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A quantitative analysis: Rally Around the European Flag, The Impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on European Support. Did Russia's invasion of Ukraine lead to more support for the European Union within Europe?

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Leiden University

Bachelor Project: Can We Trust Democracy to the Voters?

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**A quantitative analysis: Rally Around the European Flag, The Impact of
Russia's Invasion of Ukraine on European Support.**

*Did Russia's invasion of Ukraine lead to more support for the European Union within
Europe?*

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Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 is set to be the largest armed conflict since World War II on European soil. The presence of a military threat in the European Union right after facing one of the most significant international health crises of our time, the Covid pandemic, really took a toll on European citizens. Therefore, coordination and cooperation are needed at the regional level so that "EU institutions, national governments and civil society [...] tackle the challenge of developing a new Russia strategy" (Freudenstein, 2021, p. 70). However, the literature revolving around the management of international crises in Europe focuses most of the time on the national level while it would be interesting to also investigate this management at the regional level due to the way the European Union is shaped and functions (McConnell, 2021, p. 67). The management at the regional level of these crises is very complex and needs more attention in the context of today's society. Moreover, trying to evaluate crisis management is tricky and comes with problems "including the existence of innumerable possible benchmarks, variations in perception, and the interpretation of ambiguous and conflicting outcomes." (McConnell, 2021, p. 64).

For these reasons, this thesis will not focus on the evaluation of crisis management.

Nevertheless, we can still expect that European citizens also want the situation in Ukraine to be resolved with a coordinated response to the Russian threat. Thus, the thesis will shed light on a more precise phenomenon that happens at the national level called the rally around the flag effect (henceforth RAFF). The literature suggests that a rally helps to explain why a boost in popularity can be observed at the national level. The RAFF is the description of the reaction of a population against a threat or an attack. It was defined as a "conventional theoretical framework to explain the impacts of threat perception on incumbent support – that is, voter approval of political leaders will increase when the country is under threat." (Kobayashi & Katagiri, 2018, p. 300). The effect described here has been observed around the world, with the most famous example being George W. Bush's public approval rating

skyrocketing after the events of 9/11 from 51% to 86% in September 2001 (Hetherington & Nelson, 2003, p. 37). Following these events, the war on terror which induced fear and angst in the population regarding their homeland security influenced the way American citizens supported their President throughout this crisis. As we saw, the rally around the flag effect can be observed at the national level and this thesis will advocate that this effect can be observed as well at the regional level in Europe thanks to its design and institutions encapsulating and governing all its member states.

Most of the literature revolving around the role of threatening international crisis on public opinion in Europe either focused on national attitudes towards leaders or national institutions. The study of Steiner (2023) relates to my topic but differentiates itself from mine due to the sample he used that only consists of university students while the sample I use in my analysis is from multiple countries and considers every gender, and age of every European country (p. 298). Despite that, the continent of Europe is unique in nature by the fact that it is founded upon and relies on institutions and leaders at the regional level representing the interests of countries and citizens living in it. These institutions are understudied regarding the effect international crises may have on them concerning their support/approval rating by European citizens.

Could we also argue that it might be the case for Russia's invasion of Ukraine which caused fear throughout Europe? The phenomenon experienced at the national level by citizens could also be reflected at the regional level and would explain the reasons why Europeans come together in the face of uncertainty and crisis driven by democratic principles and commitment to peace. For these reasons, this thesis seeks to investigate and try to answer the following research question: *Did Russia's invasion of Ukraine lead to more support for the European Union within Europe?*

Findings concluded that the views towards Russia became more negative after they invaded Ukraine. As a result, the support for the European Union grew in the Member States. The analysis provided enough evidence to prove that there was a strong relationship over time with the idea that Russia's actions and the attitudes towards them were tied to a boost of support for the EU. Yet, some limitations were found and discussed as well.

The following section will thus review the literature present. The review will first talk about international threats, then as a consequence of these threats the second part will gather the literature on the RAFF. The third part of this review will focus on the literature concerning the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on public opinion in Europe.

International threatening situations

The term threatening situations can take an array of labels. It can go from natural disasters such as tsunamis, and earthquakes or also be caused directly by humans; intentionally by taking the form of terrorism, international war, and unintentionally in events that "involve a failure or malfunction of human technology" (Espinola et al., 2016, p. 104). Intentional mass threats such as the one central to my thesis can be qualified as human-generated and affect the way citizens live depending on their exposure. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia was seen throughout Europe as a threatening intentional invasion and provoked fear as it was an unexpected event that seems likely to have no turning point (Astrov et al., 2022, p. 332). It brought in Europe the presence of a military threat which reminded a lot of Europeans how fragile peace is (Steiner et al., 2023, p. 283). In situations where communities can perceive the presence or imminent presence of a threat to citizens' safety, well-being, and health, the beginning of spiraling reactions causes fear to spread which in turn amplifies itself (Espinola, 2016, p. 103). The actors that should prevent that fear from spreading and reassure citizens are governments, hence why there has been a growing interest

to see how different crises may affect people's opinion about their government (Erhard, Freitag, Filsinger & Wamsler, 2021, p. 340). Though, the European Union is also a body of governance that can matter and intervene during crises but research on how they may affect the attitude of citizens in the European Union is understudied. One of the consequences of those threats is the rally around the flag effect.

Rally around the flag effect

The literature revolving around the rally around the flag effect is abundant and has garnered extensive studies for multiple decades. One of the founding articles on this matter was written by Mueller (1970) which described the RAFF as a phenomenon that “tends to give a boost to the President's popularity rating.” (p. 21). The author studied the behavior of presidential popularity from President Truman to President Johnson for over twenty-five years (p. 34). The study discusses the phenomenon of the RAFF in comparison to the public's approval of the President during times of international crisis or war and identifies several events associated with it such as the Cuban Missile Crisis or the Persian Gulf War (pp. 21-27). The boost of popularity observed by the author as an international event that involves the United States and the President while being “specific, dramatic and sharply focused in order to assure public attention and interest.” (Mueller, 1970, p. 21). Authors such as Baker & Oneal (2001) and Hetherington & Nelson (2003) also use this definition in their academic papers.

According to Johansson, Hopmann & Shehata (2021), two schools of thought diverge around the explanations of the boost of popularity around the leader. The Patriotism school suggests that in times of crisis, citizens turn their support on strong symbols such as the President himself (pp. 322-323). The second school of thought is the Opinion leader school which focuses on the communication and perceptions of societal problems and suggests that politicians lay aside their ideologies to start the rally effect in times of crisis (pp. 322-323).

Thus, the implications of these two schools affect public opinion when a crisis is currently happening. Put simply, the Patriotism school explains the boost of popularity as a sign of loyalty by citizens for their country, while the Opinion leader school argues that political figures can create a sense of unity by shaping public sentiment during crises through persuasive speeches.

Unlike these authors, Baker & Oneal (2001) identify three different schools of thought regarding the dynamics influencing Presidents' approval rates (p. 663). The first school advocates that the popularity of a President will erode overtime throughout his term, while the second school emphasizes the context at the domestic and international level that the President operates in, basing its popularity on the ups and downs of the unemployment rate, inflation, deaths during wars, etc... (Baker & Oneal, 2001, p. 663). The third school of thought identified by the authors (2001) also advocates for the relationship between public approval and domestic/international contexts "but emphasizes instead the symbolic nature of the presidency and the potential for ameliorating the negative impact of events [...] through political drama and effective public relations strategies" (p. 663). Nonetheless, these schools of thought fail to identify clear reasons and models to define the boost of popularity for leaders in times of threatening situations.

Theories concerning the effect of the rally on the emotions it delivers to the public re also present and give more specific explanations. Lambert et al. (2010) found in their paper that the basic principles of the social identity theory such as in-group favoritism and social categorization were consistent with the basic features of the rally effects therefore being able to predict quite successfully the factors that contribute to it and its duration (p. 887). This means that the social identity theory which explains group phenomena depending on the context, social status, identity, and norms can also predict pretty accurately when a rally will occur. Moreover, social psychologists "have long been interested in the notion that

situationally based threat can trigger powerful shifts in attitudes” (Lambert et al., 2010, p. 887). The psychologists in his paper found four distinctive theories such as the terror management and the motivated social cognition framework to all share two assumptions, the first one being that the context of a situation might temporarily affect one’s sense of psychological security and the second one predicts that there will be “systematic changes in attitudes and values to occur in the service of restoring such security” (Lambert et al., 2010, p. 887). This is caused by emotional factors such as fear and insecurity which can be felt during threatening situations like said earlier. Thus, given the context of a situation and the emotions that procure it, psychologists managed to predict when a rally effect could occur.

Adding to the literature, Kobayashi & Katagiri (2018) state that the key mediator causing the RAFF is anger and that no matter what the ideology and partisanship of citizens is the public support for their leader will be enhanced (p. 300). In other words, the support for leaders increases when citizens are faced with an external threat which gives rise to anger since the emotions and political ideologies of citizens are set aside temporarily. A national sentiment to rally and unify around the head of state is in that fashion felt in polls measuring public opinion. Kobayashi & Katagiri (2018) found that the RAFF was the main factor explaining the increased support for a conservative incumbent leader in Japan caused by the perceived threats of China’s rapid military expenditure and economic power (p. 299). That being so, the public opinion of Japan supported the conservative incumbent leader because the features and attitude of China were sensed by Japanese citizens as a threat.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the effect of the RAFF on public opinion is only temporary. The decrease can be attributed to the loss of salience in the issue which changed the sense of threat in citizens’ eyes and in turn brought people back to their original perception of the government (Johansson et al., 2021, p. 331). Like Johansson et al., (2021),

Hetherington & Nelson (2003), found that the increase in government and leader approval is only temporary and decreases overall after the steep rise in the level of support. The biggest and longest rally effect ever recorded in the United States was during George W. Bush's presidency and the events of 9/11. In five days, the approval rate of Bush jumped from 51% to 86% in September 2001 and was still at 68% in November 2002 (Hetherington & Nelson, 2003, p. 37). Thus, the war on terror influenced the way American citizens supported their President throughout this crisis which induced fear in the population. The findings of the authors suggest that the numbers before and after the rally effect are "a near mirror image" (2003, p. 40). This implies that the level of support towards the leader created by the RAFF effect deteriorates over time. Over time other issues become salient which explains the decrease in popularity of the President by saying that life goes on after a rally and people shift back to evaluating the head of state with normal criteria (Kam & Ramos, 2008; Hetherington & Nelson, 2003).

Overall, the RAFF effect has been widely studied in the literature. The temporary boost of support for a leader and institutions and the context-dependent nature of this phenomenon raises the need for further research. Examples at the national level of this phenomenon are many, but the goal of this research will be to provide a better understanding of how threatening situations (in our case Russia's invasion of Ukraine) may influence public opinion at the regional level. As mentioned earlier, the RAFF literature mainly focuses on national leaders while the European Union gives a distinctive context that has yet not been explored thoroughly. For those reasons, as Steiner et al. (2023) did, I would like to contribute to the notion of the rally around the flag effect at the regional level which in our case translates to the European flag with the trigger event being Russia's invasion of Ukraine (p. 286). Thus, the effect that we see at the national level when citizens rally behind their head of

state (the country in general) could be translated in our case at the regional level with Europe where it would be possible to observe a popularity boost and rally “in the face of an event that was a not a direct military attack against one of their nations but that was still perceived as a common threat” (Steiner et al., 2023, p. 286). Moreover, the European Union established a lot of common shared values amongst Europeans in which they identify such as democracy, and the protection of human rights (Nowak, 2019; Eurobarometer, 2023). To elaborate further, several observations can be made that increasing support for a nation-state or state leader after a threatening situation does not limit itself to its own citizens (Nowak, 2019, p. 1).

Movements on social media after the 2015 terrorist attacks called “Je suis Paris” and acts of solidarity such as gatherings or buildings being illuminated with the French flag in Europe perfectly demonstrate the unity of EU members and that an emanation at the regional level was present to unite against a threat and grief for these French, European citizens that suffered the barbary of terrorism (Nowak, 2019, pp. 1-6). These movements were also present on social media and seen in real life throughout Europe when Russia invaded Ukraine which motivates my first hypotheses.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on Public Opinion in Europe

The case study of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine was chosen as it is a good and recent example to explain and motivate our research on the rally around the flag effect at the regional level. Several reasons as to why this attack on Ukraine is a great example at the European level and demonstrates the potential consequences of why attitudes of Europeans have changed due to it can be found in Steiner et al.’s article (2022, p. 283). The three main reasons are the following: Europeans will devote more interest in EU politics because decisions at this level will have a direct impact on them, moreover “the experience of a small country being attacked by its bigger neighbour may make them aware of the necessity of intra-European co-

operation” (Steiner et al., 2022, pp. 283-284). Third, Ukraine is a democracy whilst Russia isn’t, making this case even more interesting as it opposes democracy (a value that the European Union takes pride in) to a non-democratic state which reminded Europeans how important freedom and values are (Steiner et al., 2022, p. 284). For all of these reasons, this invasion makes a great case to study the rally around the flag effect at the regional level.

Europe being a relatively small region filled with many countries, the idea of a conflict spillover into the Baltic countries or Poland created a large impact across the continent (p. 283). In their article, Steiner et al., (2023) explored whether this invasion influenced European attitudes toward integration (p. 283). After sending a survey to students from several different European Universities, the authors concluded that the consequence of Russia’s invasion on the attitudes towards Europe increased positively (Steiner et al., 2023, p. 298). Ultimately, the attitude shifted towards more European integration, and a “rallying around the supranational EU flag has been the response of EU societies to Russia’s largely unexpected and ominous war against Ukraine” (Steiner et al., 2023, p. 298). Thus, European students seem to be inclined to support Europe and its values when asked about Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. However, this study only focuses on students which makes it a bit too narrow to consider the responses of its survey as a response representing Europeans as a whole and equally. Bartels and Jackman (2013) argued that individuals of different ages may not attach the same importance to “political shocks” because it is those shocks that shape historical periods and ultimately political opinions (p. 7). Hence, my thesis will incorporate data from each country and different age groups in order to have a more representative sample. This evidence is also supported at the national level for the EU by Larsen, Cutts & Goodwin (2020) which showed that the terrorist attack in 2016 in Berlin had a positive impact on citizens’ attitudes towards the EU (p. 184). They argued that “one might expect citizens to also perceive the EU as a broader symbol of unity in the wake of attacks, with popularity for the EU in Germany and

across neighboring member states increasing in the shadow of such a shock” (Larsen, Cutts & Goodwin, 2020, p. 184). However, the authors did not manage to include the whole of Europe in their study as they limited themselves to talk about neighboring Member States. I argue in my thesis that the boost of support for the EU was seen all over Europe and in each Member State.

On another note, the effects of the invasion impacted Europeans economically. The dataset of the Eurobarometer (2023) states that 58% of Europeans are not ready to face the consequences of a rise in energy prices due to the war. In addition, 61% of the population in Europe considers themselves as not very confident or not at all confident that their life will continue unchanged during and after the war (Eurobarometer, 2023). The EU has been very reliant on Russian gas, especially Germany with 66% of its gas imported from Russia which impacted sharply the pre-invasion prevision of inflation (Astrov et al., 2022, p. 350). As a consequence of sanctions against Russia and aside from the cost of energy, “the cost of food, fertilisers, methanol, nickel, and palladium has also risen – in part as a direct result of the war” (Astrov et al., 2022, p. 350). The EU producing an insufficient amount of energy for its population, alternative suppliers or a transition to renewable energy seems to be the only reliable solution to cut the ties and reliance on Russia’s raw material and energy (Rokici, Borawski & Szeberényi, 2023, p. 2). As a consequence of those sanctions caused by the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, many European countries started to find alternatives and unite themselves to replace the ties they had with the invaders. Bonafé (2022) explains in his article that European heads of state met in Versailles to decide on a historic project called the REPowerEU plan which sets out the strategy of gas supply diversification and a transition to renewables energy (p. 18). On the other hand, the possibility of an allied trade embargo against Russia would make it “sustain meaningful losses [...] even in the short run” (Mahlstein, McDaniel, Schropp & Tsigas, 2022, p. 3380). The causal mechanisms of this rise

in prices which impacts Europeans at the moment are pretty easy to draw and a lot of people are blaming Russia. All in all, this literature review leads us to talk about our three hypotheses that will be tested and answered in the analysis.

H1: Russia's invasion of Ukraine leads to an increase in support for the European Union within Europe.

This hypothesis relates to the argument that during an international crisis, a strong unity behind a leader is observed. In the regional context, the leader is the European Union and I want to see if people identify more with the EU after the invasion of Russia which would give credit for a rally around the European flag effect.

H2: Russia's invasion of Ukraine leads to a more negative view towards Russia in Europe.

I also assume that as a result of the invasion, attitudes towards Russia became more negative. Seen as the invader, EU Member States will hold more negative view in 2022 than in 2018 concerning Russia.

H3: Countries with more negative attitudes towards Russia, felt that their membership in the EU was more important than others.

This way, the hypothesis will enable me to investigate whether countries that felt threatened by Russia and therefore needed the EU, gave the invaders a more negative view.

Research design

The data that was selected for this thesis comes from a polling instrument widely used throughout European institutions such as the European Parliament or the European Commission to monitor public opinion in Europe (Eurobarometer, 2023). The Eurobarometer is the public opinion polling tool I use in my analysis investigates reactions to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and captures the overall sentiment of Europeans on salient topics concerning politics, conditions of life, and many more. In total, three datasets from the Eurobarometer have been used from 2018, 2021, and 2022. The methodologies of these surveys are face-to-face for 2018 and 2022 while it was it a combination of face-to-face and online for 2021 due to the Covid pandemic. The datasets were all carried out by Kantar Public in the 27 countries of the European Union and all the results were weighted in accordance with the size of the population in each Member States (European Parliament, 2022). The selection of respondents is guaranteed to be representative in the sample used with at least "1000 persons aged 15 years and more per country or territory reported" (Eurobarometer, 2023).

Due to Brexit, the variable in which the United Kingdom's response is present from the 2018 survey will be left out in order to have a continuity in the analysis. Moreover, the Eurobarometer dataset split the results of Germany into two country codes (West and East), so the sample sizes (N) of my regressions will appear as 28 or 56.

The design of this thesis will take the form of an aggregate-focused analysis in order to investigate the relationship between the independent (henceforth IV) and dependent variables (henceforth DV). Furthermore, the aggregate analysis design will allow to identify patterns of a large population, be able to draw conclusion from a large sample of respondents, understand dynamics, make prediction to better address the role international crises have on

public opinion support rather than having to focus on individual countries. In order to make this possible, the data from the three surveys were piled into a single dataset.

Support of the European Union.

For the purpose of being able to measure the support for the European Union, a question from the Eurobarometer 2021 and 2022 was taken. The question was asked to the respondents in the following way: “How important is it for you that (OUR COUNTRY) is a Member State of the European Union? Please use a scale from 1 to 10 where means ‘not at all important’ and 10 means ‘extremely important’?” (Eurobarometer, 2022). Means and standard deviations were measured for both years. In 2021, a few months before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the mean importance for a country to be part of the EU across Europe was at 6.95 while it was at 7.41 a couple of months after the start of the invasion. Standard deviations for 2021 and 2022 were respectively of 2.471 and 2.369. The standard deviation of 2022 being smaller than 2021 reinforces the idea that a stronger unity (which is translated into a higher mean and a tighter cluster around it) was present after the invasion.

View towards Russia.

With the intention of measuring the view towards Russia in the European Union, a question from the Eurobarometer 2018 and 2022 was taken. The question was asked to respondents the following way: “As regards each of the following countries do you have a positive or negative view about it? (Russia)” (Eurobarometer, 2022). The scale of this variable was from 1 to 4. 1 is a ‘very positive view’, 2 is a ‘somewhat positive view’, 3 is a ‘somewhat negative view’, and 4 ‘very negative view’. Which means that the higher the result, the more negative a country’s view is towards Russia. In 2018, the mean on the views on Russia was at 2.89 with a standard deviation of 1.032. In 2022, the results were of 3.55 on the mean and

0.838 for the standard deviation. Simply put, attitudes towards Russia became more negative over time and there was a tighter cluster around the mean in 2022 which can be interpreted as a more uniformed negative vision of Russia in Europe after the invasion.

The mean of respondents' response was aggregated at the country level concerning the importance their respondents gave to being part of the European Union in 2021 and 2022 was therefore added alongside with the mean attitudes (of respondents aggregated at their respective country level) towards Russia in 2018 and 2022. It is important to note that due to the aggregate method, the thesis will make inferences at the country and regional level in the analysis but the data from those countries come from an individual level. In essence, the respondents of one country during a year represent the average attitude or feeling of the country in relation to our variables. In addition to that, control variables were added.

Control variables.

The inflation rate of each Member State for the year 2018, 2021, and 2022 was included to ensure that the economic context that is unstable at the moment would not hinder my analysis. As we know, economic instability can change people's perception of political entities such as the European Union. The dataset for the inflation rate of countries comes from the Eurostat which is an official website page from the European Union (Eurostat, 2023). The second control also essentially here for the same purpose, is a dichotomous variable splitting countries depending on if they used to be part of the USSR or not. Regarding this control, countries with a historical legacy of being member of the USSR could potentially influence a country's political relations with the EU. Therefore, creating a group including the former soviet union countries made sure that the perceptions of these countries on their support

towards the EU wouldn't differ from the others. In order to answer the hypotheses, linear regressions will be used to analyze the data collected.

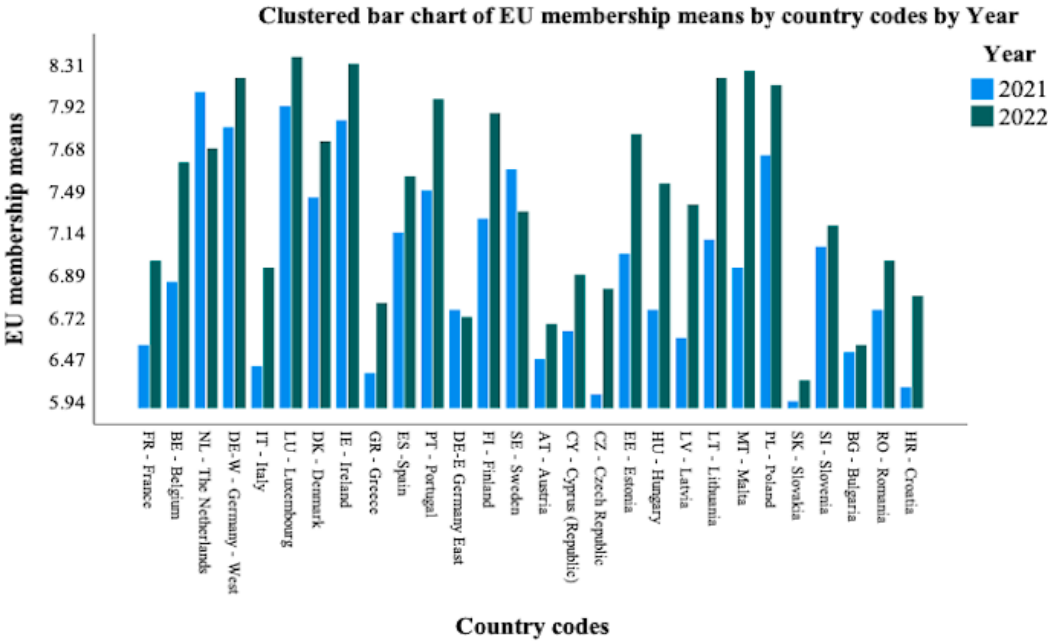
The variables we will use do not represent a threat for the results in the analysis since respondents would have nothing to gain from giving socially desirable answers instead of their true point of view. No money incentive and the respect for their privacy is also a motivation that makes me believe that the responses won't be a problem. Moreover, due to the fact that we have the same sources for the datasets, the composition and distribution of the groups are very stable. Accordingly, assumptions were checked rigorously in order to confirm and examine the fit of this statistical approach. Discussions about the assumptions can be found in the appendix.

Analysis

This thesis argues through its different hypotheses that the Russian invasion of Ukraine affected the amount of support the Europeans gave to the European Union and also impacted the views regarding Russia. I claim in the first hypothesis that due to the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, the support of the EU increased. Support for the EU was analyzed with the mean importance countries give to being an EU member. As Figure 1 shows, the mean attitude of countries from 2021 to 2022 concerning the support of the European Union rose in almost every country except for The Netherlands, Germany East, and Sweden. The range of attitudes towards EU support expressed through the importance of having a membership in 2021 started at a low of 5.94 and stopped at a high of 7.96 with a mean of 6.95. In 2022, the minimum was set at 6.35 and the maximum at 8.50 with a mean of 7.41. Thus, a change in the support for the European Union before and after the invasion can be noted with a growth of 0.46 at the European level on the 1 to 10 scale. This essentially means that a rally around

Europe can be observed only a few months after the threatening situation started taking place on European soil with countries shifting their attitudes more positively of 4.6% on average.

Figure 1. Clustered bar chart of EU membership means by country codes in 2021 & 2022.



Attitudes towards Russia in 2018 and 2022 were also aggregated on a variable measured from 1 to 4 in Figure 2 and 3. A range from 2.11 to 3.47 with a mean of 2.89 in Europe was found in 2018 and a range of 2.75 to 3.91 with a mean of 3.54 in 2022. This naturally depicts a stronger negative attitude towards Russia in Europe between 2018 and 2022. In other words, the average sentiment in 2018 at the EU level towards Russia was closest to a “somewhat negative view sentiment” while in 2022 the average sentiment was placed in between “somewhat negative view” and “very negative view”. Seeing this change of attitudes over time at the country and European level motivates the support for our first hypotheses. Moreover, the standard deviations being higher in 2018 with 0.344 compared to 0.270 in 2022 indicates us that the data is more clustered around the mean in 2022. This suggests that attitudes in Europe towards Russia after the invasion were less spread around the mean resulting in a tighter unity and uniformity in the negative view towards Russia in the Member

States. To stress that, a linear regression was performed in order to predict the behavior of my dependent variable (support for the European Union) based on my independent variable (Year 2022 and 2021).

Figure 2. View about Russia in 2018 aggregated at the European level.

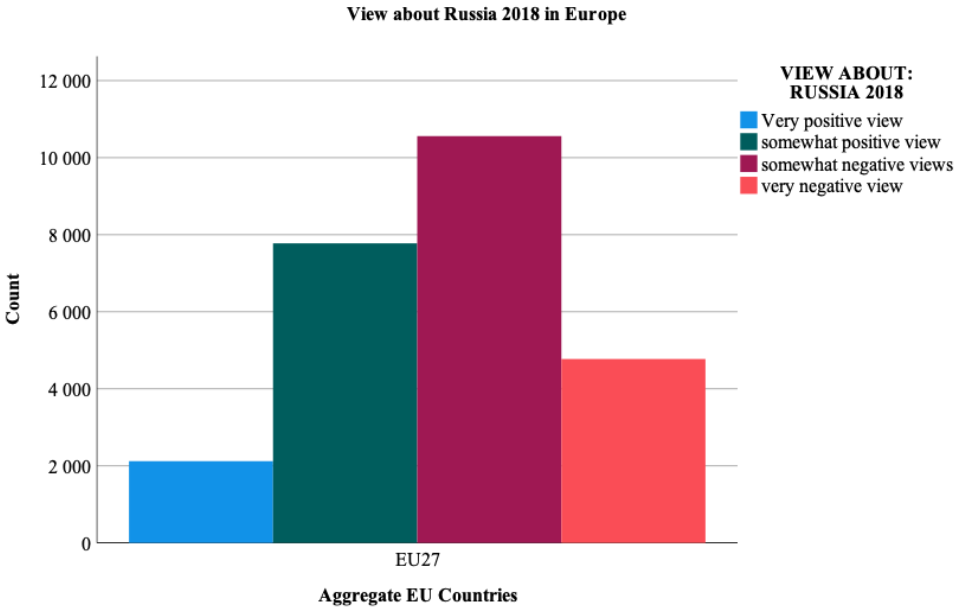
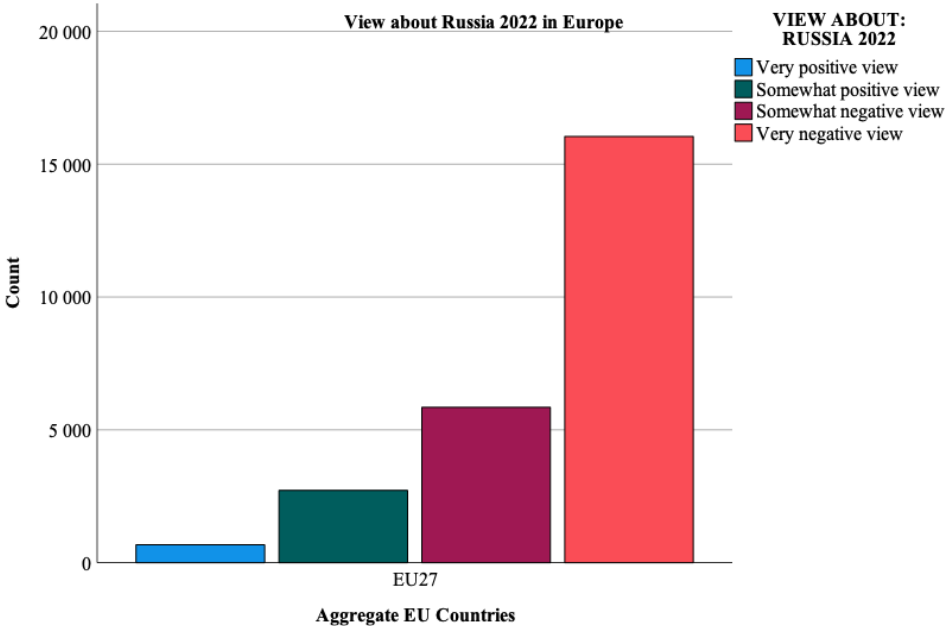


Figure 3. View about Russia in 2022 aggregated at the European level.



While we selected for this regression the years of 2021 and 2022 which contains the means for both year concerning the DV and only in 2022 for the IV, the results listed below in Table 1 are in accordance with our first hypothesis.

Table 1. Linear regression of the support for the European Union in 2021 & 2022.

	Model 1	Model 2
(Constant)	6.964*** (0.110)	6.986*** (0.143)
Year2022vs2021	0.458* (0.156)	0.598 (0.328)
Inflation		-0.018 (0.037)
USSR_member		0.277 (0.317)
R2	0.138	0.122
Adj. R2	0.150	0.101
N	56	56

*Note: OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in brackets. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$*

The general statement concerning the results of table 1 is that we can see a strong positive relationship between the IV and DV. In Model 1 both dependent and independent variable

have a lower significance than the recommended p-value of < 0.005 . We can see that the coefficients on the support for the EU (constant) is statistically significant in both Model 1 and 2, unlike the coefficients of the variable measuring the years 2021 and 2022 in Model 2 (p-value = 0.074). This suggests that I can reject the Null hypothesis, meaning that there is evidence to support a relationship between those two variables. In Model 1 the unstandardized coefficient (B) for the years 2021 and 2022 equals 0.458 while the coefficient of the dependent variable is at 6.964 when all IVs are equal to 0 in Model 1. Knowing that this coefficient represents the estimated change in the dependent variable, a one unit change in the independent variable would add 0.458 units in the mean for the support of the EU within Europe while holding other predictors constant. The positive coefficient means that in between 2021 and 2022, we can observe a higher support for the EU according to model 1. When adding the control variables of inflation and USSR for Model 2, we can see that they do not significantly influence the support for the EU during this period of time. The controls added to the second Model ensured that our regression is only caused by the effect of the IV on the DV. The control variable regarding the inflation of each country for the year 2021 and 2022 is most likely not significant due to a steep rise in prices during this period of time caused by the Covid pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine like the literature suggested earlier. Additionally, the control variable filtering countries that belonged to the USSR did not obtain a significant influence on the support for the EU. Nevertheless, adding these control variables did help to get a greater R-square value in Model 2 (0.122) compared to Model 1 (0.138). This measure however can vary depending on the field of research and its complexity regarding human behavior. Attached in the appendix a P-P Plot of standardized residuals for the selected cases shows no signs of concerning outliers and a pretty linear line. All in all, the regression that was performed succeeds at establishing a positive relationship between time and higher support for the EU. To assess the first hypothesis (H1), the linear

regression demonstrated statistical significance concerning our IV which was the most interesting to see whether it would produce an effect on our dependent variable. The findings are therefore leading me to validate my first hypothesis as all the assumptions for linearity were verified.

The first and second hypothesis were pretty similar in essence, and I could not validate one without the other. I argued in the second hypothesis (H2) that Russia's invasion of Ukraine leads to a more negative view towards Russia in Europe. Even though there are other events that took place between those five years and could have in some way affected views towards Russia in Europe (see for instance Russia hosting the FIFA World Cup or the Poisoning of the opposition leader in Russia, Alexander Navalny), due to feasibility constraints when it comes to measuring the impact they had on public opinion, the invasion of Ukraine is treated as the main event that could have shifted the views of Europe negatively. To test this relationship, a second linear regression was performed but this time with the attitudes on Russia as the DV and the year of 2018 and 2022 as the IV. We can see on Table 2 that in both Models the coefficients for our DV and IV are statistically significant. Model 1 tells us that the predicted value of our DV equals 3.542 when holding all other variables constant. The coefficient of our IV is of -0.654. This essentially means that in 2018 the attitudes towards Russia were -0.654 units lower than compared to 2022. Since the coefficient of the IV is negative, Model 1 suggests that there is a negative relationship in between the attitudes of Russia over time. Thus, it is expected in that Model to see a decrease in the mean attitudes towards Russia from 2018 to 2022. Russia's invasion of Ukraine was a big shock for a lot of European countries and from what we can see on Figure 1, the views towards Russia drastically changed and Model 1 supports this. When adding the control variables in our second Model, we can see in Table 2 that the time affects attitude at a higher rate. The time went from -0.654 in Model 1 to -0.851 in Model 2, and the variables controlling for the USSR

shows a positive relationship (0.132) with attitudes towards Russia while inflation shows a negative attitude (-0.022). All this essentially means that countries with historical connections to Russia with the USSR hold more negative attitudes towards Russia and that higher inflation rates slightly correlates with more positive attitudes towards Russia while time had a bigger impact compared to Model 1. These results put forward the decline of the attitudes towards Russia in Europe over time and show the importance that historical and economical contexts play in shaping attitudes.

Table 2. Linear regression of the views about Russia on the Year 2018 & 2022.

	Model 1	Model 2
(Constant)	3.542*** (0.059)	3.768*** (0.210)
Year2018vs2022	-0.654*** (0.083)	-0.851*** (0.193)
Inflation		-0.022 (0.020)
USSR_member		0.0132 (0.167)
R2	0.535	0.547
Adj. R2	0.527	0.520
N	56	56

*Note: OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in brackets. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$*

All in all, the combination of the second linear regression with the bar charts of Figure 1 and 2 gives us every reason to validate our second hypothesis. When Russia invaded Ukraine, it lost a lot of its popularity amongst Europeans and Member States, and this was modeled with significant results.

While we have seen that Russia's invasion of Ukraine led to more support for the European Union and that it has increased its negative views, I argue in my third hypothesis that countries with more negative attitudes towards Russia, felt that their membership in the EU was more important than others. In order to address this hypothesis, a third linear regression was performed. By using the views towards Russia as the IV and the support for the EU as the DV, this regression aimed to measure the impact of the mean for the support of Europe on the views towards Russia. The coefficients on Table 3 shows that the mean for the view towards Russia is estimated to increase support of the EU variable of 1.482 units in every unit change on average in Model 1. Accordingly, we remember that the scale of the DV in this regression is from 1 to 10 with 10 being the highest support a country could give to the EU. Based on Model 1 and its results we would expect a country giving a 3 ('somewhat negative view') on the view towards Russia to score a 6.619 on their support for the EU ($2.173 + 1.482 * 3 = 6.619$) while a country giving a 3 on Model 2 being a past member of the USSR would score a 7.136 ($2.588 + 1.402 * 3 - 0.016 + 0.385 = 7.136$). As demonstrated, if the country of Estonia would have a mean attitude of 3 towards Russia which indicates a somewhat negative view, their support for the European Union would be expected to be at 7.136 while holding the other variables constant in 2022.

The scale of the support of the EU and the positive relationship between the DV and IV in the Models gives sufficient evidence to conclude that as the level of support for the EU increases, an increase in the negative views towards Russia can be observed. Hence, this indicates that

the findings are consistent with the third hypothesis and that countries scoring higher for the support of the EU will have more negative attitudes towards Russia.

Table 3. Linear regression of the support for the European Union on the views about Russia in 2022.

	Model 1	Model 2
(Constant)	2.173 (1.176)	2.588 (1.449)
View_Russia_mean	1.482*** (0.331)	1.402*** (0.360)
Inflation		-0.016 (0.041)
USSR_member		0.385 (0.471)
R2	0.435	0.454
Adj. R2	0.413	0.385
N	28	28

*Note: OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in brackets. ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05*

After seeing that all three hypotheses turned out to be consistent with the results of the linear regressions I performed in this thesis, we can turn again to the discussion of the rally around the European Flag effect. Now that we proved that the main factor which affected the views towards Russia was the invasion of Ukraine, it is possible to establish a relationship between

this international threatening situation and the boost of support for the EU. Through the statistical analysis I was able to demonstrate that the rise of support was caused by this invasion and therefore we can argue to a certain extent in combination with the literature present in the review of existing work that a RAFF phenomenon was seen at the regional level in 2022 in Europe. As a matter of fact, a lot of clues leads to think that the boost of support experienced by the EU has not been caused by anything else rather than by the war that started on the European Continent. Seeing how the rally effects has worked in the past, the same characteristics seems to be happening at the level of the European Union even a year after enduring the worst world spread pandemic of our century.

Conclusion

It is crucial to understand how the invasion of Ukraine by Russia may have affected the support for the EU in Europe. That is the case because implications on rally around the European flag were found and it enables to contribute to this understudied topic in the literature. I argued that the support for the EU would be lower before and higher after the invasion. I tested this argument through our first hypothesis using evidence from the Eurobarometer datasets of 2021, and 2022. In the first out of the three linear regressions I performed, I regressed the mean support for the EU of each European country right before and after the invasion and found that Russia caused this significant positive change. In the second regression, the mean attitudes towards Russia were regressed on the years 2018 and 2022 to understand how the invasion impacted the attitudes the European Member States have towards Russia over time. I showed that this was the case even when accounting for the controls of the USSR and inflation. In the third regression, I showed the relationship between the views of Russia on the support for the EU. I argued and successfully found that the more a

country held negative views towards Russia, the more it was supporting the EU (since it felt threatened after Russia invaded Ukraine). Then, I discussed the predictions that a rally around the European flag phenomenon was present because of the invasion of Ukraine. In the rest of this conclusion, I will discuss the limitations of this study and potential directions for further work.

By using data from the Eurobarometer from different years, I found it more difficult to make claims as I was missing some data on the support for the EU in 2018 and views about Russia in 2021. This way, it made it harder to actually make inferences of both variables in 2018 and 2021 because I was missing the data for one of the two every time. However, I am pretty confident that it would have only helped to get a more precise prediction of changes for those two variables, but it would have not affected the ways of the relationships. Attitudes shifted the way I predicted they would but what exactly caused this shift wasn't totally clear. The fact is that Russia's political stances were present in the news quite often throughout those five years, it could be that the shift of attitude towards them was not solely created by the invasion. The same limitation can be attributed to the support for the European Union which could have been the result of other continent-wide crises not in relation to Russia like the Covid pandemic. Potential findings for the views on Russia in 2021 would have still most likely been less negative than after the invasion. Concerning the support for the EU variable, the worst thing that could have happened would have been to find higher levels of support in 2018 than in 2022. Nevertheless, just by seeing the change in support from 2021 to 2022 which is the most important for our case, we can observe a drastic change in support that increases for each country ultimately revealing a boost of popularity.

Some, if not most authors, have treated the rally around the flag effect as a phenomenon only observed at the national level. However, I believe that this may also be the case at the regional level. This belief comes from the fact that I was able to show to a

substantial level of confidence that the invasion of Ukraine by Russia participated greatly in a rally around the European flag effect. Nevertheless, I could not research as much as I would have liked into the emotions of Europeans. This way I could have confidently said and concluded that this international threat completely explained the rally around the European flag. Literature on the rally effect considers emotions such as fear and angst as being crucial factors when a rally occurs. Even though we know that citizens were scared of what could happen after the invasion of Ukraine, a Eurobarometer survey question with the following outline would have been perfect: ‘Thinking about the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, please indicate what emotion or feeling best describes how you reacted to the situation?’ with options such as anger, sadness, concern, fear, empathy, and more. Unfortunately, I did not have the data for it. Thus, I could not extend in this thesis on people’s feelings, which would have been of better interest in my opinion.

Yet, future studies could look into how emotions have played a role in the rise for the support of the EU shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine. This study would be great to extend the literature on the rally around the flag effect, international threat perception, and group identification in Europe. Relating back to the literature on that topic, we know that a decline will happen in the support for the EU since the rally already happened. The Eurobarometer of 2023 should be able to give more insight into how long this rally took place. Broader implications encapsulating emotions with a longitudinal analysis could enrich the understanding of the dynamics behind a rally around the flag effect in the context of European Union politics.

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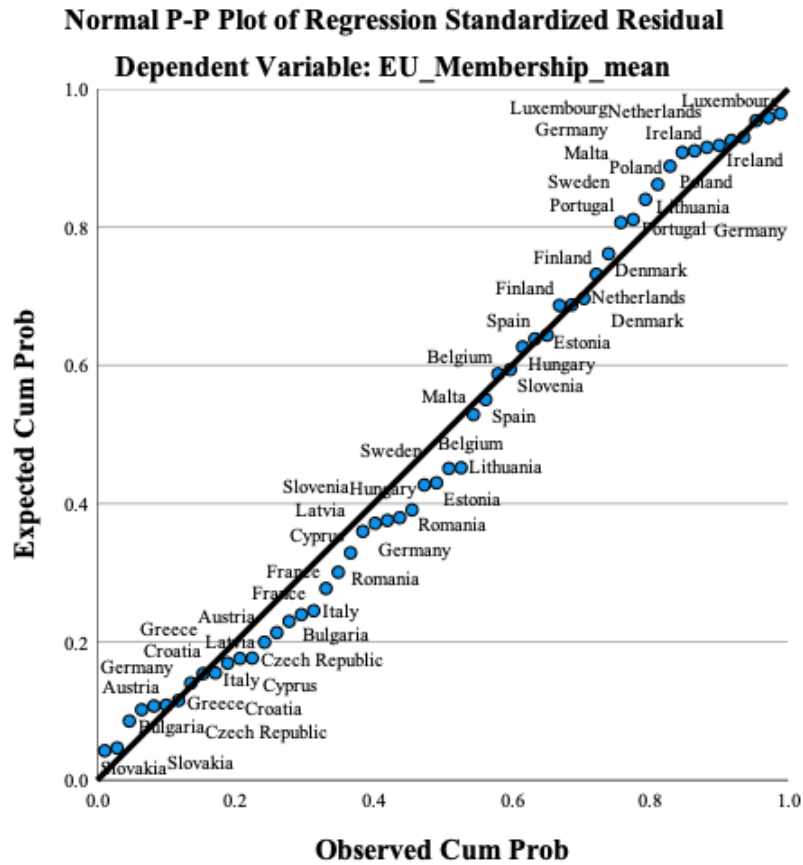
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Appendix

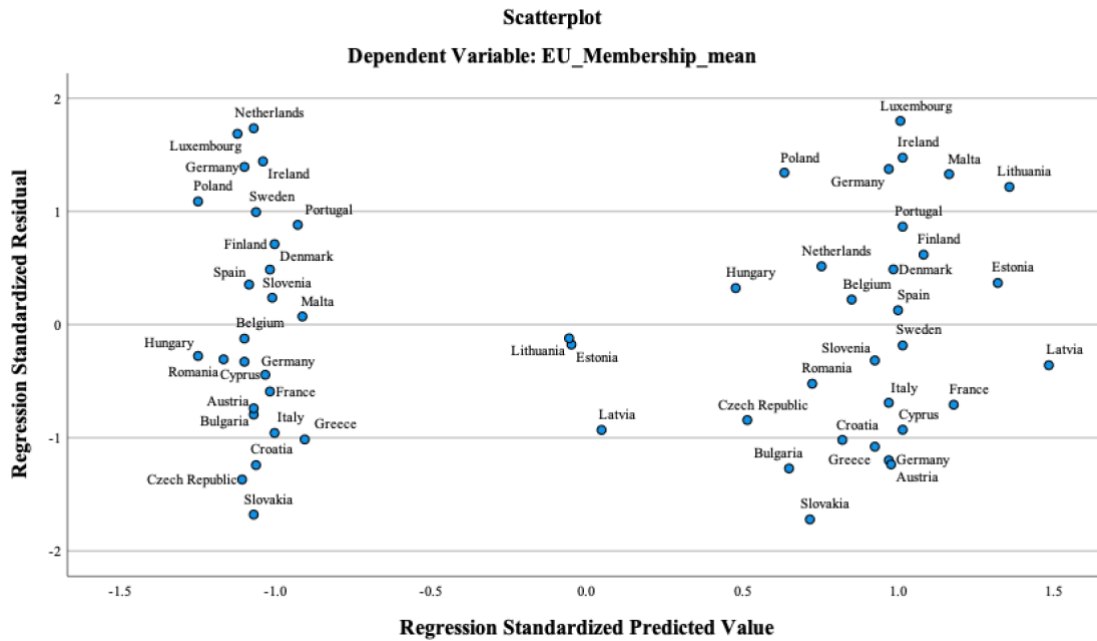
Appendix 1.

Figure 1. Normal probability plot of the standardized residuals for Analysis 1



The Normal PP-Plot of Standardized Residuals in Figure 1 indicates that the data used for the first regression is close to a perfectly normally distributed error. Nevertheless, we can see that some countries slightly deviate from the normality line, but in general they remain close to the line.

Figure 2. Scatterplot of the standardized residuals for EU membership means in Analysis 1



The scatterplot in Figure 2 of standardized predicted values in Figure 2 indicates that the data meets the assumption of homoskedasticity in both years. No pattern of a cone shape can be seen and therefore the assumption holds. The variability across the residuals is consistent in the range of the predicted values.

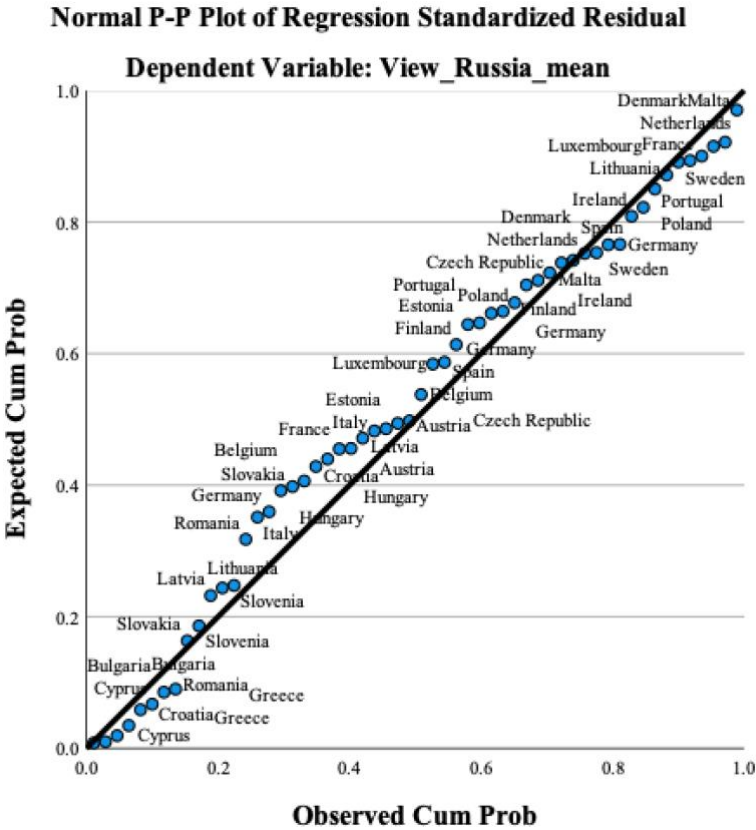
Table 1. Tolerance and VIF values for Analysis 1

	Tolerance	VIF
		Model 1
Year2022vs2021	1.000	1.000
		Model 2
Year2022vs2021	0.232	4.309
Inflation	0.206	4.847
USSR_member	0.650	1.538

In Table 1, shown above, we can see that the data met the assumptions of collinearity, therefore ruling out the concern for a possibility of multicollinearity. The VIF values are not greater than 5 so they aren't concerning.

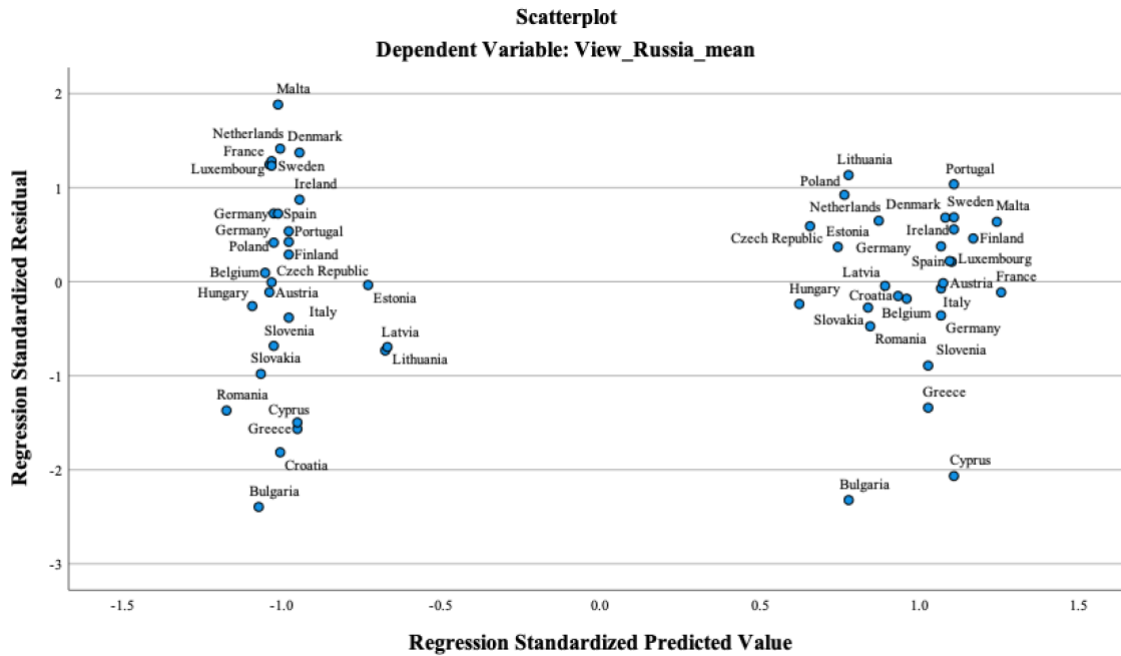
Appendix 2.

Figure 1. Normal probability plot of the standardized residuals for Analysis 2



The Normal PP-Plot of Standardized Residuals in Figure 1 suggests that the data used for the second regression has approximately normally distributed errors. However, we can see that some countries slightly deviate from the normality line, but in general these countries remain close to the line.

Figure 2. Scatterplot of the standardized residuals for Views about Russia means in Analysis 2



Concerning the Scatterplot present on figure 2, we can see that both years that were observed check the assumption of homoskedasticity. No pattern of a cone shape can be seen. The variability across the residuals is consistent in the range of the predicted values.

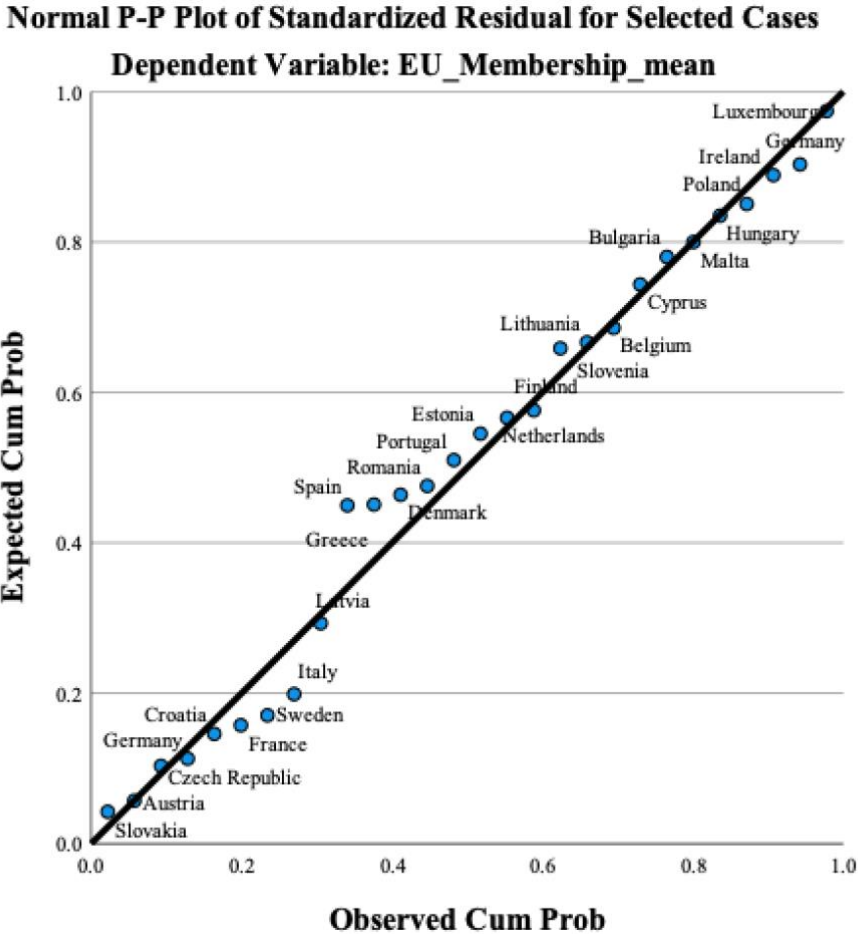
Table 1. Tolerance and VIF values for Analysis 2

	Tolerance	VIF
		Model 1
Year2018vs2022	1.000	1.000
		Model 2
Year2018vs2022	0.188	5.327
Inflation	0.171	5.849
USSR_member	0.657	1.522

In Table 1, shown above, we can see that the data met the assumptions of collinearity, therefore ruling out the concern for a possibility of multicollinearity. Even though the tolerance in this table is higher for my IV and the control variable of inflation than in the Appendix 1, low concerns are emitted from these tests.

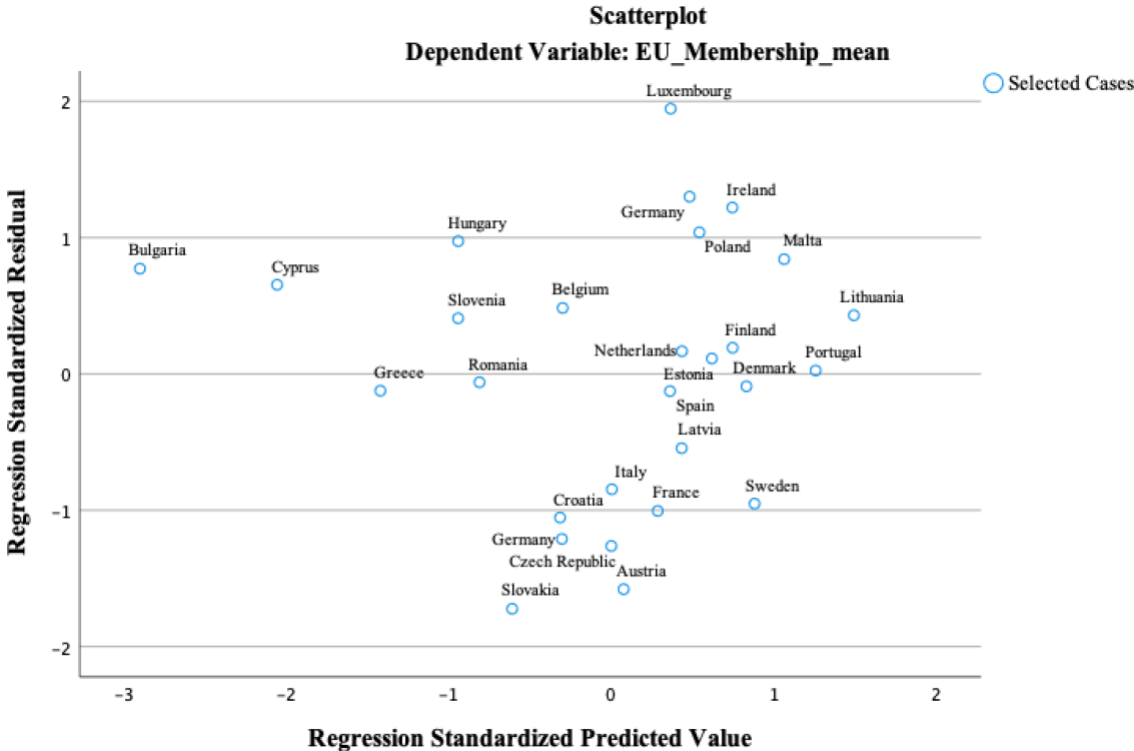
Appendix 3.

Figure 1. Normal probability plot of the standardized residuals for Analysis 3



The Normal PP-Plot of Standardized Residuals in Figure 1 suggests that the data used for the third regression is close to being approximately normally distributed errors. Nevertheless, we can see that some countries deviate from the normality line, but in general they remain close to the line. Yet, no actions needed to be taken to rectify this slight deviation.

Figure 2. Scatterplot of the standardized residuals for EU membership means in Analysis 3



Looking at the scatter plot on Figure 2, we can see that all the selected cases for the third regression check the assumption of homoskedasticity. Bulgaria and Luxembourg might be of concern as they deviate a bit more from the rest, but they cannot be considered as outliers.

Table 1. Tolerance and VIF values for Analysis 3

	Tolerance		VIF
		Model 1	
View_Russia_mean	1.000		1.000
		Model 2	
View_Russia_mean	0.886		1.128
Inflation	0.383		2.610
USSR_member	0.382		2.617

In Table 1, we can see that the data met the assumptions of collinearity, therefore there is no multicollinearity. This the best model out of the three regressions made in the analysis for the assumptions of multicollinearity.