

Perceptions of the European Union in New Member States

A Comparative Perspective

Edited by
Gabriella Ilonszki



Routledge Europe-Asia Studies Series

Perceptions of the European Union in New Member States

The book explores the views of elites alongside those of the wider population in the European Union. The chapters place the new member states – and the potential candidate Serbia – on the map of Europe in this context for the first time. The volume's comparative method goes beyond the standard old member states versus new member states divide. It assesses regional differences within Central Europe and evaluates the problem of European and national identity formation, perception of external threats to the EU (including Russia), differences between economic and political elite views about the integration process and the connection between national performance and public opinion about Europe. Even though, in each country, positive views are dominant about the integration process, heterogeneous views prevail behind the image of a unifying Europe.

The book's major contribution is that it makes the new member states more visible and provides hard evidence while remaining theoretically driven. Furthermore, it covers the most important topics that emerge in studies concerning European integration. The book is intended for those interested in European integration in general but Central and Eastern European comparativists will find it particularly useful.

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Introduction: A Europe Integrated and United—But Still Diverse?

GABRIELLA ILONSZKI

THE CHAPTERS IN THIS VOLUME GIVE AN OVERVIEW of some research findings of a European project, called Intune. The project (with the title ‘Intune’ or ‘IntUne’, standing for ‘Integrated and United? A Quest for Citizenship in an Ever Closer Europe’) has been financed by the European Union within the 6th Framework Programme, Priority 7, ‘Citizens and Governance in a Knowledge Based Society’.¹ The project started in September 2005, spans for four years, covers 18 European countries, involves 29 European institutions and more than 100 scholars across Eastern and Western Europe. These sheer numbers themselves indicate the ambition of the main organisers: the project has been coordinated by the University of Siena and headed by Maurizio Cotta and Pierangelo Isernia and the participants have included sociologists, political scientists, policy analysts and linguists.

One major aim of the project has been to explore the views of elites and the wider population on the European Union with the help of questionnaire surveys in two waves: in the spring of 2007 and in the spring of 2009, respectively. The contributions to this volume all analyse the survey results of the 2007 wave. This can be regarded as one of the first systematic comparative surveys, which covers both old and new member states. Out of the new member states Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria—and Serbia as a potential future candidate—are included.

The project’s academic value is enhanced by the fact that the population and elite questionnaires were a joint effort of academics working in the two fields of elite and mass opinion; thus as a result the mass views and the elite views can be easily compared. The mass survey was built on a national sample of 1,000 in each country while a selected group of the national elites (120 respondents per country) were asked to answer structured questions on their perceptions of identity, representation and scope of governance mainly in relation to the European Union (EU) and to their

I would like to thank Terry Cox, Editor of *Europe-Asia Studies* for his encouragement to put this volume together and Sarah Lennon for her expertise and patience in dealing with various queries during this process.

¹For the project’s homepage see www.intune.it.

national polity. Some questions referred to the respondents' social and political background.

Each national elite sample consisted of 80 national MPs and 40 members of the economic elite. As for the 80 MPs, the sample was proportional according to seniority, gender, age, party and tenure. At least between 15 and 25 senior (front-bench) politicians—former or present ministers, junior ministers, presidents or vice presidents of the parliamentary groups or standing committees and EU commissioners—were included. In countries with smaller parliaments the quota of 80 political elite members was achieved by approaching MPs starting from the top (senior) politicians. Within the economic elites the top leaders of the largest enterprises and banks were interviewed according to a roll-down design: in case of refusal the deputy and then the next largest enterprise was approached, always one person per organisation. The sample was based on the 'Top 500 firms' lists of the respective countries. In addition to these economic top leaders between six and 12 leaders of the largest business associations—leaders of organisations of industrialists, employers, bankers, entrepreneurs and chambers—were interviewed. Table 1 below summarises the number of interviews in each country with the composition of political and economic respondents—as well as the countries where the mass survey was also conducted. As can be seen there is no total overlap between the two country groups. There was no mass survey conducted in the Czech Republic and Lithuania. (At the same time, a mass survey only was carried out in Slovenia, which has been used in one of the contributions to this volume.) The majority of essays in

TABLE 1
SAMPLE SIZE IN EACH COUNTRY

<i>Country</i>	<i>Elite survey</i>			<i>Mass survey</i>
	<i>Political elite</i>	<i>Economic elite</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i>
Austria	81	35	116	1,000*
Belgium	80	44	124	1,000
Bulgaria	83	45	128	1,000
Czech Republic	80	42	122	none
Denmark	60	40	100	1,000
Estonia	72	40	112	1,000
France	81	43	124	1,000
Germany	80	43	123	1,000
Great Britain	50	21	71	1,000
Greece	90	36	126	1,000
Hungary	80	42	122	1,000
Italy	84	42	126	1,000
Lithuania	80	40	120	none
Poland	80	42	122	1,000
Portugal	80	40	120	1,000
Serbia	80	40	120	1,000
Slovakia	80	40	120	1,000
Spain	94	55	149	1,000
Total	1,415	730	2,145	16,000

Note: *The Austrian mass survey was conducted later thus its results are not covered in each article.

the volume analyse the results of the elite survey but in some cases the mass survey results are also included.

The contributors to this volume are all members of the so-called elite working group within the Intune Project, who were involved in the national elite surveys, in addition to other theoretical or empirical parts of the project.

One major goal of the contributions is 'to place' the new member states—and the potential candidate Serbia—on the 'map' of Europe with the help of surveys that had been thus far restricted to the old member states. To find their place we have found the comparative method to be the best possible approach but the rich material made it possible to exceed the more common opposition of old member states and new member states and seek for other explanatory factors. Some chapters follow a regional comparison (differentiation between Southern European countries and new member states in Central and Eastern Europe), others locate a country or a group of countries in a wider comparative framework or look inside the new member state group, still others follow an overall EU level comparison. In addition, some chapters make use of comparisons between mass and elite, and between political leaders and economic leaders, and make issue-related comparisons as well.

Although the essays are mainly based on the elite survey they reflect on and react to a general and obvious transformation of the European project in relation to its citizens. This concerns the end of the period of permissive consensus and the beginning of a period when the European Union seems to face the increasing challenge of whether it can continue and perform well (or better) without a more active participation of the population. People's involvement and their identification with the EU and the role of the elite in creating and responding to national and European identities are the central thoughts and concerns in the essays.

Public views on the European Union and the future of the integration process will largely depend on how European citizens identify with Europe, how national and European identities are intertwined, and how the elites think about these issues. The importance of this question is reflected most explicitly by four contributions (Best; Mansfeldová and Stašková; Jerez-Mir, Real-Dato and Vázquez-García; and Lengyel and Göncz), which represent different comparative routes. Best connects historical analysis with current survey results; Mansfeldová and Stašková place the Czech case in the European perspective; Jerez-Mir, Real-Dato and Vázquez-García choose to pursue a comparison between Southern Europe and Central and Eastern Europe in this field; while Lengyel and Göncz, with a general perspective, propose a new conceptual framework to understand identity formation.

Best examines identity formation on the mass and elite level with a focus on South Eastern Europe. Following Stein Rokkan's footsteps Best analyses the effects of state formation and nation formation on the perceptions of national identity. By examining population and elite responses to several 'identity questions', involving potential definitions of nationality (from language through religion to birthplace), he finds that construction of mass identities is first of all directed by 'historical givens and experiences'. Behind this general statement he is able to identify mass and elite differences and also some regional differences. For example, the 'nativistic' understanding of national identity (having parents who are nationals or being born within the boundaries of the nation state) is stronger among the population than among

elite members and generally stronger in the new member states than in the old member states. The importance of historical legacy and long term explanations in the understanding of identification not only on the national, but also on the European level, is a conclusion that re-emerges in other writings as well, among others in the contributions of Jerez-Mir, Real-Dato and Vázquez-García. The rationale of their comparison between Southern Europe and Central and Eastern Europe is founded on an apparent difference between the two regions with respect to the European Union: the former group has an overall positive and the latter group an overall negative view on integration. Nevertheless, when representation and identity issues are analysed in concrete terms regional heterogeneity comes to light, rooted in historical and institutional explanations.

Mansfeldová and Stašková single out the Czech case to explore how national and European identities of political and economic elites are being formed. They find that the Czech elites—both the political and economic ones—are amongst the most Eurosceptic in the EU: they emphasise the role of the national state as opposed to the EU—although their general evaluation is largely positive, for example they claim that their country has benefited from the entry. More generally, Mansfeldová and Stašková distinguish between the ‘origin’, ‘civic’ and ‘cultural’ components both of national and of European identities—although these have different explanatory strength on the two levels. Lengyel and Göncz also deal with the problem of identity on the basis of the elite survey data. When writing about European identity academic literature generally differentiates between an essentialist or cultural dimension and a constructivist or civic dimension, the former emphasising common ethno-cultural traits while the latter the civic attitudes and behaviour of the people. On the basis of survey evidence they find that identity components can be grouped into a primordial and into a decisional category, the latter including both the cultural and the civic components that are somehow related to the decisions of the individual, and the former including traits that are established by birth. A further differentiation between the pragmatic and symbolic aspects of EU support proves that eventually four country groups can be identified based on identification and support, and while these do not follow a clear division between old member states and new member states, in some respects this regional division prevails. For example, old member states’ elites tend to be more attached to Europe both in symbolic and pragmatic ways.

Identity is put to a kind of policy test by Matonytė and Morkevičius. The future of the European project partly depends on how European citizens will identify with it—and how the elites will think about it. As Matonytė and Morkevičius contend, cohesion of the EU is a *sine qua non* for ‘European’ political decisions. Since cohesion is built on positive and negative feelings at the same time they conceptualise cohesion with the help of threats: how do national elites think about threats in the EU context? What do they think about the entry of Turkey, about the USA’s EU connections and about the role of Russia? Survey evidence proves that there are no unified perceptions with regard to external threats but these rather depend on the political–historical experiences of the given countries. For example, countries in the old Eastern bloc regard Russia as a threat, while the old member states perceive it differently. These views might also relate to (potential) EU policies. For example, the dominant majority of those who see better social security (as opposed to competitiveness) to be the major

aim of the EU are more sceptical of close relations between the USA and some EU countries.

It is not surprising that Serbia has attracted much interest in more than one essay. It is an interesting case in itself while it also offers an analytical opportunity to see the effect of membership on EU views. Distinctions between old membership, new membership, more recent membership (Bulgaria being among the surveyed countries) and no membership in the European Union often appear to have an explanatory strength. While we can rely on experiences and well established views in the old member states, more ambivalences might prevail in the new member states and prospective members might cherish more illusions and expectations about the institution.

Lazić and Vuletić put the Serbian case in a comparative focus by seeking to determine the comparative strength of pro-EU and pro-national attitudes. This is a really challenging question because during an extended period of more than a decade of the 'blocked transformation' the Serbs blamed the West for the failures of their regime but they remained pro-EU at the same time. The authors' hypothesis is that in the EU countries, where secessionist or irredentist sentiments prevail—as they have done in Serbia—pro-nation-state attitudes will be stronger than pro-EU attitudes. This assumption is complemented—and indeed weakened—by another one, namely that the EU is regarded as a solution (mainly an economic safeguard) to economic problems. This assumption has been confirmed in another contribution (by Ilonszki), which claims that among the new member states we can observe an escape route scenario that explains EU support: the worse the economic perceptions in a country, the more 'EU-philia' can be observed. Moreover, in a pre-accession period only the positive expectations and not real world problems prevail in this respect. All in all, Lazić and Vuletić find that out of the countries under investigation the Serbian elite has been the most divided on this issue: pro-EU or pro-nation-state attitudes are equally evident as post-communist experience and national problems push Serbia towards more pro-national attitudes but positive (not yet tried) expectations concerning the EU pull it towards pro-Europeanism. The impact of legacy and the concrete political situation matter equally. Some other chapters, introduced above, also comment on the particularity of the Serbian case. Best witnesses the dilemma—indeed the dividedness—of the Serbian elite as opposed to the population in their approach to national identity, and Jerez-Mir, Real-Dato and Vázquez-García note that the Serbian political elite shows the lowest level of attachment to one's country in the survey data.

The dividedness of the Serbian elite is once more reinforced in the contribution of Nezi, Sotiropoulos and Toka who seek to answer the question of whether it is left-right placement or country of origin that best explains attitudes to the EU. At first glance the answer seems easy: the political elite from older member states (in this case Greece—as compared to Bulgaria and Serbia) and from parties located closer to the centre are more pro-European. The first finding confirms the importance of length (or prospect) of membership in the EU and the second warns that only concrete analysis can explain heterogeneity. The Greek Socialist party family tends to trust the EU less than either the Bulgarian or the Serbian respondents from the same party families. Although the Greek case is particular in this respect, this is just one piece of evidence

among many that left and right appear differently in the EU context between the old and new member states, and left–right dividing lines are often blurred in the new member states. For example, a survey question asked whether enhancing competition or ensuring social security should be the goal of the European Union. The difference between the answers of the old member states and new member states is particularly high among politicians who place themselves on the left: more than one third of left wing politicians in the new member states as compared with only about one tenth in the old member states regard economic competitiveness as the main aim of the EU. The difficulty of understanding left and right might explain why party-based comparisons are relatively infrequent in the essays. Moreover, one can add that Central and East European countries are under several constraints at the same time: in addition to a general scepticism concerning the role of parties on the European level, now that their representative functions and connections have been challenged also on the national level, in some Central and East European countries party consolidation and party system consolidation have not yet been finalised.

The Intune project offers a rich source to extend our knowledge on the European Union and further publications are planned on the basis of its findings in the near future. Still, this collection will remain of particular interest because it makes the new member states more visible and puts an emphasis on region-based comparisons. Overall, the contributions offer insights into the ‘EU-motivations’ in some single countries, and they also prove that in addition to a division between old member states and new member states, other divisions and comparisons that are regional, sub-regional or topical are similarly fruitful. At the same time the authors warn that behind the image of a unifying Europe and the overall positive views about the integration process diversity and heterogeneity prevail: the complexity of long term historical legacies, institutional variance, political and economic interests do play a role. This multifaceted social, historical, religious (not to mention political) diversity has to be calculated when we want to understand elite and mass opinion on European integration.

At the end of such an extended undertaking it is appropriate to ask some general questions as well. What can the new member states add to the European project? This question is relevant because fairly often only the ‘problem’ side of their entry is emphasised, particularly in the context of identity formation and citizenship. Thomassen and Back (2008, p. 19) claim that ‘[s]ince the 2004 enlargement brought in a number of countries with a low sense of citizenship, this might have a lasting effect on the development of citizenship in the Union’. The 2004 European Parliament elections confirmed this statement with their low level turnout (on average turnout was lower in the new member states than in the old ones). The Intune Project data also confirm some of this approach. But admittedly, the EU is important for the new member states. This is confirmed by survey evidence: without exception in each country the majority of respondents have positive views about the integration process. Also, the European Union may have a positive impact in helping to overcome old, historically rooted conflicts between the new member states, and also in helping to strengthen democratic norms and institutions.

And what can the new member states add to the European Union? They can possibly add and strengthen new perspectives, including a perspective which

emphasises the multifaceted character of the European Union. The enlargement of the EU itself due to increasing diversity will lead to a situation where the old governance model cannot perform well any longer. Ideally, ‘... the import of diversity will render the hierarchical mode of governance largely inadequate. The enlarged EU will have to embrace more flexible, decentralised and soft modes of governance ... (that is) a plurilateral mode of governance’ (Zielonka 2007, p. 188). This development might be a value in itself.

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