

Public Opinion towards the EU

Public Opinion towards the EU:

*Triumphalism, Euroscepticism
or Banal Representations?*

By

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INTRODUCTION

This volume investigates the public opinion of the EU in the context of the economic crisis and other challenges currently faced by the Union. At the time our research was conducted, the main concerns of Europeans were related to the economic crisis and the events unfolding in Ukraine, both of which provided Eurosceptics with the opportunity to reiterate their main arguments. Since then, EU member states are facing another difficulty: the immigrant crisis, which exposes not only the vulnerabilities of the Schengen area but also significant differences of opinion between the member states, especially on the issue of mandatory quotas. Furthermore, scenarios surrounding an eventual Brexit (which may have become a reality by the time this volume is published) are putting additional emphasis on the incertitude of the future.

In the beginning, the EU's legitimacy was not the core of many debates, but changes have built up over the years. The difficulties generated by the successive waves of accession, and the tendency to consult the citizens about important issues through national referenda led to a growing public debate on the benefits of membership and the direction the project of European integration should take. In the context of increasing pressure, occasional manifestations of nested Euroscepticism have been replaced by increasing distrust and open criticism. Furthermore, some national political leaders are ready to listen to the voice of the street and act accordingly. This has already happened on a few notorious occasions. One turning point was the 2005 referendum on the European constitution, when 61.5% of the Dutch voted "no". The project was also rejected by the French, proving without doubt the deterioration of positive attitudes towards the European Union and European integration. The power of public opinion became more explicit than ever. Another recent example is the Greek referendum on July 5, 2015. Greek voters overwhelmingly rejected austerity proposals from the country's creditors – the ECB, EU, and IMF – in a snap referendum called by the leftist Syriza government. The results have been described in the media as "a nightmare for the mainstream elites of the EU" (*The Guardian*, "Greek Referendum No Vote Signals Huge Challenge to Eurozone Leaders," July 5, 2015). Furthermore, a previously unthinkable question will be asked in another national referendum in June

2016: “Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave?”

Taking the above into consideration, the study of public opinion towards the EU becomes a highly significant and pragmatic endeavor. The ongoing discussion on this topic in the academia is a constant competition between the instrumental and symbolic approaches. The former favors utilitarian factors as the basis of EU attitude formation, whereas the latter finds a stronger exploratory value in the case of emotions and identity formation. Furthermore, an overview of the topic in scholarly literature allows us to determine the distinctive features of public opinion towards the EU in CEE member states (Romania included). Scholars take into consideration three main categories of factors that impact EU attitudes in the post-communist countries: economic, political (such as the influence of political elites), and individual (socio-demographic variables). The economic perspectives are rooted in the utilitarian approaches, redefined to fit the specifics of the CEE bloc. The second category of factors is related to political change and the internal political landscape, arguing that political values and cognitive capabilities affect a citizen’s ability to form opinions about abstract and distant institutions such as the EU. In the CEE context, not only is EU membership viewed in terms of an increase in the standard of living but also equalled to strengthening the institutional base for democracy and capitalism. These particular characteristics provide an explanation for the region’s above-average levels of support for the EU.

The analysis we unravel in this book is two-fold, focusing on EU attitudes at a mass level on one hand, and the opinions of Romanian experts on the other. As far as the average EU citizens are concerned, we assume a shift from moderate support to mild Euroscepticism or even open contestation; we deem the economic crisis to be the most influential factor in this respect. In terms of Romanian elite opinion, we expect a gradual evolution from highly symbolic and sometimes even triumphalist representations of the EU towards mildly critical positions, based on instrumental perceptions. We argue that the aforementioned changes mark a new stage of Europeanization, in which the EU’s presence has become ordinary. The presumed banalization of the EU accommodates demitization and criticism while maintaining EU support at a fairly high level.

We test these assumptions on two sets of data. The first includes cross-country Eurobarometer data between 2007 and 2014, whereas the second comprises fifty interviews with the Romanian elite from the areas of public administration, journalism, research in EU affairs, NGO sector, private sector, and academia. From a methodological standpoint, we find

secondary data analysis of Eurobarometer data and in-depth interviews to be the most suitable for our inquiries.

Secondary data analysis on Eurobarometer data from 2007 to 2014 offers evidence that Euroscepticism has become a growing issue. Trust in the EU and other indicators related to support and EU legitimacy experienced severe negative evolutions. We deem the economic crisis to be responsible for these evolutions, and we seek support for the utilitarian theories focusing on economic factors as the most powerful determinants of public opinion towards the EU. In traditionally EU-supportive and traditionally Eurosceptic member states, all indicators of support for the EU dropped abruptly, especially between 2010 and 2013 – which corresponds to the most severe period of crisis. Furthermore, trust in the EU hit historically low levels in all debtor countries, especially compared to other member states during the same period. As additional evidence, we must emphasize that the most dramatic fluctuations in terms of public opinion mirrored the chronology of the crisis with great precision. The European economic and financial crisis cannot be separated from the transformations of EU attitudes.

The overview provided by the official Eurobarometer statistics will allow us to argue on the striking differences between member states. Previous findings in this respect elaborate on the high degree of fragmentation of public opinion towards the EU. Reasons for support, as well as arguments for opposition, vary to a great extent from one region to the other. As such, citizens from the West, the East, and the South of the EU lack a common frame of reference. As empirical evidence and the academic literature suggest, Euroscepticism failed to unite local perspectives and interests into a greater, EU-wide debate.

The two-fold investigation of public opinion allows us to answer two fundamental questions related to the distinctive regional features of EU attitudes on one hand, and representations of the EU in the Romanian elite discourse on the other. We expect the secondary data analysis, as well as the comparative analysis of expert interviews, to confirm our two basic assumptions. We posit that the economic crisis has led to increasing Euroscepticism in the large majority of member states, and acknowledge that some regional differences may exist in this respect. Secondly, we argue about the gradual transition from triumphant to banal Europeanism noticeable in the elite discourse between 2011 and 2015.

CHAPTER ONE

PUBLIC OPINION TOWARDS THE EU: FROM AN IRRELEVANT ISSUE TO A HOT TOPIC

1.1. Why it all Matters: the Gradual End of the Permissive Consensus Era

The problem of the EU's legitimacy, in the public's opinion, is based on several aspects (Kumlin, 2009): firstly, the extent to which citizens feel they are part of a community that is larger than the national one; secondly, the EU as a political system poses the question of what level of government (regional, national, or supranational) should be mainly responsible for policies. Citizens are more or less likely to allow supranational institutions to shape policies and regulations. Thirdly, the legitimacy of the institutions and supranational governance themselves are considered. Shifting to the more pragmatic side of things, legitimacy also derives from individual perceptions of the benefits, costs, advantages, and disadvantages of EU membership.

In the beginning, the EU's legitimacy was not the core of many debates, but changes have built up over the years. Public opinion towards the European Union has become more of a salient issue for scholars, political leaders, representatives of European institutions, and the media. Interest in EU attitudes was not a prerequisite at first. Important decisions, especially decisions that carry strategic significance, have their supporters and detractors. However, we could not see them when the EU was first born because at the time the pragmatic, gradual steps that were taken had nothing of the spectacular quality accompanying great breakthroughs.

The original European Economic Community (EEC), whose birth was based on the noble ideals of peace and economic progress through integration, was driven forward by elite consensus in the six founding states (de Vries, 2013). Citizens were eager to leave the decision-making processes in the hands of the political elite without question. This passive attitude was driven by two factors: the complex processes of creating the new reality of European integration, and the general consensus that

supranational integration is a positive, desired, and necessary evolution in Europe. Furthermore, the first members of the EU had a homogenous level of economic and political development, and relatively similar cultural and societal backgrounds, making coordination and integration natural processes.

In the context of these early days of European integration, public opinion seemed irrelevant to the success of the integration process. The dominant view was that the political project of European integration was exclusively elite-driven; building support of the national and transnational elites was the main focus. The role of the European public in the 1960s and 1970s was merely to give their tacit consent to their leaders to act on their behalf.

It was not until the general wave of electoral volatility of the mid-1970s, combined with the debate about the enlargement of the EU, that “Europe” began to develop as an issue in any significant way within the domestic sphere (Usherwood and Startin, 2013, 3). Since then, the difficulties raised by the successive waves of accession and the growing tendency to consult citizens on important issues through national referendums led to a growing public debate on the benefits of membership and the direction the project of European integration should take. From the early 1990s on, domestic debates on the EU became increasingly polarized in the context of the Maastricht Treaty’s ratification process.

Another turning point was the 2005 referendum on the European constitution, when 61.5% of the Dutch voted “no.” The project was also rejected by the French, proving without doubt the deterioration of the positive attitude toward the European Union and European integration. The power of public opinion became more explicit than ever. In this context, many voices condemned the democratic deficit of the European Union. Starting in 2005, some scholars support what we could call the standard vision of the democratic deficit. This perspective relates to the unbalanced design of the European Union that leaves decision-making almost exclusively to the executive. The executive branch is not directly elected by the citizens, thus does not represent their interests (Follesdal and Hix, 2006). As a consequence, scholars, politicians, the media, and many citizens talk about the symbolic distance between the Union and its citizens.

After the failure of the 2005 referendum on the European constitution, literature on EU attitudes focused on identifying the causes of the negative vote. There are some substantial contributions in this respect. In the case of the Netherlands, Marcel Lubbers (2008) tested hypotheses resulting from the national identity, utilitarian, and political approaches to explain this voting behavior. His results showed that EU evaluations in particular

accounted for the “no” vote, although in conjunction with a strong effect from domestic political evaluations. He also found evidence for party-following behavior irrespective of people’s attitudes. Utilitarian explanations determined the “no” vote less well than political or national identity explanations. The strongest impact on voting “no” came from a perceived threat from the EU to Dutch culture, sovereignty, and identity. In an expanding Union, so the explanation goes, the Netherlands would disappear from the map. Other explanations given for the referendum results refer to the campaign (Lubbers, 2008), but there were specific content-related explanations as well. A popular interpretation of the vote among left-wing political parties is the claim that people wanted a different Europe, more social and less bureaucratic. On the other hand, the subject of the referendum was very technical and the citizens were unprepared to understand its implications. “Voters were asked say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to a 341-page treaty for the establishment of a constitution for Europe, which for most people constituted a colossal tome of abstract text” (Lubbers, 2008, p. 64). Voters in the referendum were therefore likely to have been influenced by the parties they identified with.

Other EU-related events gave scholars the opportunity to discuss the determinants of public opinion towards the EU. After analyzing the Eurosceptic voting in the 2009 European Parliament elections, de Vreese and von Spanje (2009) confirm some hypotheses that shed light on any Eurosceptic voting, both in the European elections and referendums on EU-related subjects. Concerns about the EU’s democratic deficit, low perceived utility of the EU for the country, negative affection towards the EU, opposition to EU integration, and an absence of EU identity enhance anti-EU voting. All five dimensions have an impact on the vote. In terms of relative importance, dimensions 4 (strengthening integration) and 2 (the EU’s utility) in particular stand out as key predictors of Eurosceptic votes (de Vreese, von Spanje, 2009, 423).

We have chosen to mention these studies as an introduction to the broad topic of what the public opinion on integration and the EU itself is exactly. However, after 2009, the situation intensified. Instead of occasional manifestations of Euroscepticism, the economic crisis led to a shift in public opinion by increasing distrust and open criticism. The economic and financial crisis faced by the global economy re-opened for discussion the favorite arguments of Eurosceptics: European institutions are too strong and lack transparency, the European super-state has become distant from its citizens, the European Union supports unpopular politics, the sovereignty of the national state is under threat, and European requirements are not fully applicable to developing economies from central and eastern

Europe (Bârgăoanu, 2011).

All over the European Union, nationalistic positions strengthened to the detriment of the European identity. The motto of the EU, unity in diversity, is now more about the latter part: diversity of opinion, interests, preferences, and options, and decisions taken individually by each member state. The European Union has to face this growing wave of Eurosceptic feelings and economic problems through a symbolic reconfiguration and by reforming the economic system. The crisis has led to a rise in the nationalist positions of extremist parties and the revival of the nation-state as the main actor.

In a statement made in September 2011, the Council for the Future of Europe openly admitted that the European Union was at a crossroads (*Europe is the solution, not the problem*, 6th of September, 2011). The statement explicitly described citizens as “disconnected and alienated from the abstract processes in Brussels” and warned European leaders of the difficulty of engaging the doubts and anxieties of European citizens. For the vision of Europe to succeed, the document said, it needs to be that which “inspires the commitment of its citizens whose faith in a European future is shaken” (*Idem*, 2). This particular phrase sheds light on the current meaning of Euroscepticism. In a European Union shaken by crisis and uncertain of what its future could be, Euroscepticism could impact the very delicate balance of public opinion.

Although the EU has experienced crises in the past, the current situation differs in at least one vital respect: decisions can no longer be taken by completely ignoring popular consent. The days that European integration could be pushed forward without public scrutiny are over. During the past decades, the EU has moved away from a largely elite-led diplomatic project to a system of multilevel governance in which member states share policy-making with supranational institutions such as the European Commission (EC), the European Central Bank (ECB), and the European Parliament (EP). This shift in the power balance between national governments and supranational institutions has not gone unnoticed by the public, especially during the current crisis. At present, we are witnessing increased public contention over European matters in election and referendum campaigns as well as party and media discourse (de Vries, 2013, 435).

Public opinion validates or invalidates decisions taken at the European level through domestic democratic processes. Today, most major EU initiatives are advanced through negotiations by member state governments, and these governments are subject to electoral accountability. Some studies suggest that European integration has the potential to influence party

mobilization in European polities, whereas the presence of European issues in national elections would indicate an indirect democratic process through which European citizens can control the development of European integration (Tillman, 2004). Increasingly, national political parties rally Eurosceptic sentiment to distinguish themselves from the predominantly pro-EU mainstream and obtain electoral gains (Harteveld, van der Meer, and de Vries, 2013).

With the expansion of the European Union jurisdictional authority over a wide range of policy areas, the introduction of a single currency, and the ongoing enlargement, European integration has increasingly become the subject of discussion and the object of support or rejection on behalf of the European public. The *permissive consensus* is not only obsolete but has been replaced by a less benign *constraining dissensus* (Hooghe and Marks, 2009). This increased contestation over deepening integration efforts, combined with the financial challenges the EU and the euro are facing, has put public support for the EU in the spotlight, making citizens' evaluation of the legitimacy of the EU and its institutions very relevant.

Harteveld *et al.* (2013) underline the problem of principle related to the EU's alleged democratic deficit. In any democracy, legitimacy is derived by the perception of the political process as originating *from the people* and serving *the people*. In a multilevel setting, it becomes very unclear who exactly the rulers are, and who voters are giving their consent to. Also, trust in the EU is influenced by the domestic context, which is very vulnerable in southern member states, and in eastern Europe, where post-communist countries still have a long way to go to fill the gaps in development. The increased importance of public opinion towards the EU validates EU attitudes and EU support as relevant issues for scholars and the political elite. As we will attempt to prove in the rest of the chapter, there is no single answer to what drives public opinion across Europe, making the pursuit of an explanatory model even more difficult.

1.2. Not Everything is Black and White: The Multidimensionality of EU Attitudes

Public support can be understood as “the attitudes held by the public which bear the potential to translate into implicit or explicit consent towards a particular policy or polity” (Sigalas, 2010, 1343). Explicit consent always leads to action as a manifestation of agreement or disagreement (demonstrations, strikes, voting), whereas tacit support is less vocal and may remain in the private sphere. In the context of EU studies, European public opinion usually refers to the opinion of the

member state citizens in relation to the present or desired form of the EU, its institutions and policies, and the extent of supranational integration (Sigalas, 2010). For the purposes of this study, we will use Sigalas' definition of public opinion towards the EU to define specific attitudes and stances.

There is broad agreement in the literature that EU attitudes are multidimensional. This fact has been emphasized since the mid-1970s. From the early beginnings of investigating EU attitudes, scholars emphasized that public opinion towards the EU has different objects of support (Easton, 1975, as cited by Boomgaarden *et al.*, 2011), or can be of a utilitarian or affective nature (Lindberg and Scheingold, 1970, as cited by Boomgaarden *et al.*, 2011). Boomgaarden *et al.* (2011) agree with Easton's initial bi-dimensional distinction:

I. *Modes of support (specific and diffuse)*. Specific support relates to concrete policy outcomes or the performance of a polity; diffuse support represents a general evaluation of what the EU represents (the focus shifts from the way the union works to what core values and principles it embodies). Specific support varies according to the variations in terms of expected outputs, whereas diffuse support is more focused on the objects' intrinsic characteristics. The choice of terms may vary, as diffuse vs. specific support is not very different from the affective vs utilitarian distinction (Boomgaarden *et al.*, 2011, 244). The issue in question is to measure accurately the aforementioned clusters of attitude orientations: a) specific, utilitarian, and output-oriented attitudes, and b) diffuse, affective, and input-oriented attitudes.

II. *Objects of political support*. This dimension consists of three elements: the community, the regime, and the authorities.

Inside the first dimension (modes of support), there are five attitudinal dimensions (Boomgaarden *et al.*, 2011, 258). Emotional responses represent the first of these dimensions, referring to feelings of fear of and threat by the EU. Emotions are gaining increasing attention in public opinion research and political studies, and an emotional affective dimension of EU attitudes has to be taken into account. Research related to Euroscepticism and the EU news on the social unrest during the economic crisis appeal in particular to the affective dimension. The second dimension refers to a sense of European identity, which is becoming the focus in recent years. Eurobarometer surveys are paying more attention to the issue of identity and its corollary – the feeling that one's voice counts in the EU. This addresses the significant issue of having a sense of belonging to a greater European family, above national loyalties. The EU tackles this aspect by encouraging the idea of EU citizenship in order to

build an organic legitimacy. The third dimension relates to the performance and the democratic and financial functioning of the EU and its institutions. The fourth dimension relates to utilitarian attitudes such as general support and benefit evaluations as well as more post-materialist utilitarian considerations with regard to the EU. The fifth and final dimension refers to a strengthening of the EU in the future and reflects support based on agreement with extended decision-making competencies and policy transfer as well as with further integration. The last three dimensions (evaluations of the performance of the EU, utilitarian attitudes, and attitudes related to the future of the EU) have all experienced negative changes during the economic crisis. The least affected is perceptions related to the future: 56 percent of Europeans remain optimistic (Eurobarometer 82, Autumn 2014).

Other scholars tackled the idea of multidimensionality of EU attitudes by attempting to identify and map them on a more complex basis than the basic dichotomy between Europhiles and Eurosceptics. For instance, R. Haesly (2001) identifies five basic types: Instrumental Europeans, Europhiles, Eurosceptics, Anti-U not Anti-Europe, and Theoretical Europeans. Although there is a complex range of attitudes towards the EU, they can be clustered around core beliefs. For instance, negative attitudes stem from concerns that the EU affects state sovereignty. All positive types of European attachment, despite considerable variation in strength and underlying attitude structure, share an explicit rejection of the idea that there is no meaningful European culture upon which a supranational identity might be based. Europhiles enthusiastically endorse all aspects of European integration while instrumental Europeans support only specific aspects of European integration.

There is a concept that contradicts such views of public opinion as a continuum from low to high support – *ambivalence*. This theory argues that individual opinions are often simultaneously positive and negative. Rather than endorsing one side and refuting the other, many citizens embrace elements of both (Stoeckel, 2012; Dixon and Fullerton, 2014). The main possibilities in terms of public opinion to the EU are indifference, ambivalence, and univalent views. Ambivalence is contrasted with indifferent attitudes (the absence of unfavorable or favorable thoughts toward the EU), positive attitudes (the presence of favorable thoughts and the absence of negative thoughts), and negative attitudes (the absence of favorable thoughts and the presence of unfavorable thoughts) (Dixon and Fullerton, 2014).

The relevance of ambivalent opinions cannot be ignored. Attitudes marked by ambivalence are held with less certainty, are retrieved from memory with more difficulty, and, overall, tend to be less stable over time.

As far as political persuasion is concerned, attitudes characterized by ambivalence are more vulnerable than univalent views, and are highly influenced by cues and context. Whatever considerations are momentarily salient can and will influence ambivalent opinions (Stoeckel, 2012).

There are two conceptualizations of ambivalence in the literature: first, as a conflict of core beliefs, and, second, as a coexistence of positive and negative evaluations of a single object (Stoeckel, 2012, 25). In the field of EU attitudes, ambivalence is the presence of positive and negative considerations of the EU whereas indifference is characterized by the absence of both kinds of considerations. There are two main factors that create ambivalence: cognitive cues and affective cues. Cognitive cues on the EU involve EU-specific knowledge, political cues from the news media, and cues on the EU sent by parties. On the other hand, feelings of attachment to Europe and trust in EU institutions are treated as affective cues, which influence citizens' views of the EU in a distinct but similar fashion to cognitive cues (Stoeckel, 2012, 26). The influence of these cues on ambivalence and indifference is rather subtle. Findings show that cognitive cues decrease indifference but increase ambivalence. The availability of cognitive cues makes a univalent view of the EU less likely. Affective cues decrease levels of both indifference and ambivalence. A strong positive affect towards the EU makes individuals more likely to be univalently positive about the EU (Stoeckel, 2012, 34).

To some extent, the concept of ambivalence challenges what we already know about public opinion of the EU. As we will develop in the following section, most studies on public opinion focus on opinion formation, using the implicit assumption that an opinion, once formed, will fall under one of the identified categories (e.g., Europhile, Eurosceptic, etc.). Ambivalence teaches us that EU attitudes could be more volatile than we thought and, furthermore, that it is possible to agree *and* disagree with the EU at the same time. Ambivalent individuals are more susceptible to external influences, and can influence the average results in polls or when voting. Furthermore, increasing debate on EU topics increases ambivalence by pushing contradicting cognitive cues (such as "pro" and "anti" arguments). Ambivalent Europeans are highly informed and knowledgeable about the EU whereas indifference results from low levels of knowledge and little understanding of EU politics. Additionally, the strong politicization of European integration and debate among parties increase the probability of individuals being ambivalent.

By contrast to cognitive cues, affective cues decrease levels of both indifference and ambivalence. A strong positive affect towards the EU makes individuals more likely to be univalently positive about the EU.

Given these conditions, we believe that symbolical identification with the EU (adhesion to its core values and higher meanings) could help build up support.

1.3. Public Opinion Crystallization: A Review of the Most Relevant Determinants of EU Attitudes

The ongoing discussion in the academia on the determinants of public opinion can be summarized as the constant competition between the instrumental and symbolic approaches. The former favors utilitarian factors as the basis of EU attitude formation whereas the latter finds stronger exploratory value in emotions. Regarding these modes of support, the utilitarian perspective is specific (it relates to clearly measurable and definable aspects/perceived benefits of EU membership, evaluations of the functioning of the union, and matters of strengthening European integration). By contrast, affective attitudes are more diffuse as they include less objective variables such as emotional responses, identity-related factors, and perceived threats to the nation (Boomgaarden *et al.*, 2011). Instrumental (utilitarian) forms of support are cognitive in their character (Kumlin, 2009); in addition, they are dependent on short-term results, and on the benefits and burdens induced by the political system. Affective support is more stable and stronger because it is created “by slow socialization processes rather than by swift interest-based and output-based revision” (Kumlin, 2009, 410).

Domestic politics must be taken into consideration as an influencing factor. It can be very difficult for citizens to make the appropriate connection between their personal interests and integration processes. As the average citizen is uninterested and uninformed about European integration, he or she relies on domestic cues in order to estimate its costs and benefits.

We would also like to include theories related to political factors as a mid-way between the instrumental and symbolic approaches due to the fact that evaluations of domestic socio-political contexts or the use of cues from party and elite positions usually embody both instrumental and symbolic logic. These two ways of theorizing have often been coined as mutually exclusive conceptualizations “[b]ut a new line of research, drawing on cognitive and social psychology, challenges this either/or thinking by examining how political cues – grounded in ideology or in elite communication – mediate the effect of economic calculation and community membership” (Hooghe and Marks, 2005, 420).

It is argued that the instrumental and symbolical types of support are in a reverse relationship – as one increases, it suppresses the other. Individuals

with strong affective support are not much influenced by the short-term benefits and outputs of the system. In this respect, the EU shows a great vulnerability:

Exactly because few Europeans hold strong emotional attachments to the European political level, support for integration becomes highly dependent on short-term outputs and benefits. Moreover, these are assumed to be economic in nature, as European integration has to a large degree been focused on economic integration. (Kumlin, 2009, 410)

The competition itself between instrumental and symbolic sides does not necessarily imply the total exclusion of one category; what are debatable is which factors are stronger at a given time and in a given context, and which ones could provide a universal model of public support. However, no definite winner can be declared. These competing perspectives also mean competing representations of the EU (Hooghe and Marks, 2005). Instrumental theories view the EU as a regime that facilitates economic exchange. The free market across national borders has implications for wealth distribution. Having less or more benefit from this varies accordingly; for individuals, we can talk about differences in asset mobility, and for countries, imbalances arising from varieties of capitalism. The symbolic perspective focuses more on identity. As the EU represents a polity overarching established territorial communities, the people from those territories (the nation-states) are constrained in their opinions by their identities and the way they relate to the EU as a threat, or not, to national identity. Theories grounded in domestic politics focus on cues – the European Union is seen as an extension of domestic politics, and public attitudes are therefore guided by domestic ideology and domestic political organizations (Hooghe and Marks, 2005, 420).

1.4. Costs, Benefits, and Inequality: Core Concepts of the Instrumental Approach¹

One of the most comprehensive instrumental theories is the utilitarian one related to the economic benefits of European integration. Most

¹ An earlier version of this section has been first published in Durach, Flavia and Nicoleta Corbu. 2015. "Fragmented Euroscepticism: Distinctive Features of the Public Opinion towards the EU in the Light of the Economic Crisis". In Negrea-Busuioc, Elena and Mirela Pirvan (eds.). 2015. *Conference Volume Communication and Euroentrepreneurship in the European Context*. Comunicare.ro University Press: 55-72.

research on the topic builds on the calculation of economic costs and benefits (Hooghe and Marks, 2005). The presumption is that citizens evaluate the economic consequences of European integration for themselves and for the groups of which they are part, and that such consequences motivate their attitudes. “Utilitarian thesis [...] maintains that the performance of the EU and/or of the nation states, in combination with a rational cost-benefit analysis of the EU membership implications, dictates support towards the EU and European integration” (Sigalas, 2010, 1344).

The economy argument (Scheuer and Schmitt, 2009, 578) has a strong prominence in the literature. Its core statement is that citizens are as content with a specific governance as the quantity of their direct economic benefits. This is why people tend to praise Europe in times of economic growth and prosperity – they attribute those developments to European integration. During hard economic times, the reverse happens: as long as the EU fails to deliver the advantages that are expected of it, trust in the institution decreases. However, the impact of economic factors on EU support may decrease as citizens become increasingly aware of the implications of the European and Monetary Union on national social policy and the increasing intrusion of the EU into formerly domestic policy areas (Scheuer and Schmitt, 2009). In the aftermath of the economic and financial crisis, this statement may already be obsolete. We expect an increase in the importance of economic evaluations on EU public opinion. The EU’s poor performance in recent years led to a significant drop in trust, with the most dramatic developments taking place in the south of Europe (the region hit hardest by the crisis). Negative public opinion was also aggravated by the fact that national governments justified unpopular austerity measures by using the EU as a scapegoat.

The concept of inequality is the starting point of all economic theories. European integration fostered inherently new forms of competition and, hence, new inequalities. In general, trade liberalization and increased mobility are advantages for those with higher levels of human capital, and hurt those with less. Early work on the individual-level economic determinants of EU support focused on human capital and found that highly skilled/educated people (who had the capacity and the position to benefit from the market opportunities that flowed from the EU integration process) were overall supportive of the EU, whereas people with lower levels of education and fewer skills (vulnerable when facing increased competition) were more sceptical about EU integration (Garry, 2014). The argument goes that the liberalization of trade allows companies to shift production across borders, thus increasing job insecurity, especially for less specialized workers, who are more interchangeable and whose

training implies less cost (Hooghe and Marks, 2005). A reduction in trade barriers favors citizens with a relatively high income, education, and occupational skills for several reasons (Hooghe and Marks, 2004, 415). Firstly, international economic openness is rewarding for those with high levels of human capital; secondly, it increases the international substitutability of labor as firms are more able to shift production across borders, intensifying, in return, job insecurity, and puts pressure on welfare systems; and thirdly, it shifts the burden of taxation from mobile factors of production (e.g., financial capital) to immobile factors (e.g., labor).

Most scholars explain their preference for European integration in terms of its economic consequences. As we have shown above, there are very specific correlations between individual characteristics (education, occupation, sectorial vulnerability) and support for European integration. Additionally, the sources of these preferences have widened to include economic perceptions (as well as objective conditions), group (as well as individual) utility, and national economic institutions that mediate individual interests (*Ibid*).

Theories of public opinion based on the notion of individual egocentric calculation of costs can be extended from evaluations of the personal situation to the evaluation of one's group (e.g., country). Citizens may be sensitive to their collective economic circumstances as well as to those that affect them individually. Residents in countries that are net recipients of European Union spending will be inclined to support European integration while those in donor countries will tend to oppose it, and the same logic can be seen in regional or federal states where poorer regions champion centralization to increase the scope for redistribution while prosperous regions favor decentralization (Hooghe and Marks, 2004).

For the sake of accuracy, we must emphasize that the economic approach is not infallible; it only works under certain conditions: "The economic approach to public opinion is likely to be most valid when economic consequences are perceived with some accuracy, when they are large enough to matter, and when the choice a person makes actually affects the outcome" (Hooghe and Marks, 2005, 422). When these conditions are not met, other factors may influence attitudes (such as identity and other symbolic cues). European integration is perceived by most citizens to shape their economic welfare in a general sense. Citizens who feel confident about the economic future – personally and for their country – are likely to regard European integration in a positive light, while those who are fearful will lean towards Euroscepticism (Hooghe and Marks, 2004, 416).

There are reasons to believe that the utilitarian model of support is not universal. When the model was tested in post-communist countries, it was posited that people can be characterized as either “winning” or “losing” from the transition from the communist command economy to the post-communist free-market economy. Those who gained from free-market reforms are assumed to favor EU integration because the EU is seen as a vehicle for guaranteeing and furthering the free-market process. Those who did not benefit from the same reforms are likely to oppose integration and the furtherance of the free market that it would be perceived to deliver. However, evidence suggests that the communist past shapes the views on European integration to a greater extent than a simple calculation of economic benefits (e.g., Christin, 2005; Cichowski, 2000; Garry and Tilley, 2014). As we will elaborate in a following chapter, contextual effects must be integrated into the winners and losers model. Retrospective economic evaluations were, in fact, a greater predictor of EU attitudes in the East than in the West.

1.5. A System of Group Loyalties, Values, and Norms: Affective Support for the EU

The core assumption of the symbolic/affective modes of support is that citizen preferences are driven by group attachments, by the loyalties, values, and norms that define one’s identity (Hooghe and Marks, 2004, 2005; Sigalas, 2010; Hartevelde *et al.*, 2013.) Humans developed an emotional capacity for intense group loyalties early on, as cohesion ensured greater odds for survival. What was primarily a biological mechanism of protection is now shaping views towards political objects such as the EU. Emotional attachments are inherent in trust relationships. As an expression of diffuse support, political trust is related to diffuse entities such as identity and community (Hartevelde *et al.*, 2013). The symbolic politics thesis argues that national identity is an important parameter in people’s attitudes towards the EU and European integration either because European integration is perceived as incompatible with national identity and culture or because different nationalities are related to different preferences (Sigalas, 2010, 1344).

The relationship between national identity and European integration is double-edged: regional integration affects national identity and national identity impacts support for European integration. On the one hand, national identity and European identity may reinforce each other, and it is not unusual for citizens to have multiple identities – to feel, for example, Romanian and European at the same time. But it is also true that

opposition to European integration can trigger the need to defend the nation against control from Brussels. Citizens who conceive of their national identity as exclusive of other territorial identities are predisposed to be considerably more Eurosceptical than those who conceive their national identity in inclusive terms (Hooghe and Marks, 2005).

There are reasons to believe that citizens do indeed take into account the economic consequences of European integration but conceptions of group membership appear to be more powerful in the equation (Hooghe and Marks, 2004). The mechanisms by which social identities, including, and above all, national identities, constrain support for European integration are rooted in the psychology of group membership. “The premise of social identity theory is that ‘who one is’ depends on which groups one identifies with. Humans evolved a capacity for intense group loyalty long before the development of rational faculties” (Hooghe and Marks, 2005). The bottom line is that group loyalties can be extremely powerful in shaping views towards political objects, with national identity as the strongest kind of loyalty.

National identity constrains preferences concerning European integration. As previously mentioned, national identity can both reinforce and undermine support for European integration. For example, the historical basis of national identity may embody subsequent positions on European integration. Some findings show that English Euroscepticism is rooted in Britain’s special history of empire, that West German pro-Europeanism reflects Second World War guilt, and that the Spanish tend to support European integration as a proxy for modernization and democratization (Diez Medrano, 2003, as cited by Hooghe and Marks, 2005, 424). Results emphasize the importance of the national contexts.

We have shown that the nation-state is the main recipient of group loyalty, in the form of a strong national identity. It would be a very difficult endeavor for the EU to foster a European identity as strong as the national one because this artificial supranational political object is more distant from citizens’ sense of community. The European project has evolved from a mainly elite-driven venture to a people’s project without managing to ensure unconditional loyalties. The EU’s typology as a multilevel and supranational governance may be perceived as a threat to the community. The more the citizens identify with Europe, the more they trust the EU; the more the citizens identify with their nationality, the less they trust the EU (Harteveld *et al.*, 2013).

As public opinion polls prove, it is possible to have a strong national identity and also a European one (Standard Eurobarometer 82, 2014). People are able to have multiple identities. However, when opposition to

European integration does exist, it is often based on the perception of the EU as a threat to the sovereignty of the state. Citizens who conceive of their national identity as exclusive of other territorial identities are likely to be considerably more Eurosceptical than those who conceive of their national identity in inclusive terms (Hooghe and Marks, 2004). Identity-based Euroscepticism is also a question of group conflicts – opposition is related to the loss of internal resources to outsiders. For instance, immigration is linked to the liberty of free movement guaranteed inside the common market so anti-immigration feelings may fuel anti-EU attitudes. But, against expectations, anti-immigration attitudes also strongly influence utilitarian support. Apparently, people who dislike migrant outgroups do not believe in the potential benefits of international cooperation in more general terms (Boomgaarden *et al.*, 2011, 256).

The perception of an inclusive or exclusive national identity mediates support for the EU, but what are the contexts in which one or the other type of identity is created? National identities are formed through early socialization processes whereas the interference of the national identity with other affiliations (such as EU membership) is continuously constructed through socialization and political conflict (Hooghe and Marks, 2004). As the EU is distant and abstract, public opinion relies on cues from the political elite (Hooghe and Marks, 2004; Harteveld *et al.*, 2013; Garry, 2014). The sharper the divisions among national elites on the issue of European integration, the greater the scope for national identity to be mobilized, and the more impact exclusive national identity has. Such divisions are fueled by the existence of radical right political parties who reject any factors that diminish national identities or the role of the nation-state. Sentiments of fear towards the EU reinforce Euroscepticism. The inverse relationship is also possible: in countries where the elite is united behind the European project, national identity has a less prominent role or is positively associated with support for integration.

The more divided a country's elite, and the more elements within it mobilize against European integration, the stronger the causal power of exclusive national identity. Political parties are decisive in cueing the public, and the wider their disagreement, the more exclusive identity is mobilized against European integration. (Hooghe and Marks, 2004, 417)

In conclusion, the political implications of national identity depend on the way this identity is constructed, the particular domestic context, and the presence/absence of elite and political party consensus on European integration. This leads us to the third category of public opinion determinants – domestic politics predictors, which include the evaluation

of national democracy and the political state of affairs, elite cues, and party positions. It would be difficult to integrate these factors in only one category of utilitarian or affective models of support; it is not rare that individual evaluations and party positions embody elements from both logics. What unites domestic determinants is not their affiliation to instrumental or symbolic frameworks but the argument that the national political and social context has the power to mediate and influence citizens' opinions of the EU. The main challenge associated with this is that the EU has little means to influence attitudes based on something other than the characteristics of the EU itself as a political object. Surprisingly or not, trust in the EU may depend on more general dispositions rooted not in Brussels but in the national context.

1.6. What Political Predictors Teach Us: Trust in the EU is Built Back Home²

There are only a few genuine European factors that influence public opinion towards the EU, such as the common currency, the enlargement of the Union towards central and eastern Europe, or the prospect of Turkish EU membership (Scheuer and Schmitt, 2009). It might be uncomfortable to admit but there is evidence that trust in the EU does not depend solely on what happens within the European realm. The legitimacy of the EU depends on the legitimacy of the individual member states. Legitimacy is expressed through political trust, and ensuring the trust of the citizens is very beneficial “as it helps to solve collective action problems and to reduce the transaction costs of public policy” (Harteveld *et al.*, 2013, 543). Trust is a fundamental form of diffuse support, relating to the basic traits of the political system and institutions. Trust in the EU is directed to the existing system of political institutions, thus differentiating itself from more specific EU attitudes such as support for different policies, satisfaction with the performance of EU officials, or adhesion to a set of values and principles (e.g., free movement, support for democracy and liberalism, etc.). The subject's evaluation of the trust relationship is not necessarily based upon direct experiences but on (first-hand or second-

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hand) evaluations of (actual or perceived) performances and procedures of the national political system and the EU.

There are three logics of trust (Harteveldt *et al.*, 2013, 544). The logic of rationality hypothesizes trust to be a rational evaluation of the object – the EU – by its merits: performance and accountability. The logic of identity assumes trust in the EU to depend on emotional attachment towards the EU or the member state. The logic of extrapolation considers trust in the EU to be unrelated to the Union itself. Instead, trust in the EU goes hand in hand with trust in other institutions, either inherently as part of one's personality or social standing or indirectly because trust in the EU is derived through trust in national political institutions. There is evidence to support the validity of the third logic, and we will discuss it as follows.

National and European politics are “bound together in a multi-level and multi-tiered system of government” (Scheuer and Schmitt, 2009, 579). Attitudes towards these two levels of government are related and affect each other. The quality of national institutions – and hence the level of national democracy satisfaction – sets the criteria for evaluating EU democracy. The authors' argument is that as long as the average citizen is poorly informed and has a low level of political interest, he or she does not clearly distinguish the achievements and shortcomings of the different layers of EU governance, and the performance of the ‘main political arena’ sets the tone for the evaluation of other levels as well.

In other words, trust does not necessarily depend on the characteristics of the object itself. Rather, it might actually depend on citizens' general dispositions (Harteveldt *et al.*, 2013, 546). These *general dispositions* depend on two sets of factors: a) the domestic context (trust/distrust in the institutions; satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the state of the economy or political developments), and b) cues that guide citizens' opinions on something as aloof and abstract as the EU; the most significant cues are given by the political elite, and the party one favors or supports.

Basically, it is a question of political trust. Different forms of political trust are closely associated regardless of their object. There is a strong relationship between satisfaction with national democracy and confidence in the EU. This correlation has more the one explanation (Harteveldt *et al.* 2013, 547). Political trust might depend on a personal tendency towards having a generally positive or negative outlook; this individual tendency is formed during childhood and becomes the basis for later assessments of trustworthiness. In other words, some people are prone to be more sceptical than others and are thus more negative towards national democracy and the EU. Furthermore, political trust can be the result of extrapolation. As one's direct experiences are inherently limited, there is a

tendency to generalize the conclusions drawn from direct experience with the local or national political arena to the EU level. Last but not least, the correlation between trust in national institutions and trust in the EU are closely correlated because the EU is a system of multilevel government with supranational and international cooperation between member states. Some studies (Harteveld *et al.* 2013) have found evidence in Eurobarometer data that the logic of extrapolation is by far the most influential. To an important degree, citizens' trust in the EU can be predicted by their trust in national institutions regardless of their rational evaluation or emotional affiliation. The authors found no conditionality of citizens' national identity or their knowledge about the EU on the strength of this correlation between trust in national institutions and trust in the EU. Yet, a strong European identity has a conditional effect: it partly overrules rational arguments as a more generalized orientation.

Public opinion is constrained by political ideology, political parties, and political elites in the domestic arenas (Hooghe, Marks, 2005). "All explanations of public opinion on European integration see domestic politics as mediating attitudes. The Danish, Irish and French referendums on the Maastricht Treaty have been interpreted as judgements on national government performance" (Milner, 2000, 6). Generally, the higher the citizens' general trust in national institutions, the higher their trust in the EU – "Liking the government spills over to thinking that the government ensures the best outcomes for its own country and citizens in the EU" (Boomgaarden *et al.*, 2011, 256).

Although the issue will be discussed in a separate chapter, we should emphasize at this point that the positive correlation between trust in national institutions and trust in the EU is proved valid mainly in western, older member states, whereas in post-communist countries from eastern Europe, the opposite is more frequent (EU is seen as a cure for the structural flaws of local institutions and the domestic political system). As far as ideology is concerned, in western Europe at least, European integration has become a left-leaning project because it holds out the prospect of continental-wide regulation. There are many shades of gray in the area of ideologies: in social democratic systems, it is expected that the Left opposes European integration and the Right supports it, as citizens in social democratic societies are likely to perceive European integration as a source of regulatory competition and hence a constraint on market regulation (Hooghe and Marks, 2005, 425).

As we mentioned at the beginning of the article, public opinion towards the EU is usually expressed by voting. This is why the literature on public opinion focuses on voting behavior as well. In this respect there