

Brussels will pay for everything. The shaping of the European public sphere before *NextGenerationEU*

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic meant challenges in crisis management for democratic institutions such as the European Union (EU). To achieve an economic and social recovery to the crisis, the EU institutions have promoted the *NextGenerationEU* (NGEU) program, a massive recovery package for this purpose. This action takes place at a time of strong visibility of Euroscepticism within a global phenomenon of distrust in political authorities. The present work aims to know the shaping of the European Public Sphere when NGEU is launched. First, the evolution of EU support during the pandemic is described, analyzing the possible factors that influence on this variable. On this matter, a secondary analysis of data is applied on different waves of the *Eurobarometer* (EB 92, 93, 94 and 95). The statistical method is also used to give items that determine the image of the EU. Moreover, the communicative dissemination of this plan is drawing upon semi-structured interviews with some of the professionals who deal with the task. The objective is to provide an overview of how the public sphere made up of citizens and institutions is defined before a moment of symbolic relevance. The results reveal a trend towards greater positivity with the EU after the pandemic. However, among other possible factors, the degree of support depends on the ideological position and, to a lesser extent, on the type of community where the citizens live. EU officials assess this rise of Europeanism as an opportunity, targeting the NGEU communication campaign especially at young people.

Keywords

Institutional communication; Public opinion; European public sphere; Opinion polls; Semi-structured interviews; Europeanism; Euroscepticism; *Eurobarometer*; Covid-19; Pandemics; *NextGenerationEU*; European Union.

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