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**THE IMPACT OF CRISES ON EUROSCEPTICISM IN
THE EUROPEAN UNION
A ROMANIAN CASE STUDY**

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Introduction

The development of the subprime mortgage crisis into a full-scale economic crisis in 2008, allowed for the emergence of an unprecedented reality in the European Union: widespread Euroscepticism. While the concept of Euroscepticism has been at the centre of European political disputes, as well as scholarly debates, for a lengthy period of time, a working definition of the phenomenon has yet to be agreed upon. With numerous crises cascading on the political stage of an ever-expanding European project, divisions between peoples and EU member states have developed rapidly. The economic crisis, United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union, the refugee crisis, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, and the COVID-19 pandemic more recently, are just some of the complex and difficult issues that European institutions have faced together with EU member states – the aftermath of which still impacts Europe on many levels. Each of the above-mentioned crises, as well as other fissures in the fabric of European cooperation, have added multiple dimensions to the Eurosceptic phenomenon. While some citizens believe their collective interests are not met due to extranational decision making that lacks democratic control, others feel that the costs of being part of the European integration process outweigh the benefits, or that national identity and cultural values are being lost when accepting the European value system.

Internal divisions in the European Union have not always been as profound as they are today. A unique and unexpected enterprise was forged as an outcome of the Treaty of Rome (1957), namely the European Economic Community (EEC). The Community was a regional organization set about to bring the economic integration of the Inner Six, which included, among others, a customs union and a single (common) market. Following the accession of Denmark, Ireland and the UK to the Community in 1973, citizens from the Inner Six questioned the beneficial effects of the Union's enlargement. However, during the mid-1980s, opposition to the European integration process was still very weak. The notion of 'Euroscepticism' only first appeared in British press in the mid-1980's (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2008, p. 240), while the movement's manifesto was set by Margaret Thatcher in her 'Bruges Speech' (1988).

The following waves of accession to the European Community caused further unrest, with citizens starting to dispute the usefulness of the project in terms of its socio-economic benefits and its future. Consequently, the tendency of national governments to consult the population through referenda increased in order for parties to dissociate themselves from decision-making responsibility.

The European Union's attempt to engage in open communication with citizens across member states seemed to be making great progress until the outburst of economic crises, which made citizens focus on the prevalent and salient economic downsides that were present in public discourses nationally (Bargaoanu, 2011, p. 8). This caused the further systematic division of the European Community.

Europe has faced a range of complex issues to date. In the 1990's, the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) had been established for the economic integration of member states, while fiscal policies had been enforced through the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP). The Monetary Union's objective regarded the enhancement of free competition on a supranational level, which imposed regulations that continue to be binding for member states (Habermas 2013, p. 2). Some of the 'big players' in the European Union, such as France and Germany, have knowingly trespassed the SGP regulations, attracting criticism with regards to solidarity across Europe, which the Union had been emphasizing (Bargaoanu et al., 2015). Spain and Portugal have violated SGP regulations as well. The isolation of peripheral members with smaller economies, over time, has caused smaller players to feel that they have not had a seat at the table, effectively projecting the Orwellian construction of 'all animals are equal, but some are more equal than others' (Orwell, 1993). The plan for the market to regulate itself, creating a uniform level of prosperity across Europe – both at its centre and its periphery - with similar labour costs and economic, industrial and agricultural growth, has failed. Joint decisions and interventions in the market are clearly necessary in order to redress financial, economic and social policies (Habermas, 2013).

Despite having arisen as a British concept, Euroscepticism has spread across Europe. It is no longer an isolated event. Euroscepticism has taken many forms and developed differently depending on geographical location. Traditionally, very few British had envisaged themselves as having a European identity (Curtice, 2012). Historically, the largest opposition to European integration emerged in the UK (Curtice, 2012). In Denmark, however, there has also been a widespread perception among citizens that Brussels is a threat to national sovereignty (Durach, 2015). Southern Europe has had some of the most enthusiastic attitudes towards the European Union since it stood to benefit greatly from the project (Lubbers and Scheepers, 2010). Another reason for high levels of EU support in Southern countries regards their histories of authoritarianism (Diez Medrano, 2003). As Diez Medrano (2003) explains: "it is because of these histories that Southern European publics have established strong associations between democratic stability, economic modernization, and EU integration." Studies have also shown

that post-communist states from Eastern Europe show above-average support for the EU (Guerra, 2013). The limitations exerted upon citizens by communist regimes created a fundamentally supportive attitude of the West. Furthermore, relatively high poverty levels have largely contributed to the apparition of Euro-enthusiasts due to ‘expected collective benefits’ (Durach, 2015, p. 17). France and Germany have been long standing Euro-optimists. However, as of lately, even the strongest economies in Europe – which stood to benefit greatly from the European project – have started to foster Eurosceptic ideologies. Recent developments related to refugees and immigrants have fuelled populist movements – the Front National in France, as well as the Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident (PEGIDA) and the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Germany.

The 2008 economic setback has been a clear indication of the European Union’s weak economic stability, which proved inefficient. Ironically, it was precisely the stability of economic cooperation that served as the foundation for the European project. This event has further fuelled anti-EU sentiments, which was also enhanced by political and mass media rhetoric. Post-2008, more and more citizens have started to perceive the supranational organization as a system where political actors, representing the interests of other states, determine their future through EU-level economic policies - effectively replacing an essential role of their national government, which represents the citizens’ direct interests (Habermas, 2013). With the political landmass shifting drastically in each country, the EU’s motto: “United in Diversity” seems to hold fast. Perhaps, for the state of accuracy, a distinction must be made, however. The new motto of the European Union should read ‘United in Eurosceptical Diversity’. As Habermas (2013, p. 1) states: “what unites European citizens today is the Eurosceptic mind-set that has become more pronounced in all of the member countries during the crisis, albeit in each country for different and rather polarizing reasons.”

In this context, this research aims to discuss the nature of the Eurosceptic phenomenon in Europe as a whole, and more particularly in Romania, in terms of its theoretical models, as well as its applications in the contemporary European political reality, both in terms of its causes and in respect to its aftermath.

Chapter 1. Euroscepticism Unfolded

The Eurosceptic phenomenon is multifaceted and context specific. Taggart attempted to define it through the *hard-soft* dichotomy, while Kopecky and Mudde developed a *diffuse* versus *specific* dual axis system of EU support, which also presented different types of oppositions to the European Union – in terms of its *policy* or *polity*. In order to create an efficient framework in discussing Euroscepticism, four distinct theoretical models of the Eurosceptic phenomenon are discussed.

Theoretical Models of the Eurosceptic Phenomenon

The most pervasive model regards the utilitarian aspects of Euroscepticism. According to the utilitarian model, citizens' attitudes towards the European Union are based on internal cost-vs-benefit analyses, which are also highly subjective. The utilitarian model gives sound explanation to why there is such a high variation in individuals' support for the EU since there is a strong positive correlation between the citizens' favourable attitude towards European integration and the expected benefits from the process – both personal and collective (Negrea, 2011, p. 173). However, the utilitarian model is not infallible. While economic matters are correlated to citizens' attitudes towards the EU, there are other factors – such as accuracy, symbolism and belief systems that the model has not been designed to take into account. As a bystander, and with an adequate level of research, it is perhaps possible to objectively analyse the economic costs and benefits of European cooperation. However, as a citizen affected by economic measures – be they personal or collective oriented, maintaining an objective framework is difficult.

The identity model regards Euroscepticism as an attitude that is caused by citizens perceiving deeper integration at the EU level negatively impacting their national identity. The identity model indicates that opposition to the European project is not only about economic gains and losses, but rather also about the fear of losing 'national community' (McLaren, 2007). Citizens fear that the European integration process affects the 'terminal community' – the group they identify with (Carey, 2002).

The cultural dimension associates further enlargement and deeper integration at the EU level to a phenomenon of Europeanization – part of a larger globalization effect – which is perceived to bring about cultural degradation and the loss of traditional norms and values. Leconte (2010, p. 61) explains that there are two central discourses that encompass this form of Euroscepticism. Firstly, there is a belief that 'Europe' should not trespass the boundaries of

a customs union due of the absence of “shared ethnic identity” between the peoples of Europe who do not share common history or political culture. Carbonell’s (1999, p. 1) “historiographic Euroscepticism” theory has been one of the main proponents of this rhetoric. According to this view, the concept of political and geographic unification has never had solid foundations in Europe. Rifts and dividing lines have always existed, be they based on values and perceptions between Romanic and non-romanic peoples (Leconte 2010, p. 62), or religiously between Catholics and Protestants (Mignot, 2008). Secondly, the promotion of “homogeneous values, norms and preferences” – as an act of Europeanization and globalization – is rejected by Eurosceptics on the basis that they could prove “corrosive” to national traditions and values (Leconte, 2010, p. 61).

The political model brings about two central issues which foster Euroscepticism. On the one hand the model discusses how supranational organizations bring challenges to national sovereignty, while on the other, the Union’s democratic deficit is brought into question as many decisions taken at the EU level still lack a general perception of transparency. Durach and Corbu (2015, p. 58) explain that political Euroscepticism depends upon “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 favours or supports.” As such, the political model has been thoroughly used by political actors as a vehicle to further ideological discourses (Hooghe et al., 2002; de Vreese, 2005; Kriesi et al., 2008; Bargaoanu and Durach, 2013). Elites and political parties have been able to construct frameworks that are internalized by the public and trigger support or opposition the European project. A study by de Wilde et al. (2014, p. 22) concludes that “Euroscepticism is a form of opposition that relies on media infrastructures for salience and amplification”, showing that mass media is also central to the phenomenon, in terms of shaping attitudes towards the European Union.

Chapter 2. Crises in the European Union: From a Unipolar to a Multipolar World

Since the 2008 financial crisis, the European Union has faced an increasing number of crises, which have resulted in considerable divisions between EU member states. Events following the 2008 financial crisis fueled criticism of the European Union, European integration and European enlargement. Starting with 2008, Euroland started being represented

as a division between the “virtuous North” and the “sinners” from the South (Ulatowski, 2016, p. 139). Countries from the periphery, which had been speculated financially by banks from Germany, Austria, France and Benelux were attributed the acronym PIIGS (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Spain), which exemplifies the disdain they faced (Rosenthal, 2012, p. 53). Germany outright refused calls for a “Marshall Plan for Europe” (Crafts, 2012). Demands for solidarity emerged, calling for a Maastricht Treaty 2.0 and Germany only agreed on offering assistance after harsh austerity reforms were implemented (Krieger, 2016, p. 28). Burden sharing between creditor and debtor countries was one of the foundations of the Eurozone, that of solidarity - but it mattered very little when risks were so great and countries followed an isolationist approach.

Another important crisis that followed the economic setback of 2008 regards Russian interferences in European affairs. These have been observed in three key areas: the modality in which Russia has managed to anchor itself to Europe using the energy market; the Russian-Ukrainian conflict – which has shown the European Union’s weak ability to resolve international disputes; and the manner in which Russia is competing with the EU for the political support of Eastern Europe and the Balkans, which has forced the Union into reopening negotiations for further enlargement and integration.

One of the largest security risks that Europe has faced up to date is that of homegrown terrorism, fuelled by a large wave of refugees that entered Europe starting with 2015. Terrorist attacks in Europe, since 2014, have been primarily carried out by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or those inspired, but not directly affiliated, by their doctrine. With more than 1 million refugees having crossed into Europe by land or by sea in 2015, according to the Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection division of the European Commission (2016), fear of terrorism and negative perceptions towards refugees have increased.

The election of President Trump in 2020 was an important signal to Europe. Populism in the US could spill-over and contaminate Europe as well. One of the focus points in this area was Brexit, which is a recurring theme throughout this research since it is perhaps the most significant event that has been determined by populist political actors in the European Union. As a cause of numerous ruptures and conflicts between member states, the Commission’s *White Paper* has also been closely analysed, showing once again the democratic deficit of the European community.

Lastly, the last factor discussed is the on-going COVID-19 situation, which has both sanitary and economic setbacks, yet also the lessons learned by the EU in dealing with EU-wide crises, following the 2008 economic crisis. While discrepancies still existed in the core-periphery relationship of the European Union, it quickly became obvious that the economic impact of the COVID-19 epidemic required a financial solution, based on solidarity, accessible to all national governments, not only for those in the Eurozone. It is not surprising thus, that on 18 May 2020, in a joint press conference, the French-German duo called for a 500 billion euro recovery fund (Politico, 2020a). After the Union's shortcomings in terms of the 2008 economic crisis, the immigration crisis and Brexit, it was very important for the right signals to be sent towards citizens and political actors in the EU. Stopping the solidarity crisis, at a political and socio-economic level was critical in order to prevent further alienation. Indeed, these reactions were not immediate, since many member states preferred an initial isolationist approach to dealing with the crisis. It is perhaps the forward-thinking approaches of German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, and President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, that pushed forward for such a plan, understanding the risks involved in the EU demonstrating once again an ineffective *modus operandi* of dealing with a crisis.

Chapter 3. The Role of Inter-war Elites in Determining Romania's Pro-European Approach

Elites in inter-war Romania were split into three dominating movements: Europeanists, Traditionalists and the Taranists. Europeanists argued that the sole manner in which Romania could mitigate the economic disparity with that of the West was to adopt European ideals, turning to industrialization and mass urbanization. Traditionalists argued that Romania had fundamentally different values from the West. They believed that the Romanian identity would be altered and lost by embracing Western norms, which would negatively impact autochthonous traditions, religion and culture. The Taranist movement believed in empowering the peasantry. Their manifesto involved a skeptical view of industrialization and urbanization, and thus of globalization in the form of Europeanization. Presenting the three different political doctrines during the inter-war period allows for a historical understanding of Eurosceptic attitudes in Romania. It also shows the type of debates concerning the European Union that could have emerged if the country would not have passed through decades of Communist regimes.

This shows how different the approach to European ‘integration’ was in a country that today has some of the highest levels of enthusiasm towards the European project. Thus, possible explanations can be drawn in terms of how history and political context impact citizens attitudes towards European cooperation. While the theoretical models discussed in chapter one can be universally applied to the historical development of all member states, this chapter offers a deeper understanding of how the Eurosceptic debate has developed in a country over the course of a century.

Chapter 4. Euroscepticism in Romania: A post-revolution perspective

The European debate takes a fundamentally different form in post-communist Romania than it had during the inter-war period. Romania today is still among the most Euro-optimistic member states in the European Union. This is in part due to the effects, economic and psychological, that the communist regimes have had on Romanian citizens. This chapter regards Romanian specificity based on the theoretical models of Euroscepticism. As such, a multi-dimensional analysis of the phenomenon has emerged, regarding utilitarian, salience, as well as cultural and identity perspectives. While Romania is a profoundly pro-European state, both in terms of *policy* and *polity*, the chapter provides insights as to the reasons for citizens having this attitude. Following the fall of the Iron Curtain, Romania needed both economic and territorial security. This was a well understood fact by political actors and elites, who elaborated strategies and discourses that supported the need for Europeanization. The need for joining and being integrated in the European project was and continues to be rooted deeply in Romanian society – for utilitarian and geopolitical motives specifically.

Chapter 5. The Opinions of Romanian Experts on Brexit: Causes and Consequences¹

Romanian elites perceive Brexit as a geopolitical event, in terms of its causes and consequences – both for Europe and for Romania. To a certain degree, a comparison has been made between elites today and elites during the inter-war era. Discussion today is driven much more by instrumental and political objectives, while during the inter-war period the European debate regarded philosophical and ideological matters predominantly, while only having certain political and economic components. Elites in Romania are still the most important

¹ Part of this chapter has been published previously in Nastase. M.D. (2020). The Opinions of Romanian Experts on Brexit: Causes and Consequences. *Journal of Community Positive Practices*, XX(2), 56-72. Available at: <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=879681>

vehicles of informing the population. Organizing twelve interviews with individuals that shape attitudes towards the European Union has offered incredible insight into the issue of Brexit, perhaps the most important Eurosceptic event in recent European history.

Methodology

The following research questions were used in this thematic analysis:

RQ₁: To what extent does the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the Union elicit a necessary change in the EU's socio-economic framework?

RQ₂: How does Brexit impact Romania socio-economically and politically?

RQ₃: Does the Brexit phenomenon elicit an increase in Eurosceptic attitudes in Romania?

Twelve Romanian experts and elites, both practitioners and theorists, from the economic, political, diplomatic, academic, sociological, and mass media spheres, have been chosen to participate in a series of interviews in order to convey opinions on the matter of Brexit that are well-balanced, diverse and representative. Rich's 18 point approach to conducting "elite interviews" (2018, p. 324-325) was utilized in order to construct the interactional framework with interviewees, while respecting the approaches of research interviews (Suchman and Jordan, 1990; Abell and Myers, 2008) and addressing convergent and discriminant validity (Beamer, 2002). Although based on conducting 'elite interviews', this research attempts not to overuse the term "elite" and has preferred to refer to respondents generally as experts. Many academics have had problems with agreeing on a general definition for elites (Harvey, 2011). As such, when referring to experts and elites further in this research, these are defined as individuals that have key positions in their social frameworks, with extensive knowledge in their fields of activity and who are able to exert influence (Parry, 1998; Smith, 2006). The decision to limit the sample size was taken upon reaching the saturation of information on the subject.

Findings

The interviews conducted with twelve representatives from the political elite, the economic sector, academic sphere and mass media offer a broad view concerning the causes and effects of Brexit as a phenomenon. A thematic analysis was used in order to categorize and efficiently structure the information collected in the interviews into six subchapters, offering a holistic perception from Romania regarding the causes of Brexit, its consequences for the EU and how Brexit will affect Romania and its citizens.

Brexit is, among other things, an anti-globalization phenomenon, validated by the resentment of individuals affected by deindustrialization. The central causes of Brexit are socio-economic and historical in nature, oddly being the same elements that construct the pro-European narrative in Romania. A conclusion can be drawn, thus, that the cost-versus-benefit analysis of the membership to the EU weighs heavily in terms of the collective attitudes that citizens have towards the EU and other member states. Larger economies in the EU managed to thrive on the continuous enlargement of the European community, through the guarantees of the European single market - the free movement of goods, services and capital in the European Union. However, it is the free movement of labour – the freedom most valued by Romanian citizens - that created the necessary rhetoric that UKIP used to spearhead their „leave” campaign – wanting a Europe „a la carte”, attempting to cherry pick both the desired labour force and the policies and freedoms that allowed the UK to capitalize massively in the newly constructed zero-sum structure of the European Union.

United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the European Union will certainly affect the Union’s current structure and operating framework. The deconstruction of the London-Paris-Berlin axis is sure to represent a stimulus for the newly forged Franco-German duo that will have a stronger role in shaping the future of the European Union. In order to prevent other exits, the EU27 must solve a series of issues such as a common fiscal policy, the deepening of the monetary policy, as well as managing to find solutions towards a common foreign policy. The new fissures and divisions that Brexit creates, enables global hegemony in dealing with a weaker European Union. Thus, the analysis shows that the current EU framework must be remodelled in a post-Brexit plan for EU integration, but that business-as-usual will continue in a Franco-German dominated Europe.

In terms of the negotiation of Brexit, Romania has managed to secure its most important objective, the rights and liberties of the over 400.000 Romanian citizens who are residing in the United Kingdom. Although further steps could have been taken in order to secure additional advantages, the Romanian authorities preferred to rely on the direction received from France, Germany, the EU27 and the European institutions. Romanian experts saw Brexit as a regional, isolated event, which will not affect the attitudes of Romanian citizens towards the European Union. With Romanian elites still acting as catalysts and disseminators of messages and information from the European Union, Romanians perceive Brussels and the EU as an abstract entity. This matter is also central to this research, as the interviewed experts and elites that activate in various fields of activity are those who internalise the information and discourses

that stem from Brussels and propagate their analyses towards the Romanian public sphere. As such, according to experts, Eurosceptic attitudes in Romania could only be caused by “fake news” circulated by experts and mass media, by Romanian authorities inefficiently implementing European policies, or by double standards present in the decision-making mechanism at the EU level. Romania, with weak economic ties to the UK does not suffer a large economic blowback from its withdrawal. Furthermore, with negotiations ensuring the rights and liberties of Romanian expats, the most significant socio-political issue in the matter of Brexit has been solved. With limited economic impact on Romanian citizens, elites consider that Eurosceptic attitudes have not risen as a result of long-drawn negotiations, the Brexit phenomenon, or its aftermath.

With an insecure common foreign policy, economic zero-sum games present at the core of the Union, and many other crises that create divisions between member states, the European Union finds itself at a crossroad and must find a future direction that involves the common interests of the whole EU27, so that smaller, less integrated member states can continue to obtain economic, internal or external, benefits in order for attitudes to remain Euro-enthusiastic and prevent additional exits from occurring.

Chapter 6. National and European Attitudes based on Eurobarometer surveys: A Romanian Case Study

Methodology

This chapter aims to investigate correlations between national perceptions and attitudes towards the European Union using secondary data that was collected from 2008 to 2019. The empirical analysis in this research is based on Standard Eurobarometers (EBs) that are available on the European Commission’s Public Opinion Analysis website. The data used in this analysis was extracted from the following standard Eurobarometers:

EB 69 (Spring 2008); EB 70 (Autumn 2008); EB71 (Spring 2009); EB 72 (Autumn 2009); EB 73 (Spring 2010); EB 74 (Autumn 2010); EB 75 (Spring 2011); EB 76 (Autumn 2011); EB 77 (Spring 2012); EB 78 (Autumn 2012); EB 79 (Spring 2013); EB 80 (Autumn 2013); EB 81 (Spring 2014); EB 82 (Autumn 2014); EB 83 (Spring 2015); EB 84 (Autumn 2015); EB 85 (Spring 2016); EB 86 (Autumn 2016); EB 87 (Spring 2017); EB 88 (Autumn 2017); EB 89 (Spring 2018); EB 90 (Autumn 2018); EB 91 (Spring 2019); EB 92 (Autumn 2019)

The Standard Eurobarometer was established in 1973 as a bi-annual survey, spring and autumn, which measures public opinion regarding EU policies, EU institutions, the enlargement process, as well as internal and economic policies in each member state of the European Union. Data is collected from persons that are aged 15 years or older using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI). Sample sizes vary from approximately 500 to 1500 respondents based on country population and each statistical sample is representative of the population.

Eurobarometers were chosen as secondary data for this quantitative analysis due to their robust sample sizes that allow for cross-national and longitudinal comparisons (Hobolt and de Vries 2016). Financial costs and language barriers are other significant advantages that led to the decision of utilizing secondary data analysis for this thesis. Furthermore, this research has an objective premise since it will utilize data that was collected for a different purpose (Smith, 2006).

Data used in this study concerns levels of trust in the European Union, national governments, national economies, along with perceptions about “having a voice” in the EU and the most important issues that member states face.

For the question regarding the most important issues a country is facing, two sets of data were analysed, Romania and the EU country averages. In order to concentrate this research on *hard* and *soft* predictors of Euroscepticism, five categories were considered for both sets of data. Primarily, the three categories that emerged the most were recorded for the 2008-2019 period: “unemployment”, “economic situation” and “rising prices / inflation / cost of living”. Secondly, “immigration” and “the environment, climate and energy issues” have been selected as topics that have caused much public debate both at the national and European level. Furthermore, *unemployment*, *economic situation* and *rising prices/inflation/cost of living* are elements that contribute to the utilitarian model of Euroscepticism, while *immigration* is central to the cultural and identity models. At the same time, *the environment, climate and energy issues*, as well as *health and social security* are matters which have developed political Euroscepticism. One such example are the UKIP Brexit referendum campaign slogans regarding the NHS.

This empirical analysis is guided by the following research questions:

RQ4. To what extent have European and national events post-2008 determined Eurosceptic attitudes in Romania?

RQ5. Are Romanian citizens' attitudes towards the European Union based on national, historical and political contexts, and do they follow trends that can be observed across other EU member states?

Finally, by analysing the following data from Eurobarometers:

RQ6. What are the possible predictors, hard and soft, of Eurosceptic or pro-EU attitudes in Romania?

Findings

The empirical analysis undertaken in this chapter investigated correlations between EU citizens' national perceptions and attitudes towards the European Union. The use of standard Eurobarometers enabled both the cross-temporal and the cross-country analysis above, even though survey-taking by the European Commission can sometimes have design flaws – especially for cross-temporal studies.

This chapter sought correlations between citizens' tendency to trust the European Union, citizens' perception of the national economy being 'good', their trust in the national government and their perception that their voice matters in the EU. Many questions remain whether these attitudes influence each other unilaterally or bilaterally. The first part of the analysis allows for observing similar patterns in data, by following major incidents at the European level. Following the data waves, it is possible to see positive or negative correlations by assessing cross-temporal trends illustrated in the graphs. Small speculations regarding future trends were also made with regards to the new Coronavirus pandemic. The second part of the analysis, carried out in SPSS, has allowed for analyzing a specific moment in time in order to find how much citizens' tendency to trust the EU correlates with other perceptions and tendencies that occur at a national level.

By utilizing a cross-country analysis, it was possible to observe whether certain trends were isolated nationally, or if European events generated changes in perceptions and attitudes across all member states. One such example was the refugee crisis. In the European Union on average, during this event, fear of immigration increased massively becoming one of the core issues for European citizens for more than two years. However, in Romania, immigration has been one of the least salient issues in society – even during the refugee crisis. This allows for two interesting conclusions. Firstly, certain European or global occurrences impact citizens' attitudes cross-nationally, such as the economic crisis or European elections, while others do

not. This allows for a second inference. Why do only some major events impact EU attitudes across all member states and which are the biggest factors that determine this occurrence? Results from this analysis point mostly to economic ones. If certain events did not affect a country economically, then attitudes towards the EU in that country will not have fluctuated significantly because of the respective event.

Looking at the data, it is possible to infer that, in the EU, during the autumn of 2019, (important to note that these findings are closely related to pre-pandemic realities) on average, citizens' tendency to trust the national government correlated most with citizens' tendency to trust the EU, followed by citizens' perception of personal voice counting in the EU and lastly by citizens' perception of the national economy functioning 'good'. When discussing Romanian citizens' cross-temporal attitudes from 2008 to 2019, however, things look slightly different. Romanian citizens have been concerned by economic matters much more than EU citizens on average. It is thus possible to infer that for Romania the correlation between citizens' perception of national economy doing well and citizens' trust in the European Union is much stronger than the correlation between citizens' perception of personal voice counting in the EU and trust in the European Union. However, it is difficult to assess whether economy or voice counting in the EU has more impact on Romanian citizens' tendency to trust the EU. At any rate, this analysis has thoroughly supported 'congruence theory' that argues for positive spill-overs from tendency to trust national authorities to tendency to trust EU institutions.

This research emphasizes that Euroscepticism in Europe is widespread, yet the effects of crises are different from one member state to another. Furthermore, certain crises impact the attitudes of citizens in some member states immensely, but at the same time only have a limited impact on citizens' attitudes in other countries. One such example is clearly the refugee crisis. However, based on the data provided by Eurobarometers, it is possible to infer that numerous crises have had a significant impact on citizens' attitudes towards the European Union. At the same time, the quantitative study shows the interconnectedness of the theoretical models presented in previous chapters with the political realities of the time – manifested in the form of numerous crises.

In terms of limitations, Eurobarometers have certain issues that should be mentioned as potential limitations for this data analysis. One of the primary issues regarding using Eurobarometer data concerns the fact that, over time, some questions have been excluded from the surveys, have been reworded, or the answers to the same question have been modified. An

attempt to deal with this issue was made by choosing to analyse data from questions that spanned throughout the whole period from EB69 to EB 92, with minor exceptions. There are very few data entries that are missing from the data. Pausch (2008) and Nissen (2014) bring forth certain issues of comparability of data due to how questions have been worded, as well as how questions are translated in different languages.

The context in which questions from the Eurobarometers are posed change over the years. For example, it is important to note definite differences between pre-pandemic and post-pandemic political and economic realities. Furthermore, since data was not collected in a laboratory, then political realities have surely affected the study. In terms of the cross-country and longitudinal research, another limitation is the number of countries that were considered. A larger sample could have offered slightly different results. Ultimately, the upsides of using Eurobarometers in this research have far outweighed the relatively small issues that have been presented.

Conclusion

Never before has the European Union faced such high levels of distrust from member states' citizens as it has in recent history, starting with the Eurozone crisis. This considerable increase in Eurosceptic attitudes correlates to a great extent to the increase in crises that the EU has faced. While Euroscepticism has had an impact at the national and European decision-making levels, so far, the phenomenon has only prompted one country to withdraw from the Union, the United Kingdom. Other 'exits' could have occurred as well. Both France and Greece have been on the verge of also triggering article 41, the Withdrawal Agreement.

Tensions have risen in the European Union as an effect of numerous crises unfolding, some doing so simultaneously. First came the 2008 financial crisis, which was the most difficult event to recover from. The economic impact on the single market, as well as on national economies, was severe. The crises, however, affected citizens differently, since the economic consequences had different intensities depending on the fiscal and monetary measures that were taken by authorities. Countries that followed more disciplined economic policies, while having current account surpluses, managed to overcome the crisis in approximately two or three years. Countries with current account deficits and flexible economic policies only managed to redress their economies starting in 2012, until 2015. Following the Eurozone crisis came the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the refugee crisis, the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU, as well as the COVID-19 sanitary and economic

crises. These events have created many rifts in the fabric of European solidarity. Post-WWII Europe was divided between the Western and the Eastern Blocs. More recently, however, Europe has witnessed fissures appearing between the ‘righteous’ North and the ‘reckless’ South; between those who have proclaimed themselves as supporters, and those who are framed as rejecting the rule-of-law; and between perceived ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ of zero-sum games at the EU level.

This research has set out to investigate the extent to which geopolitical, security and economic events, following the 2008 economic crisis, have impacted Eurosceptic attitudes towards the European Union. This has been done throughout six chapters, where theoretical models were applied to European and Romanian realities. The quantitative and qualitative studies in chapter five and six were based on six research questions, concerning the future of the European Union post-Brexit, Romanian citizens’ attitudes towards the European Union, the effects of the many crises since the 2008 financial setback on member states and their citizens, as well as the extent to which perceptions and trends at the European level affect citizens’ national attitudes, and vice-versa.

The United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the European Union has affected the Union’s current structure and operating framework. The London-Paris-Berlin axis has been replaced by the newly forged Franco-German duo that has had a stronger role in shaping the future of the European Union. The new Franco-German core needs to find solutions to the internal fractions in the European Union. Most member states, with some exceptions such as the ‘frugal four’, want deeper economic convergence, as well as more profound political integration. Furthermore, with the emergence of a multipolar world, the enlargement of the Russian and Chinese spheres of influence, and paired with continuous US isolationism, the European Union must find a way to construct a coherent common foreign policy. This will allow member states to achieve better results from global zero-sum games, as well as power and economic negotiations.

From a Romanian perspective, the Brexit phenomenon has not had a significant socio-economic and political impact. The core reason being that the fundamental rights and liberties of Romanian citizens living in the United Kingdom have been secured post-Brexit. Commercial ties between Romania and the United Kingdom are limited and thus, it is the matter of expats living abroad in Britain that concerned Romanian citizens and the Romanian authorities most. With the negotiations between the EU27 and the United Kingdom arriving at a favourable

conclusion in this regard, Romanian elites believe that Brexit had and will continue to have little to no impact on Romanian citizens' attitudes towards the European Union. In some countries, such as France, it is possible that the Brexit vote has made a difference – considering Le Pen's new standings in the next presidential election polls. Yet, for Romania, a country that has overwhelming support for the European project, the UK's decision has not significantly impacted citizens' positive attitudes towards the European Union. This notion has been confirmed both by the longitudinal cross-country study in chapter six and the opinions of Romanian elites in chapter five.

Many of the interviewed elites believe, however, that there were many opportunities that were missed by Romanian authorities during Brexit. These concern, among other things, the relocation of foreign companies from the UK to Romania post-Brexit, as well as the relocation of European agencies, such as the European Medicines Agency.

In terms of Eurosceptic attitudes in Romania, this research has shown that both European and national events and crises have shaped citizens' attitudes towards the European Union. Romanian attitudes are primarily based on historical and socio-economic realities. As such, the 2008 financial crisis, the effects of which lasted in Romania until 2012, definitely had an important effect on Romanian Euro-optimism. Also, it seems that the viciousness of the terrorist attacks, which started in 2014, also had some effects in this regard. However, other events, such as the Russian-Ukrainian conflict or the refugee crises do not seem to have had significant effects on pro-EU attitudes in Romania.

With many results that support *congruence theory*, this research has shown that positive and negative spill-overs exist between citizens' tendencies to trust the European Union and their tendencies to trust the national government. One of these aspects refers to the democratic change of governments in member states. In the countries regarded in the longitudinal study, observations were made that whenever an opposition party came to power in a country, trust in the government increased initially, followed by a decrease. One possible explanation is that when a party takes office, citizens have a tendency to believe the promises made in campaigns and have high expectations that political and economic changes will follow. However, noticing that their expectations were perhaps too high, the levels of trust in government were adjusted shortly after. All things considered, Romania today still remains a profoundly Euro-optimistic state.

Coincidentally, the same predictors that led to the ‘leave’ vote in the Brexit referendum are emphasized as causes for pro-European attitudes in Romania. These are primarily socio-economic and historical in nature. Brexit is an anti-globalization movement, which was supported by citizens affected deeply by deindustrialization. Thus, returning to historical notions of the Commonwealth and the greatness of Britain as a colonial power, many political actors advocated for the withdrawal from the EU. At the same time, in Romania, it is partly the utilitarian opportunities that have led to Romania’s European path, as well as a widely spread fear in society of returning to the communist regime. In Romania, thus, the concept of Europe is positively associated with freedom and prosperity.

This research could not have been realized without both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Offering a top-down perspective, information was gathered directly from experts and elites – some of which were actively involved in the Brexit deal. Yet, it is the themes and patterns that are most interesting. Among all the interviewees, there were none that believed that citizens in Romania were Eurosceptic or that they would start to oppose European integration. The quantitative data, in the form of a bottom-up approach, suggested the same – citizens’ strongly support the European Union in Romania. By utilizing quantitative and qualitative methodology, it has been possible to confirm the information obtained in the studies. Furthermore, both the former and the latter have also allowed for deeper analysis into the subject of Euroscepticism, at the national and European level.

Romanian citizens have believed, starting before the 1989 revolution, that the European Union is truly a savior of the country. While it is indisputable that Romania stands to gain from its EU membership – economically primarily, but also socially – there is also a downside. Similarly to the way in which the IMF demanded the privatization of the Romanian industry post-1989 in order for the country to be eligible for loans and foreign direct investments, the European Union has allowed the Romanian accession because of national and private interests. Member states, in a zero-sum Europe, did not decide on the 2007 enlargement as a form of altruism. It is precisely the issue regarding national and private interests from abroad that should concern citizens more, allowing for a sentiment of constant wariness as discussed by Krouwel and Abts (2007). Yet, without doubting the motives of other member states, from a political standpoint, Romania will not be able to progress politically. Without a political elite that is able to expertly navigate the river of external interests – US, EU, Russian, and Chinese – Romania will not be able to mitigate the development gap between it and the West. Romania can be considered, in a two or multi-speed Europe, a second-class member. Although having

met all provisions to join the Schengen Area, it has still not been accepted. With vast amounts of evidence that double standards exist between member states, it is clear that zero-sum games continue in the European Union. Furthermore, while some countries manage to appear as winners if only regarding the economic cost-vs-benefits, there is likely a trade-off which is made on behalf of countries from the periphery towards those from the center. For Romania, however, post-1989, there was only one way through which it could have secured its territorial and economic autonomy, and that was the European project.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown a change in the European Union's modus operandi in times of crises. While the initial reaction in 2020 followed the same isolationist approaches that member states had for the 2008 financial crisis and the refugee crisis, after a few months, member states began acting in solidarity. European institutions, in the face of this sanitary and economic crisis, finally began having solid initiatives and economic aid plans to help member states in need.

There are many conspiracy theories regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, about the origin of the virus, as well as the components of the various vaccines. The European Union has invested heavily into Big Pharma and the vaccine industry. As such, the effects of the anti-vaccination movement could have a spill-over effect towards the credibility of the European Union. Further studies should consider the effects of the COVID-19 crises on Eurosceptic attitudes in the EU. It is likely that both the sanitary and the economic setbacks that ensued as a result of the pandemic have significantly impacted citizens' attitudes towards the European project.

The outcome of the 2020 US presidential elections has had various ramifications. The victory of President Biden, meant that Big Pharma has come once again at the center of the political spotlight in the US, outranking the military and defense sector (not necessarily in terms of public spending). This realignment is also emphasized by the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan – an action which was set into motion by former president Trump. Allegations regarding the interference of foreign powers in US elections have also made the headlines of news outlets. Reports, such as the *Mueller report on the investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 Presidential election* have emerged, yet limited legal actions have been taken despite the evidence. Internal divisions, among which the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement, have created gigantic social tensions in the US. These matters, as well as others, have made the US continue its isolationist policies allowing room for maneuver for other global

and regional players. As the most important strategic partner of the European Union, the US isolationist approach has made the EU consider alternatives – Austria and Germany with Russia, Hungary with Russia, Germany and France with China.

The wave of Euroscepticism appeared to have diminished after the 2008 financial crisis. After 2012-2013, European economies started functioning at full capacity once again. Citizens' livelihoods improved, which meant greater trust in national authorities, as well as in the European project. However, not long after, a crescendo of European and international crises hit member states, culminating with the COVID-19 pandemic. As an outcome of zero-sum games at the EU level, Europe today is fractured not only between East and West, but also between North and South, pro-Russian and anti-Russian, pro-Chinese and anti-Chinese, supporters of LGBTQ and traditionalists, etc. Zero-sum games have been played throughout various crises which have deepened divisions in Europe. While positive attitudes towards the European Union appear to have increased recently, political leaders should be wary of the stark divisions that exist in Europe today, which could fuel Eurosceptic attitudes with great ease. The biggest threats to how the European Union is perceived are not only economic crises, Russia, or COVID-19 but the European Union itself, its institutions, policies and growth trajectory.

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