 no answer	4 pro-EU, 2 against, 1 not good nor bad, 1 don't know,
GRE_SEQ_1, GRE_SEQ_2, GRE_SEQ_3	61 to 77	4 men, 4 women	High	2 left, 3 centre, 1 right, 1 don't know	5 pro-EU, 2 not good nor bad, 1 it depends,
GRE_WC	28 to 33	3 men, 4 women	High	1 left, 6 centre	7 pro-EU
GRE_YU	24 to 29	2 men, 3 women	High	3 left, 2 centre	5 pro-EU
GRE_YP	22 to 36	3 men, 3 women	No diploma or professional	1 left, 4 centre, 1 don't know	2 pro-EU, 1 against, 2 not good nor bad, 1 don't know