

Determinants of Eurosceptical Voting Behavior in CEE Countries and Party Responses

DEVBCEEC

ORIGINAL PROPOSAL

Overview: The project intends to undertake a quantitative cross-national study of the successes of Eurosceptic¹ political parties in Central and East Europe (CEE). It approaches this question in a novel way by exploiting systematic but unexplained attitudinal differences between mass publics in the CEE states and Western Europe. In doing so, it addresses empirically one of the central questions of contemporary European politics, the perception of European integration and the causes of the growing disenchantment on a part of the European public. As this issue routinely receives considerable public attention, the research proposed here reaches far beyond narrow academic concerns. If Eurosceptic parties succeed in constraining the integration process this has significant political, economic, and social consequences. The multidisciplinary aspect is taken into consideration through the fact that Euroscepticism has been approached from various scholarly traditions, which informs this research and is the center of two conferences/workshops organized in the context of this project. This applies especially to philosophy, sociology, communication sciences, economics, and law.²

Underlying Unresolved Question: Two developments have been startling: Since 2002 the number of parties participating in CEE governments that hold a negative view on European integration has risen from 21% to 25% while the comparable figures for Western Europe are 16% and 18% respectively. Secondly, many new or previously marginal parties have gained influence by entering parliaments across CEE presenting themselves as an oppositional force to European integration. Citizens across the region express consistent support for these types of parties during recent elections while, at the same time, aggregate levels of support for EU membership and trust in EU institutions remain higher than the West European average. This is a puzzle that new research needs to address.

What is more, in many CEE countries, trust in EU institutions often surpasses trust in domestic ones. In 2002, for example, every 6 out of 10 people (61%) in the candidate countries tended to trust the EU – a number much higher the average of 35% satisfaction with domestic governments across Central and East

¹ The definition follows the Kopecký-Mudde (2002) Typology and includes so-called “Eurorejects” and “Eurosceptics” but not “Europragmatists” and “Euroenthusiasts”. It defines Eurosceptics as those that oppose either ceding sovereignty to the EU or accept membership but oppose further integration/ceding more sovereignty. It does not include parties demanding hard bargaining in the national interest and does not follow the Taggart and Szczerbiak (2008) distinction between Soft and Hard Euroscepticism (cf. Kopecký, Petr and Cas Mudde (2002). “The Two Sides of Euroscepticism: Party Positions on European Integration in East Central Europe.” *European Union Politics* 3(3): 297-396).

² Taggart, Paul and Aleks Szczerbiak (2008) “*Opposing Europe*,” (Vol.1, & Vol .2). Oxford: Oxford University Press. Hooghe, Liesbet and Gary Marks (2005), *Calculation, Community, and Cues. Public Opinion on European Integration.* “*European Union Politics*, 6(4):419-442. Harmsen, Robert and Menno Spiering (2004) “*Euroscepticism: Party Politics, National Identity and European Integration.*” Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Europe. In the same year, the average satisfaction with domestic governance in Western Europe was about 70%, with none of the countries falling below the 50% cut-off point while satisfaction with the way democracy works in the EU averaged to approximately 45%.³ Eurosceptics, nonetheless, tend to do better and grow at a faster rate in Central and East Europe despite the fact that East Europeans on average trust the EU more than their West European counterparts. Another paradox arises from the fact that the distribution of Eurosceptic parties in a country does not always mirror the distribution of public opinion.

Proposed Explanation: The above paradoxes allow us to draw the following conclusions, which guide hypothesis formation for this project: The emergence and success of the Eurosceptic label in CEE party politics is not entirely a function of anti-EU sentiments among the population or anti-EU ideology on the part of political parties. Instead this proposal argues: (A) that Euroscepticism in Central and East Europe is a response to certain degrees of mainstream party convergence and (B) its electoral success is largely due to the disenchantment of the population with *domestic* elites and political processes rather than the EU per se. In explaining what drives political parties to adopt a Eurosceptic agenda, two potential causal factors may be identified. Eurosceptic parties can try to capture genuine anti-EU sentiments among voters *or* they can aim to strategically challenge mainstream political elites on the core issue – EU accession – that had grown to define mainstream policies. In the second case, opposition to the EU serves only as a signal to voters and is instrumental in capturing the segments of the population that have become dissatisfied with mainstream governments. Political parties in the new member states adopt a Eurosceptic agenda as a means of differentiating themselves from the mainstream consensus and offering voters an electoral alternative. Citizens who choose these parties do so largely as a form of protest against the hollow mainstream party competition and the lack of choice on substantive issues. Yet, a perception of “sameness” of the mainstream political parties does not automatically need to result in a protest vote. In Central and Eastern Europe, however, perceptions of widespread political corruption can thus serve as a trigger which, coupled with viewing mainstream parties as “all the same”, intensifies the likelihood that voters would choose a Eurosceptic party as a form of electoral protest.

Explanatory Approach and Theory: According to the spatial model of electoral choice, individuals choose the party whose position on an issue or issues of interest is the closest to their own. This model is likely to fit well in Eastern Europe since partisan attachments are still weakly developed and issue positioning is more likely to capture electoral shares. Moreover, the instability of the party systems, the proliferation of new parties, and the demise of old ones suggests a much greater volatility on the supply side of the electoral process, which is reflected among the electorate in unstable party attachments and dissatisfaction with partisanship as a whole. As parties are more likely to be evaluated on issues, rather than ideology, a major electoral strategy becomes unavailable to mainstream political parties if they are constrained to express similar, if not overlapping, issue positions covered by EU conditionality. Citizens who support EU membership and European integration, but are largely dissatisfied with the conditions of mainstream political parties, can thus cast a protest vote if perceptions about the performance of domestic politicians are more salient to them than their beliefs about the EU.

Innovative Aspect: Linking corruption and Euroscepticism as an important explanatory factor, draws on the fact that the increase in frequency and media coverage of corruption in the region coincides with the initial rise of Eurosceptic and populist parties. The associated increase in corruption perceptions in a setting where mainstream party convergence has been on the way, can lead to changes in the dynamics of inter-party competition and electoral behavior. According to Grigoresku’s measure of the salience of

³ Standard Eurobarometer 57, 58; Candidate Countries Eurobarometer 2002

corruption in the media, there has been a sevenfold increase in such coverage (1996-2004) in CEE countries.⁴ Corruption is now seen as one of the greatest threats to the proper functioning of new democracies. But the most dangerous effect of corruption is arguably the growing popular distrust of public institutions and their representatives.

Research Objectives and Expectations: The main objective is to analyze determinants of Euroscepticism especially in relation to the perception of corruption and mainstream party convergence. For purely populist parties, the corruption issue is expected to be at the very core of their platforms but perceptions of corruption should play a key role in explaining support for the mixed category of populist/Eurosceptic parties as well. If this can be shown and different forms of Euroscepticism can be disentangled from one another, then more effective strategies for counteraction can be devised (i.e., sharpening mainstream party profiles and strengthening anticorruption measures).

B 1.2 Research Methodology

Methodology and Project Objectives The key contribution is to undertake a quantitative study to gain an empirical basis grounded in cross-national data on the salient issue of Euroscepticism. By using a uniform operationalization and conceptualization, it will be possible not only to achieve substantive conclusions about the endogenous or exogenous causes of Euroscepticism but also to make meaningful cross-national comparisons.

Relevant Theoretical Basis: Eurosceptic parties in CEE often have heavy populist undertones and utilize the corruption issue to their benefit. Thus, Eurosceptic parties will be analyzed as a subset of the larger category of protest parties in an attempt to disentangle the link between populism, the perception of corruption, and Euroscepticism. According to the argument advanced here, the domestic electoral success of protest parties that mix Euroscepticism with populism is largely due to the populist anti-elite and anti-corruption element in them rather than their anti-EU positions. In this context, this study develops a theory aimed at explaining the electoral paradoxes surrounding Euroscepticism in the new member states. The first part of the theory concerns the institutional determinants of protest politics, while the second examines the factors influencing citizens' behavior.

Proposed Empirical Analysis: The analysis is based on a typology of the protest parties in the region that distinguishes between: (A) *purely populist* (electoral strategy consists of presenting itself as the people's alternative to a corrupt and/or incompetent political elite but supportive of European integration); (B) *purely Eurosceptic* (contains a certain degree of opposition to European integration, while refraining from engaging the populist dimension); (C) *mixed political parties* (engage both dimensions simultaneously in their formal rhetoric and platforms). As there is now considerable consensus in the literature on CEE party profiles, identifying parties as populists and Eurosceptics is generally possible.⁵ For ambiguous

⁴ Grigorescu, Alexandru (2006) "The Corruption Eruption in East-Central Europe: The Increased Salience of Corruption and the Role of Intergovernmental Organizations", *East European Politics and Societies*, 20(3): 516-549.

⁵ Hughes, James, Gwendolyn Sasse and Claire Gordon (2008) "How deep is the wider Europe? Elites, Europeanization, and Euroscepticism in the CEECs." In Taggart, Paul and Aleks Szczerbiak (eds) *Opposing Europe* (Vol.2).Oxford: Oxford University Press: 181-207.

cases, *Wordfish* software in conjunction with a content analysis can be used to extract political positions from text documents.

The investigation then proceeds on two levels by undertaking first an (aggregate) *Country-Level Analysis* consisting of four hypotheses centered on the explanatory variables Euroscepticism (H1) and Corruption Levels (H2 – H4). Here, the focus lies specifically on the distance between converging (mainstream) parties, which, if sufficiently polarized, is hypothesized to result in less favorable electoral outcomes for protest parties. On the other hand, Euroscepticism as an electoral strategy succeeds when presented as an alternative to the established consensus. The effect of mainstream party similarity is conditional or strengthened, so the argument, by corruption levels (cf. Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI)).

Country-Level Analysis

H1: The higher the similarity of mainstream political parties, the greater the electoral success of populist and mixed (populist/Eurosceptic) parties.

H2: The higher the level of corruption in the country, the greater the electoral success of populist and mixed political parties.

H3: Mainstream party similarity results in greater electoral success for populist and mixed political parties when corruption levels have passed a tipping point.

H4: The closer a country comes to EU membership, the higher the similarity of mainstream political parties.

Project Implementation, Thus Far

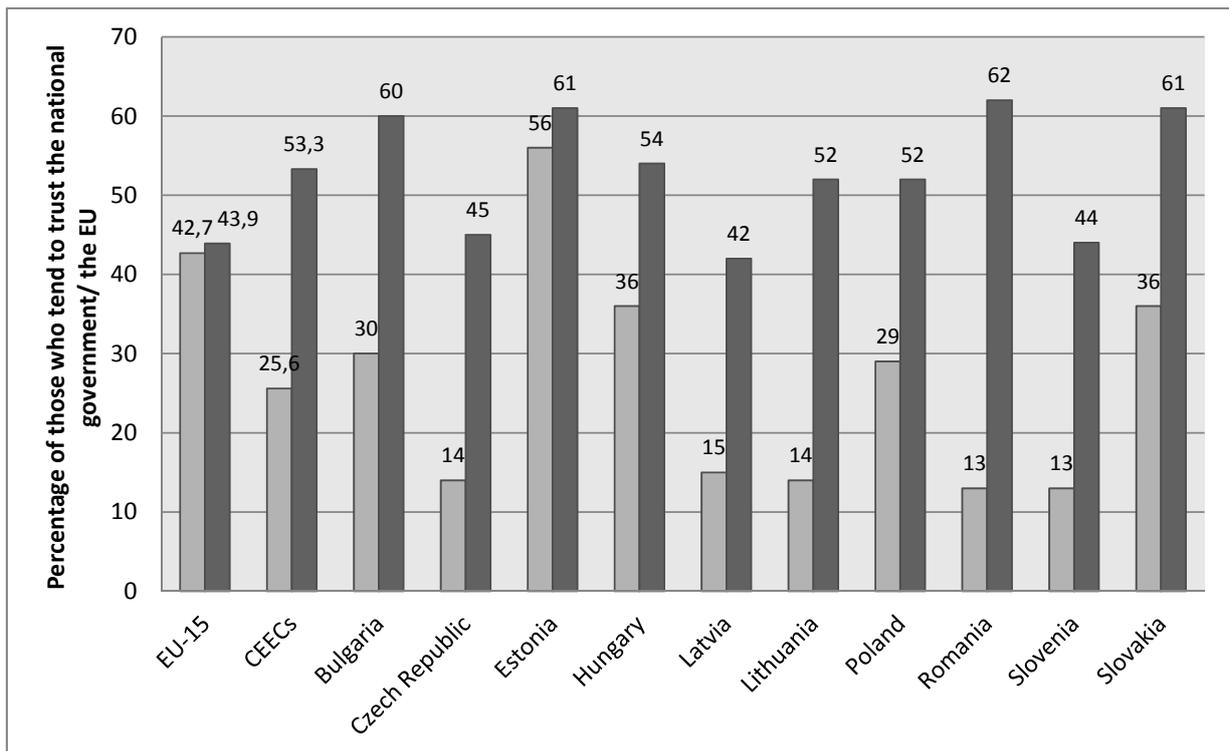
As first step within the project we wrote case studies of each country covered by the project. The case studies provide basic information about the general economic development, population, ethnic minorities, religious groups, etc., an overview of the historical background, of institutional characteristics (political system, electoral system), and of the development of the national party system. This helps us to identify factors that potentially influence the behavior of political parties. Moreover, a review of the literature on Euroscepticism and Populism in the target countries gave us a starting point for our research as we are now in the position to carry on work that have already been done. What is more, comparing divergent classifications of Eurosceptic parties give us the opportunity to underline the usefulness of a new typology that we developed in the context of our project work (see below).

Every case study ends with a detailed timeline reaching from the first free elections to today. Major developments in domestic politics like issues highly debated, electoral campaigns and results, government formation and splits as well as developments in international relations (bilateral, EU, and beyond) are summarized in a comprehensive way. This enables us to take possible effects of specific events on the behavior of political parties into account.

The findings of the case studies were useful for writing a contribution to a *Routledge Publishing Consortium* book project titled *Prospects on East Central Europe in the 21st Century*. After EU accession, in all Central and East European Countries – with the exception of Slovakia – the initial public

Euroenthusiasm has been partly replaced by Eurorealism, i.e., “[...] support for the principle of European integration and disapproval of the accession conditions offered to the CEECs” (Neumayer 2008: 136.). As a result, some political parties tried to capitalize on this change in public opinion by adopting Eurorealistic stances, e.g., the Polish party PiS. Only in Slovakia, EU membership as well as the accession conditions continued to be an uncontested issue. This was a result of the special case of Slovakia as a country whose accession to the EU was initially rejected in 1997 because of failing to meet the political criteria during the Mečiar government. Consequently, the dominant discourse in Slovakia does not deal with the question “[...] whether Slovakia wanted to join the EU, and what sort of EU it wished to be a member of, but – rather – whether the EU wanted Slovakia to join and, if not, whose fault this was” (Henderson 2008: 279). To sum up, the broad pro-EU consensus of the political elites in CEE partly disappeared when the goal of EU accession had been achieved. By contrast, some political actors adopted critical stances towards Europe while the public in large remained more pro-EU than the Western public. Above all, this is shown by a comparison of the extent of public trust in the EU and in national governments: People in CEE trend to trust the EU more than their national government while people in Western Europe have on average an equal degree of trust in their national government and in the EU:

Graph 1: Trust in the EU and in National Government in 2011



Source: Own presentation of data provided by Eurobarometer 75

We hope to solve this empirical puzzle by arguing that political parties in CEE use criticism on Europe only as an additional means to distance themselves from the pro-EU political mainstream. Hence, we

expect voting decisions in favor of this type of parties to be motivated by protest attitudes toward domestic politics and not by opposition to the EU.

With regard to the party level, we developed a new typology of party-based Euroscepticism by adding salience as another dimension to the conventional one-dimensional classifications focused on party positions on Europe. By doing so, we are able to distinguish between parties attaching high relevance to their Euroscepticism and those treating their criticism on Europe as a minor issue. While we expect the Euroscepticism of the first type to influence the party's behavior, other parties' behavior, and – particularly important in the context of our project – voting behavior, we do not expect such effects of the Euroscepticism of parties treating Europe as a secondary issue. Consequently, we classify only parties attaching high salience to their criticism on Europe as Genuine Eurosceptic parties while other parties showing Eurosceptical attitudes are called Mixed Protest parties. As this typology contributes to research on party-based Euroscepticism beyond the specific use in our research project we wrote a research note that explains our way to classify Eurosceptic parties in more detail and is submitted to the journal *Government & Opposition*.

First empirical results based on data provided by the recent Chapel Hill Expert Survey 2010 support our argument: All of the parties in Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia that adopt Eurosceptical positions attach relatively low salience to their criticism on Europe. Thus, all of them belong to the group of Mixed Protest parties. Consequently, we do not expect their electoral success to be due to their positions on European integration. In a next step, we made preparations to conduct our surveys in the three countries (Hungary, Slovakia, Poland) in order to test our argument empirically. The questionnaire we developed contains questions about the individual voting decision in the last parliamentary elections, the individual position towards European integration and other issues, and the degree of relevance individuals attach to different issues including EU issues. On the basis of this data we are able to evaluate the effect of individual attitudes and the priority ordering of issues on the voting decision in favor of Mixed Protest parties.

We were then in contact with survey agencies in each of the target countries and obtained cost estimations of the planned survey. However, as a condition for undertaking voter surveys in three East European Countries we were required to seek prior approval from responsible ethics review boards. This turned out to be more difficult than imagined and until fall 2012, we could only secure such a clearance from a competent review board in Hungary on 5 September 2012. We then petitioned early in 2012 (26 March 2012 with follow-ups on 17 April, 25 September, and 16 October 2012) the European Commission to be allowed to turn to our University's review board from which we received a green light on 11 November 2012. However, we did not obtain a communication from the Commission until 1 February 2013 and thus did not dare proceed with our surveys in Slovakia and Poland until we were given the go-ahead. As a result we put our project on hold for some time in 2012 once all the preliminaries were in place.

However, there was also a substantive reason not to push on more quickly with the survey portion in 2011 and 2012: This was because we felt strongly that the unfolding financial crisis would severely impinge on the results we hoped to obtain about the relationship of political protest and Euroscepticism. We believe given the circumstances, this decision on our part was prudent and well-justified.

Nonetheless, we were able to complete a paper based on our preliminary work, an earlier draft of which is being published as a working paper of the Salzburg Center for European Union Studies. Another version, as already mentioned, has been submitted for review to *Journal of Government and Politics*.

Three additional papers based on this research have been and will be presented at various scholarly conferences. A book chapter based on our research will be forthcoming with in a consortium project with Routledge which currently going through an editing phase. The time has also been used to develop a follow-up and ad-on grant that was submitted to an Austrian funding agency in order to expand the scope of the survey – a decision is pending.

Once the most virulent part of the Euro-crisis subsided by the summer of 2012 and once we obtained a positive ethics review by a competent Hungarian review body affiliated with the national Academy of Sciences and once having been cleared also the review body of our own university we immediately proceeded to undertake the survey in Hungary. Following the preliminaries in October, data collection took place in November and the agency....delivered the data to us at the beginning of December when we began with the analysis. After receiving a green light from the European Commission, we then solicited bids from a Slovak survey agency in February 2012 and are currently engaged in finalizing the questionnaire. The data collection phase is to take place in March. Following this we will continue with Polish case.

In the meanwhile we used the time to finalize three conference papers, a book chapter as well as a working paper and journal article. There have also been important personnel changes in the research team. A PhD research we hired to help with the start-up phase of the project has since left the university, while starting in March 2013 a post-doc researcher with background in mathematic and empirical research is being brought in to help with the data analysis portion. Post-doc researcher Bernd Schlipphak has left the University of Salzburg to take a position with the University of Gottingen in Germany but has nonetheless remained committed to the project and has been co-authoring two of the papers thus far.

Concrete Tasks:

- 1) Analyze the data from the Hungary Survey
- 2) Prepare Survey/Poland jointly with BK
- 3) Analyze the data from Slovakia
- 4) Analyze the data from Poland

Data Analysis Hungary:

- Descriptive statistics /frequencies on all questions
- Estimations of hypotheses as in Paper-Graz
- Estimations of hypotheses as in Paper G&O
- Estimations of hypothesis as in Proposal

Country-Level Analysis

H1: The higher the similarity of mainstream political parties, the greater the electoral success of populist and mixed (populist/Eurosceptic) parties.

H2: The higher the level of corruption in the country, the greater the electoral success of populist and mixed political parties.

H3: Mainstream party similarity results in greater electoral success for populist and mixed political parties when corruption levels have passed a tipping point.

H4: The closer a country comes to EU membership, the higher the similarity of mainstream political parties.

Table 6: Hypotheses G&O

H 1 Citizens who perceive a higher degree of mainstream party similarity and of political corruption will be more likely to vote for Nationalist/ Mixed Protest parties than for Mainstream parties.

H 2a

Citizens who have less favorable views of EU membership or European integration and attribute a *high* salience to European issues will be more likely to vote for Genuine Eurosceptic parties than for Mainstream parties.

H 2b

Citizens who have less favorable views of EU membership or European integration and attribute a *high* salience to European issues will be more likely to vote for Genuine Eurosceptic parties than for Nationalist/ Mixed Protest parties.

H 3a

Citizens who perceive a higher degree of mainstream party similarity and of political corruption, have less favorable views of EU membership or European integration and attribute a *low* salience to European issues will be more likely to vote for Nationalist/ Mixed Protest parties.

H 3b

Citizens who perceive a lower degree of mainstream party similarity and of political corruption, have less favorable views of EU membership or European integration and attribute a *low* salience to European issues will be more likely to vote for Mainstream parties.

H1. From the perspective of the vulnerability argument, a citizen is more likely to be eurosceptical if
1a) s/he is living in a country within the Eurozone and if s/he does not consider the EU capable of or beneficial in solving the crisis.
1b) s/he considers the financial crisis a danger to the citizen's well-being and if s/he does not consider the EU capable of solving the crisis.

H2. From the perspective of the vulnerability argument, a eurosceptical citizen is more likely to cast his/her vote for a radical party on the national level if s/he is living in a country within the Eurozone and if s/he does not consider the EU capable of or beneficial in solving the crisis.

H3. From the perspective of the nationalist backlash-argument, a citizen is more likely to adopt a eurosceptical position in the run of the financial crisis if
3a) s/he is living in a country in need of a bailout and therefore under the influence of third actors such as the EU troika including the IMF
3b) s/he is living in a country which only recently has become sovereign
3c) s/he is rather risk-averse
3d) s/he is rather closed-minded.

H4. From the perspective of the nationalist backlash-argument, a euroskeptical citizen is more likely to cast his/her vote for a radical party on the national level if

4a) s/he is living in a country in need of a bailout and therefore under the influence of third actors such as the EU troika including the IMF

4b) s/he is living in a country which only recently has become sovereign

4c) s/he is rather risk-averse

4d) s/he is rather closed-minded.