

MORE EUROPEAN THAN THE EUROPEANS: THE NATURE OF THE PUBLIC DEBATE ON EUROPE IN BULGARIA

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Public support for Europe in Bulgaria is comparatively higher than in the rest of Central and Eastern Europe, while opposition to EU membership is one of the lowest in the region. This is despite of series of disappointments to Bulgaria from the EU such as the inclusion of Bulgaria in the black list of countries in 1995, the delay to the start of the accession negotiations agreed at the Luxemburg Council in 1997 and most recently in 2004 the inclusion of a back-up clause into Bulgaria's accession treaty that could see the country's membership date postponed to 2008.

Currently, there is no research that explains the reasons for the unwavering public support for Europe in Bulgaria. With this in mind the aim of this article is twofold. In its first part it generates, comparatively to Central and Eastern Europe and on the basis of Eurobarometer data for Bulgaria from 1997 and 2003, patterns of support for EU membership which are formed with seven independent variables: public image of the EU, expected benefits from EU membership, occupation, age, education, knowledge about the EU and voting intentions of respondents. It then progresses to the second part to discuss the outlined patterns which feeds into the wider question of the high levels of support for Europe in Bulgaria.

1. INTRODUCTION

The subject of public opinion and European integration has resurfaced with systematic regularity in academic publications at times when the Union gratulates new waves of enlargement. Some topics have remained constant in the literature over time: what inspires publics to support or oppose integration? Is there a link between political partisanship and public support? Does economic performance influence the views of the majority? Other issues have tapped on concerns directly related to enlargements: is public support higher or lower in the new states in comparison to original members? Do countries from different waves diverge or converge in their support for Europe? Why are some countries keener on integration than others?

Predictably, the latest contributions in the area of public opinion in Europe hover around the recent enlargement of the European Union with the countries from Central and Eastern Europe. The majority of these studies are comparative in nature¹. They

¹ See Cichowski (2000), "Western Dreams, Eastern Realities: Support for the European Union in Central and Eastern Europe"; White et al (2000), "Eastern Publics and Western Enlargement";

usually rely on a single year survey data from Central and Eastern *Eurobarometer* to statistically test public opinion theories, previously developed for Western European countries, in the context of Central and Eastern European states. Three such theories have been popular with political scientists in recent years: the utilitarian model of public support of Gable & Palmer², Inglehart's theory of cognitive mobilization³, and the theory of political partisanship developed by Anderson⁴.

Briefly, the essence of these theories and their relevance in the post-communist circumstances is as follows: The utilitarian model argues that citizens form their opinions of Europe on the basis of individual cost-benefit analysis. This means that they weight over their benefits from integration and compare them against the costs that they may potentially suffer. The logic follows that those who envisage a net gain for themselves will be supportive of Europe and vice versa. Research shows that the likely supporters of the European idea appear to be well educated, of young age, professional, urban dwellers with relatively high incomes. Put to the test in the environment of Central and Eastern Europe this hypothesis is supported by all studies. For example, Tverdova and Anderson reported that in six East European countries⁵ – Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia and Slovakia – respondents who believed that they and / or their country will benefit most from the relationship with the EU were more likely to support it. The researchers, however, found no evidence to suggest that education was positively correlated with support for Europe. Instead they identified that the more educated strata of the populations were merely more likely to hold an opinion of the EU rather than being undecided. The same model was also tested by Cichowski across the Czech republic, Estonia, Hungary and Slovenia⁶. In this study again those who perceived that they themselves and/or their country will benefit most from being part of Europe were on average more likely to support integration. However, “democratic process” and “market reforms” rather than economic factors were exposed as being the strongest explanatory variables for EU support in the region. Additionally education and being involved in sectors that would benefit from EU integration were also strong determinants of EU support. Finally, the paper of White et al,⁷ which compares data from the Czech republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Ukraine, found strong positive relationship between socioeconomic factors such as age, education, level of income, urban residency, support for market economy and support for the European Union.

The theory of cognitive mobilization is cited in only one study from Central and Eastern Europe as a possible explanation of public support. The theory suggests that

Tverdova & Anderson (2003), “Choosing the West? Referendum Choices on EU Membership in east-central Europe”

² See Gable & Palmer (1995), “Understanding variation in public support for European integration”; Gable & Whitten (1997), “Economic conditions, economic perceptions, and public support for European integration.”; Gable (1998), “Economic integration, voters and national politics”

³ See Inglehart (1970), “Cognitive mobilization and economic identity”; also, Inglehart & Rabier (1978), “Economic uncertainty, and European standards: Public opinion trends”; Jassen (1991), “Post materialism, cognitive mobilization and public support for European integration”.

⁴ See Anderson (1998), “When in doubt, use proxies: Attitudes towards domestic politics and supports for European integration”; Anderson & Kaltenthaler (1996), “The dynamics of public opinion towards European integration, 1973-1993”.

⁵ Tverdova & Anderson (2003), *ibid*

⁶ Cichowski (2000), *ibid*

⁷ White et al (2000), *ibid*

“rising educational levels of recent decades, coupled with the growing availability of information about things happening in distant places, is conducive to an increasingly cosmopolitan outlook on the part of Western publics”⁸. Therefore, support for European integration increases with individual’s levels of education and socioeconomic standing. Cichowski related to this theory in an attempt to explain the link between rising educational levels and support for the EU although when she statistically tested this proposition, she concluded that there was insufficient evidence to justify the model in the studied region⁹.

Finally, the model of political partisanship is based on the assumption that knowledge about the EU is too abstract and institutionalized for people to understand it so they normally use political parties as proxies in forming their opinions about integration. In practice this means that supporters of a party with a pro- European position are more likely to be pro-European themselves and supporters of a party with an anti-EU stance are expected to hold anti- European views too. Tverdova & Anderson found little support for this hypothesis when it was applied to Central Europe¹⁰. Two explanations were given for why that may be the case. Firstly, the researchers argued that the respondents may not have been aware of the positions that parties hold in regards to the European Union as there has been a limited debate on the issue. Secondly, as there was an overwhelming consensus on integration across the political systems, this made it difficult to single out prospective EU opponents on the basis of this theory. In contrast to this study, Cichowski found party cues useful for predicting public support¹¹. In particular she argues that those who identify themselves with parties that take unambiguous and clear pro- European position are more likely to support membership.

All of the above studies suffer from two clear weaknesses. Firstly, they present very conflicting results which makes it difficult to validate the above three theories in the context of Eastern Europe. This point was raised by Gable who suggested that the problem with the studies was methodological¹². More precisely, he questioned the use of bivariate analysis which “may conceal intervening or spurious relationships¹³.” This is an important problem as many of the theories offer explanations for the same evidence. For example, education may be positively correlated with support for integration because it raises cognitive mobilization or because it allows people to benefit comparatively more economically in a European market. Therefore, “without controlling for alternative explanations, it is impossible to test accurately these competing theoretical claims¹⁴.”

The second drawback of the studies is that they do not capture the evolution of public opinion over time as they rely on a single year surveys. In this way they achieve a cross-country comparability of public support at the expense of the more interesting

⁸ Inglehart & Rabier (1978), pp. 86

⁹ Cichowski (2000), *ibid*

¹⁰ Tverdova & Anderson (2003), *ibid*

¹¹ Cichowski (2000), *ibid*

¹² See Gable (1998), “Public support for European integration: An empirical test of five theories”.

¹³ See Gable, *ibid*, pp. 334.

¹⁴ See Gable, *ibid*, pp. 334. Also it is interesting that when Gable performed a rigid test on five theories in order to test their validity after overcoming the drawbacks of previous research he found substantiated support for only the utilitarian model and the theory of political partisanship.

debate on what factors stimulate public support for Europe in different countries and how it changes with time.

The only country from Central Europe in which public opinion of the EU has to some degree been researched independently is Poland¹⁵. An excellent contribution in this direction is the study of Kucia who relied on qualitative, focus-group study of representative groups, in Poland & the Czech Republic in order to map out both the reasons for public support for EU membership as well as the “fears, dangers and problems” that membership entailed for the respondents¹⁶. Although he concluded that the responses were similar across both nations, by employing a qualitative framework, he highlighted that in Poland the debate about membership appears to be more emotionally charged, while the Czechs are better informed and more rational in their judgements.

The remaining two studies on Poland deal with the declining levels of EU support in the country with the prospect of accession. Bielasiak relies on cross tabulations based on survey data over time to explain the drop in support through four traditional paradigms¹⁷ – the economic voting argument (utilitarian theory), political values in the formation of policy preferences, human resources as a form of social capital and cultural lifestyle based on Marody’s “three Polands” argument. The picture that stems from his analysis is one in which declining support cuts across social groups and neither theory is sufficient in itself to provide an explanation for the emerging pattern. Rather it is the maturing of the debate and the realization of membership costs at elite and public level that the researcher holds accountable for the draining of enthusiasm on EU membership in Poland.

Bielasiak’s explanation is consistent with the views of Szczerbiak who in a similar manner interprets declining level of public support for Europe, as a result of the concessions that Poles are expected to make in order to realize their bid for membership¹⁸. His article adds further to the debate by illuminating that the appearance of a Polish anti-EU party – Polish Agreement- and the divisive behaviour of the pro-EU political lobby into “soft” and “tough” on the basis of how they conduct their negotiations with Brussels, are supplementary causes of public disappointment with Europe.

This article explores public opinion of Europe in Bulgaria. Apart from being a country that has so far remained on the peripheries of academic research in relation to European integration, it is an attractive case to examine for a number of other reasons.

In recent years Bulgaria has emerged with one of the highest levels of public support for Europe (between 75 – 85%) in comparison to the other countries from the post-communist group¹⁹. For example, according to the latest Central and Eastern *Eurobarometer* from 2003, Bulgaria is at 75% the third most supportive nation of the

¹⁵ Refer to Kucia, M. (1999), “Public opinion in Central Europe on EU accession: The Czech Republic and Poland.”; Bielasiak, J. (2002), “Determinants of public opinion differences on EU accession in Poland.”; Szczerbiak, A. (2002), “Explaining declining Polish support for EU membership”

¹⁶ Kucia (1999), *ibid*, pp. 149

¹⁷ Bielasiak, *ibid*

¹⁸ Szczerbiak, *ibid*

¹⁹ According to Candidate Countries Eurobarometer 2001-2003.

EU after Romania (84%) and Slovenia (80%)²⁰. A closer look at the data shows that as well as having one of the highest degrees of support for Europe, comparatively speaking, Bulgaria enjoys one of the lowest percentages of public opposition to the idea which nests at around 4%. Only Romania with a 2% opposition rate can compete with Bulgaria's optimism for Europe. This is in contrast to the opposition in countries from the same league such as - Estonia, Latvia and the Czech Republic that have opposition rates way above the group's average of 14%. Moreover, Bulgaria has still quite a large percentage of the population (21%) that remain undecided about Europe which suggests that depending on how the public opinion develops we can still see a further increase in support for the European idea or the formation of a tangible opposition in the run up to accession.

	Vote for EU Membership	Vote Against EU Membership	Undecided	Total
Romania	84%	2%	14%	100%
Slovenia	80%	10%	10%	100%
Lithuania	75%	12%	13%	100%
Bulgaria	75%	4%	21%	100%
Hungary	73%	10%	17%	100%
Slovakia	71%	10%	19%	100%
Poland	70%	14%	16%	100%
Average	68%	14%	18%	100%
Czech Rep.	61%	17%	22%	100%
Latvia	51%	27%	22%	100%
Estonia	43%	31%	26%	100%

Source: Calculated from the CCEB Survey (raw data files), 2003.2

Question: 'At a referendum would vote for or against Bulgaria's EU membership'

Table 1: Support for EU Membership in Central and Eastern Europe

Interestingly, Bulgarians have remained firm on the idea of European membership over time despite a series of disappointments from the EU. These include the embarrassing inclusion of Bulgaria by the European Commission in the "black list" of countries whose citizens needed to obtain visas when crossing the external borders of the Union in 1995. Then there is the subsequent decision of the EU in 1997 to delay the start of the negotiations for accession with Bulgaria due to its lack of compliance with the Copenhagen criteria²¹. Most recently, in 2004 Bulgaria (and Romania) has

²⁰ Refer to Table 1

²¹ The other countries that were seen as unprepared to start accession negotiations with the EU were Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia.

had a back up clause inserted into its accession treaty which permits EU member states to effectively postpone the country's membership with an additional year if Bulgaria does not adapt to the European conditions.

Last but not least, as the first Balkan country set to join the Union in 2007, Bulgaria brings into the limelight insights that may help to understand future enlargements. For instance it is worth reflecting upon whether the overwhelming support for Europe in Bulgaria is a Balkan phenomenon that will be replicated in countries like Croatia and Macedonia. Equivalently, perhaps there are regional peculiarities that make it difficult to construct a convincing anti-EU campaign in the Balkan context.

This article goes some way into deliberating the issues behind the consistently high public support for Europe in Bulgaria. The next section will explain the methodological aspects of the research before proceeding to section three which outlines patterns of public support for Europe compiled from CEEB and CCEB survey data. This sets the grounds for a discussion in section four on the factors that drive the positive public perception of Europe in Bulgaria.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 THE DATA SET

This study relies on raw data for Bulgaria and Central and Eastern Europe from the Central and Eastern *Eurobarometer* 1997 and Candidate Countries *Eurobarometer* 2003 surveys, published by the European Commission and obtained via the Data Archive UK.

The Eurobarometer series are the most exhaustive source of public opinion in relation to European integration that are at present available for Bulgaria. The first Eurobarometer on Bulgaria was compiled in 1990 and since then the survey has run annually in two sequences from 1990 until 1997 and from 2001 onwards. Although it has broadened in scope over the years to capture more aspects of the European debate, most of the questions asked in the original surveys were still asked in the second cycle, which makes it possible, to follow the direction of public opinion over time²².

1997 and 2003 surveys were selected from each part of the series as they have most questions in common on five areas – image of the EU, benefits from EU membership, socioeconomic status, knowledge about the EU and political affiliation- that could be used as explanatory variables for the high support for membership in Bulgaria.

²² At the initial stage of the research one national research institute in Bulgaria – Alpha Research was also considered as a potential source of information. Unfortunately, its surveys on public attitude towards the EU did not run prior to 1999 which makes it impossible to capture the position of public opinion in the early years of the transition. Also the questions that were asked were less than twenty on average a year and lacked the thematic grouping that makes Eurobarometer easy to work with. The final obstacle was that when the author contacted the institute to nevertheless request the data files, she was warned that the waiting time will be at least nine months.

In addition to the data from Bulgaria, the *Eurobarometer* data from the countries of Central and Eastern Europe is averaged out for the whole region and presented in a directly comparable format to the questions on Bulgaria²³.

2.2 THE METHOD

Once the Eurobarometer data was received the next step was to decide on what method to employ. Most surveys that utilize Eurobarometer usually use bivariate or multivariate analysis to test the significance of particular relationships and then compare the results across countries.

In this case I considered it unnecessary to bring in the complexity of regression analysis when in fact I could arrive at the relationships between the dependent and independent variables on the basis of simple cross tabulations and then discuss the emerging patterns for Bulgaria and compare them with those of the region.

The cross tabulations were produced with SPSS version 11 software package. They were done independently for 1997 and 2003 for Bulgaria and the CEE countries with the same dependant variable. Where possible the independent variables were also kept the same or similar across the two years to allow maximum comparability of the results.

To aid the analysis it was better to collapse (record) some of the categories into one. This was done on five occasions. Firstly, three of the categories of the dependent variable – “undecided”, “would not vote” and “no opinion” were collapsed into “undecided”. The reasoning for doing this was that the respondents in all cases lacked a specific preference either for or against Europe. Secondly, in relation to education and age some alterations were made with the data from the 2003 survey to make it directly comparable to the 1997 results. Basically, for Bulgaria the categories “no education”, “elementary” and “primary” were collapsed into “primary or less” and the same was done for “college (semi-higher)” and “university (higher)” which was presented as “higher education/university/college”²⁴. Thirdly, the respondents’ age

²³ The countries of Central and Eastern Europe include Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

²⁴ As the educational systems across Central and Eastern Europe differ in structure it was necessary to adapt the data for each country individually to the same categories as those used for Bulgaria. The introduced alterations are as follows:

For the Czech Republic the category “primary school” was presented as “primary or less”; “secondary school” was presented as “secondary completed”, while “non-university degree” and “university degree” were collapsed into “higher education/university/college”.

In the case of Estonia, “less than primary” was interpreted as “primary or less”, while “primary or uncompleted secondary”, “vocational school without secondary education”, and “vocational school with secondary education” were collapsed into “secondary uncompleted”. Finally, “secondary education” was counted as “secondary completed” and similarly “higher education” was presented as “higher education/university/college”.

For Hungary the categories “uncompleted primary school” and “primary school” were collapsed into “primary or less”. Then “three or less-year secondary school” was understood to mean “secondary uncompleted”, while “four or five year secondary school” was counted as “secondary completed”. Lastly, “college and university degree” fitted into “higher education/university/college”.

was collapsed into the same categories as those of 1997. In addition, the samples in relation to age, education and occupational sectors were reduced by the number of respondents that refused to identify themselves with a specific category and gave a “no answer” in order to simplify the data set. Finally, in connection to party affiliation the votes for the four major parties in Bulgaria – BSP, UDF, MRF and NMSS were collapsed into “vote for main party”²⁵, while the categories “would not vote” and “would vote blank (spoil vote)” were presented simply as “would not vote”.

The educational systems in Latvia and Lithuania appear to be the same and therefore identical changes were introduced in relation to both countries. The category “primary/basic education or less” was presented as “primary or less”, while “secondary” and “secondary special” were collapsed into “secondary completed”. The category “higher education” corresponds to “higher education/university/college”.

In the case of Poland the category “primary or less” included the original categories “uncompleted primary school” and “primary school”. “Basic vocational” was treated as “secondary uncompleted”, while “general and technical secondary school” fitted into “secondary completed”. Also, “university degree or more” was presented as “higher education/university/college”.

Romania has the most complex educational system from the whole region so many changes were necessary to the data to make it comparable to the other countries. Basically, the categories “no degree” and “primary school” were collapsed into “primary or less”. The category “gymnasium” was interpreted to mean “secondary uncompleted”, while “secondary completed” consisted of three original categories: “high school - level 1”, “vocational school” and “high school – level 2”. In the end the categories “post high/college” and “university degree or more” were collapsed into “higher education/university/college”.

In relation to Slovakia the category “primary or less” included respondents that gave their education as “elementary”. “Secondary uncompleted” included those with “secondary school without school leaving exam-apprenticed”, while “secondary completed” counted everyone with “secondary school with school leaving exam”. Those with university degrees simply fell into the “higher education/university/college” category.

Finally, in the case of Slovenia “uncompleted primary school” and “primary school” were collapsed as “primary or less”, while “non-university degree”, “university degree or more”, “magisterij/specializacija” and “doktorat” were collapsed into “higher education/university/college”. “Secondary uncompleted” included those with “three or less year secondary school” and “secondary completed” included respondents with “four of five year secondary education”.

²⁵ In order to arrive at the regional (CEE) average of the category “vote for main party” it was necessary to select the main parties from each country. The selection criteria in this respect was to count as main parties, parties that were capable of potentially capturing at least 5% of the vote. On the basis of this condition for 1997 the votes for the following parties were included in the data set. For the Czech Republic: 1) Cristian and Democratic Union – Czech People’s Party, 2) Czech Social Democratic Party, 3) Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, 4) Civic Democratic party. For Estonia: 1) Estonian Centre party [EKE], 2) Moderates, 3) Estonian Pensioners and Families League, 4) Estonian Reform Party. For Hungary: 1) Smallholders Party, 2) Hungarian Socialist Party, 3) Federation of Young Democrats. For Latvia: 1) Master Democratic Party, 2) Latvian Social Democratic Workers Party, 3) Latvian Way Union, 4) Fatherland and Freedom Alliance. For Lithuania: 1) Lithuanian Social Democratic Party, 2) Lithuanian Democratic Labour Party, 3) Lithuanian Center Union, 4) Homeland Union – Lithuanian Conservatives. For Poland: 1) Polish Peasants’ Party, 2) Solidarity, 3) Democratic Left Alliance, 4) Freedom Union. For Romania: 1) Greater Romania Party, 2) Romanian Social Democratic Party, 2) Cristians and Democratic Peasants’ Party, 3) Social Democratic Union. For Slovakia: 1) Party of the Democratic Left, 2) Democratic Union of Slovakia, 3) Movement for Democratic Slovakia, 4) Cristian Democratic Movement. For Slovenia: 1) Social Democratic Party of Slovenia, 2) Liberal Democracy of Slovenia, 3) Slovenian People’s Party, 4) United List of Social Democrats.

Similarly for 2003 the relevant parties included: For the Czech Republic: the same parties as in 1997. For Estonia: 1) Center Party, 2) Estonian Peoples’ Party, 3) Reform Party, 4) Res Publica. For Hungary: 1) Hungarian Civic Party, 2) Hungarian Socialist Party. For Latvia: 1) New Time, 2) Peoples’ Party, 3) Political Union for Human Rights in United Latvia, 4) Union of Greens and Farmers. For Lithuania: 1) Lithuanian Liberal Union, 2) Lithuanina Social Democratic Party, 3) Liberal Democratic Party. For Poland: 1) Democratic Left Alliance, 2) Law and Justice, 3) Citizen Platform, 4) Self – Defence. For Romania: 1) The Social Democratic Party, 2) The Great Romania Party, 3) The

2.3 DEPENDENT VARIABLE

I defined the dependent variable as “support for European membership”, which was measured by the question: “If there were to be a referendum tomorrow on the question of Bulgaria’s membership of the European Union, would you personally vote for or against it?”

Choosing the right question to represent the dependent variable is a key part of the research process, as it affects all findings. With this in mind I set the criteria to identify it. In short I was looking for a question that would appear in both of the studied years (1997 & 2003) and that would draw specifically on the topic of EU membership.

As I found out there were many questions that tapped on public attitudes towards the EU such as question 18 from 2003 : “In general do you have a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image of the EU?” or question 22 from 1997: “What is your impression of the aims and activities of the EU?”. Neither of these two questions were considered suitable as I reasoned that the support for membership does not equalise to one’s perception of the EU for it is perfectly legitimate that people with negative views about the EU would be nevertheless supportive of their country’s bid (for example, because they will benefit personally from it)and vice versa.

Apart from the selected question there was one other question on membership that I could have used to measure the dependent variable. “Generally speaking do you think Bulgaria’s membership of the EU is a good, bad, neither good nor bad?” is question 23 from the 2003 survey. There were two concerns with this question. It did not appear in years prior to 2003 which would have affected the comparative aspect of the research. Also, the responses linked to the question did not follow a “yes/no” framework that is ideal for cross tabulations but instead allowed three replies: “good”, “bad”, “neither good nor bad”. The danger with this situation is that many respondents would have gravitated in their responses towards the “neither good nor bad” category, which hampers the analysis of support.

2.4 INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

National Liberal Party. For Slovakia: 1) Movement for a Democratic Slovakia – people, 2) Cristian Democratic Movement, 3) Slovak Democratic and Cristian Union, 4) SMER, 5) Party of the Hungarian Coalition. For Slovenia: 1) Liberal Democracy of Slovenia, 2) United List of Social Democrats, 3) Social Democratic Party of Slovenia, 4) Youth Party of Slovenia.

3. PATTERNS OF SUPPORT FOR EUROPEAN MEMBERSHIP

This section describes patterns of public support for European membership in Bulgaria derived on the basis of five relationships. The first relationship is between public image of the EU and levels of support for it. The second shows a similar link between support and expected benefits from EU membership. Then the attention turns to the impact that socioeconomic factors have on public support for Europe before considering the last two relations between knowledge, voting intentions and support.

3.1 IMAGE OF THE EU AND SUPPORT FOR EU MEMBERSHIP

Bulgarians have held positive views about Europe since the beginning of the transition period, which has influenced their desire for European membership. Data from the CEEB 1997 survey shows that 89% of respondents with positive impressions of the aims and activities of the European Union were supportive of the country's bid for membership²⁶. This pattern strengthens in 2003 when 94 % of people with a positive image of the EU continue to express support for Europe²⁷. Similarly, in both years those who were neutral about the Union were more likely to support the membership application (47% in 1997 & 52% in 2003) than to oppose it (6 and 5% respectively). Even among people with negative impressions of Europe there is a substantial group (26% in 1997 and 19% in 2003) that were nevertheless prepared to vote in favour of the Bulgarian application.

Unsurprisingly, respondents who had negative impressions of the European Union were most likely to vote against membership in referenda. However, this group reduced in size over the two studied years from 52% in 1997 to 43% in 2003 with people obviously gravitating towards either the undecided group or those who would vote for membership.

The undecided on whether to support Bulgaria's application to the EU were not a homogenous group. Predictably, the largest share of them were people who were neutral or in other words of no opinion on Europe (47% in 1997 and 43% in 2003). Apart from this obvious observation, those with negative impressions of the European Union were more likely to be undecided than those with positive images. In 1997 22% of respondents who were negative about the EU were also undecided on membership compared to 10% with positive perceptions. Likewise, in 2003 38% of those with negative images of the Union were unsure of their opinion on membership in contrast to the relatively low 5% of undecided among respondents with positive views.

From a comparative perspective, Bulgarians were in all cases consistently more supportive of European membership than respondents from the rest of Central and Eastern Europe. For example in 1997 89% of Bulgarians that had a positive image of the EU were in favour of the country's application to the Union in comparison to 84% of the Central Europeans from the same category. In the case of neutral respondents

²⁶ See table 2.

²⁷ See table 3.

47% of Bulgarians and 41% of CEE nationals were positive about EU membership. From those with negative impressions 26% of Bulgarians and 21% of CEE residents were committed to vote for Europe in referenda. The same pattern is repeated in 2003. 94% of Bulgarians with positive views compared to 92% of those from Central Europe were for European membership. The share of neutral respondents in this year was pretty much identical – 52% for Bulgaria and 51% for CEE. However, of those with negative impressions 19% of Bulgarians were supportive of membership in contrast to 16% from the region.

Hand in hand with the high levels of support for Europe, Bulgaria has lower levels of opposition to membership than the regional average. In 1997 1% of Bulgarians with a positive image of the EU were prepared to vote against membership which parallels 3% of Central Europeans. From those of neutral opinion on Europe 6% of Bulgarians were against membership in comparison to 13% from CEE. The divergence in opposition levels between Bulgaria and CEE is even more evident from the 2003 data. Among Bulgarians with positive image of Europe there were no enthusiasts to oppose EU membership, while 2% of Central Europeans in the same category took this position. Of the neutral respondents only 5% of Bulgarians were against EU membership in contrast to 15% from the CEE countries. Analogously, 43% of Bulgarians with negative views on Europe were opposed to Bulgaria's application while the share of those respondents from Central and Eastern Europe was 63%.

On balance, in the early stages of the transition Bulgaria has very similar levels of undecided voters to those from Central Europe. The data from 1997 shows that 10% of people with positive views in Bulgaria were unsure on their position on membership, which mirrors 12% from the same group across the CEE countries. Similarly, 47% of neutral voters in Bulgaria and 46% of respondents from CEE were undecided on membership in the same year. By 2003 the parallel of undecided voters in Bulgaria and CEE had altered, with the share of undecided respondents in Bulgaria peaking above the levels of Central Europe. This pattern is particularly evident among respondents with neutral or negative impressions of Europe. For instance 43% of neutral voters in Bulgaria were unsure about EU membership in comparison to 34% from the region. Equivalently, 38% of Bulgarians with negative perceptions were undecided on membership, while only 23% of Central Europeans from the same league shared this opinion.

Table 2 Image of the European Union and Attitudes towards EU Membership

	Vote for EU Membership		Vote against EU Membership		Undecided		Total	
	BG	CEE	BG	CEE	BG	CEE	BG	CEE
Image of the European Union								
Positive	89%	84%	1%	3%	10%	12%	100%	100%
Neutral	47%	41%	6%	13%	47%	46%	100%	100%
Negative	26%	21%	52%	52%	22%	27%	100%	100%
Total	77%	63%	4%	10%	19%	26%	100%	100%

Question: 'Would you say that the impressions of the aims and activities of the European Union are generally ...?'

Source: Calculated from CEEB Survey (raw data) files, November 1997

Table 3 Image of the European Union and Attitudes to EU Membership

	Vote for EU Membership		Vote Against EU Membership		Undecided		Total	
	BG	CEE	BG	CEE	BG	CEE	BG	CEE
Image of the European Union								
positive	94%	93%	0%	2%	5%	5%	100%	100%
neutral	52%	51%	5%	15%	43%	34%	100%	100%
negative	19%	16%	43%	61%	38%	23%	100%	100%
Undecided	23%	38%	7%	10%	70%	52%	100%	100%
Total	75%	68%	4%	14%	21%	18%	100%	100%

Question: 'And, in general, do you have ... image of the European Union?'

Source: Calculated from CCEB Survey (raw data) files, 2003.2

3.2 BENEFITS FROM EU MEMBERSHIP AND SUPPORT FOR IT

The *Eurobarometer* data illustrates that support for Europe is strongly motivated by public expectations of national and personal benefits arising from integration. Moreover, the share of those motivated by benefits has risen across the two studied years²⁸. While in 1997, 85% of respondents who felt that Bulgaria will benefit most from the relationship with Europe, were happy to support European membership, by 2003 the figure has leapt to 96%.

At a personal level the data reflects pretty much the same picture. Although, details on this question are not available for 1997, the information for 2003 shows that 97% of

²⁸ See tables 4 and 5.

those who harboured expectations for advantages from membership were willing in referenda to support it²⁹.

The relationship between benefits and support for European membership could be turned the other way round. Predictably, opposition to European membership is high among those with sceptical views about the benefits of integration at national and individual levels. 32% of those who believed in 1997 that the EU will benefit the most from the relationship with Bulgaria were determined to vote against it. Similarly, in 2003 48% of respondents who foresaw that the EU will bring Bulgaria disadvantages were prepared to reject the membership in referenda. Even, when this relationship was tested at individual level there was little deviation from the above pattern. In 2003, 29% of those that believed the EU will bring them disadvantages were against Bulgaria's application.

In all cases the share of undecided respondents remains high. However, one notices a tendency for those with a positive outlook on Bulgaria's prospectus to benefit from its membership of the EU to be less likely to fall into the undecided category. In 1997, 14% of respondents of the opinion that Bulgaria has more to benefit from its association with the EU were undecided of whether to support the membership application, compared to 40% undecided among those who believed the EU was to benefit the most. Similarly, in 2003, 4% of respondents who believed that becoming a member of the EU will bring Bulgaria advantages were undecided on how to vote which is in contrast to the 44% undecided among those that expected disadvantages from the association. Equally, when people were confident that the EU will bring them personally advantages they were less likely to be undecided. In 2003, only 3% of respondents that expected to gain advantages from the EU were unsure on how to vote. At the same time 46% of those who expected the EU will bring them disadvantages were undecided on membership.

On the whole, Bulgarians who expect to gain from EU membership remain more enthusiastic about the prospect of it when compared to their fellow Europeans. For instance in 1997, 85% of Bulgarians who believed that Bulgaria will benefit most from relations with the EU and 82% of those who expected both sides to benefit equally were supportive of Bulgaria's integration while 76% and 72% of Central Europeans from the same categories were of that opinion. Over time this pattern is sustained as data from 2003 illustrates. 96% of Bulgarians compared to 95% from Central Europe were in favour of membership because they believed it would result in advantages for their country. Even in cases when people predicted the same level of advantages as disadvantages to arise from the association with the EU Bulgarians emerged as more committed to membership (at 63%) than the rest of the region (at 60%). Finally, at a personal level the pattern continues to hold as 97% of Bulgarians who predicted the EU will bring them advantages and 76% of those who expected an equal share of advantages as disadvantages declared themselves in favour of the Bulgarian application in comparison to 95% and 68% respectively from the rest of the accession countries.

Interestingly, while Bulgarians lead the support tables for EU membership on the basis of benefits in comparison to the rest of the region, they come at the bottom in

²⁹ See table 6.

relation to opposition. In 1997 only 1% of Bulgarians of the opinion that Bulgaria has more to gain from the EU and 2% of those who believed that benefits will be equally divided across Bulgaria and the Union were against Bulgaria’s membership in comparison to 4% from both groups for Central and Eastern Europe. The 2003 data strengthens this observation. 5% of Bulgarians who believed that EU membership will bring as many advantages as disadvantages to their country were nevertheless against membership in contrast to 13% from the region. Likewise, 48% of those in Bulgaria who expected the EU to result in disadvantages for their country were opposed to membership compared to the regional average of 63%. Lastly, from a personal perspective the relationship between opposition levels in Bulgaria and the rest of Europe remains unchanged. While 4% of Bulgarians that predicted as many advantages from membership as disadvantages were against membership this was matched by 11% across the other countries. Similarly, 29% of Bulgarians with negative expectations from membership were opposed to the idea of membership compared to 54% from Central Europe.

In relation to the group of undecided respondents on the question of Bulgaria’s membership both Bulgaria and CEE appear to start off with roughly the same percentages in 1997. 14% of Bulgarians and 19% of Europeans who expected their country to benefit most from the relationship with the EU were undecided on membership. In the same manner, 40% of Bulgarians and 38% of regional voters who predicted that most of the benefits will go to the EU were unsure on their position in referenda. By 2003 the distance between undecided voters in Bulgaria and CEE has changed with levels decreasing in CEE while remaining high in Bulgaria. The new relationship is easy to spot particularly among respondents with negative expectations from membership where 44% of Bulgarians were undecided on the subject compared to 28% of the Central Europeans. From the personal graph, the same pattern emerges. 46% of Bulgarians who expected to be worse off as a result of the EU were undecided on the issue of membership while 28% of respondents from the region found themselves in the same position.

Table 4 Benefits from Relations with the EU and Attitudes to EU Membership

	Vote for EU Membership		Vote against EU Membership		Undecided		Total	
	BG	CEE	BG	CEE	BG	CEE	BG	CEE
Benefits from EU Relations								
Bulgaria/Our Country	85%	76%	1%	4%	14%	19%	100%	100%
Both equally benefit	82%	72%	2%	4%	17%	24%	100%	100%
The European Union	27%	31%	32%	31%	40%	38%	100%	100%
Total	78%	65%	4%	10%	17%	25%	100%	100%

Question: 'Who do you think benefits the most out of the relationship between [Our Country] and the European Union?'

Source: Calculated from CEEB Survey (raw data) files, November 1997.

Table 5 Advantages/disadvantages from EU membership and attitudes to EU membership

	Vote for EU Membership		Vote Against EU Membership		Undecided		Total	
	BG	CEE	BG	CEE	BG	CEE	BG	CEE
Advantages/disadvantages from EU membership for Bulgaria								
advantages	96%	95%	0%	1%	4%	4%	100%	100%
as many advantages as disadvantages	63%	60%	5%	13%	32%	27%	100%	100%
disadvantages	8%	10%	48%	63%	44%	28%	100%	100%
Undecided	21%	29%	4%	8%	75%	63%	100%	100%
Total	75%	68%	4%	14%	21%	18%	100%	100%

Question: 'Do you think that becoming a member of the European Union would bring [Our Country] ...?'
 Source: Calculated from CCEB Survey (raw data) files, 2003.2

Table 6 Personal advantages/disadvantages from EU membership

	Vote for EU Membership		Vote Against EU Membership		Undecided		Total	
	BG	CEE	BG	CEE	BG	CEE	BG	CEE
Personal advantages/disadvantages from EU membership								
advantages	97%	95%	0%	1%	3%	3%	100%	100%
as many advantages as disadvantages	76%	68%	4%	11%	20%	21%	100%	100%
disadvantages	24%	19%	29%	54%	46%	28%	100%	100%
Undecided	48%	54%	2%	7%	46%	38%	100%	100%
Total	75%	68%	4%	14%	21%	18%	100%	100%

Question: 'Do you think that [Our Country] becoming a member of the European Union would bring you personally...?'
 Source: Calculated from CCEB Survey (raw data) files, 2003.2

3.3 SOCIOECONOMIC GROUPS AND PATTERNS OF SUPPORT FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION

The positive correlation between expected benefits from the EU and support for membership is also confirmed by data of the social and economic characteristics of the respondents. In line with the utilitarian model of Gable and Palmer people in occupations that permitted them to benefit the most as a result of Bulgaria's accession were overwhelmingly in favour of membership. Moreover, support for the EU has continued to increase across all occupations between 1997 and 2003, while opposition to membership has remained permanently low³⁰.

³⁰ See tables 7 and 8.

For example, in both 1997 and 2003 one of the biggest supporters of Bulgaria's membership was self-employed business proprietors at 96% and 90%, respectively, and students at 71% and 88%. The argument goes that the first group is likely to enjoy the benefits of an integrated market such as larger consumer base, better skilled working force and lower tax burden. The students on the other hand have the benefit of being educated which makes them competitive in the European market and presents them with more opportunities to sell their skills at a higher price.

However, in the Bulgarian case support for Europe is extremely high even among people in categories that have traditionally been perceived to lose out from integration. Take for example pensioners. In 1997 a relatively low 40% of them were in favour of Bulgaria's application but by 2003 this figure has increased to 64%. Other categories also follow the same dynamics. For instance 45% of the housewives were prepared to vote for Europe in 1997 while their share increased to 71% in 2003. Even the unemployed supporters increased in number from 54% in 1997 to 70% in 2003 while the farmers kept their support levels at a permanent 60% across both years.

Interestingly, while support for Europe has continued to grow over the studied period, opposition to European membership is very low (4%) or in many cases non-existent. Where opposition is detected it is always associated with the less advantaged from membership groups of society. For instance in 1997 5% of state workers and 3% of the unemployed were against Europe. In 2003 the same pattern is evident: 4% of the unemployed, 6% of the pensioners, 4% of the unskilled manual workers and 2% of the skilled manual workers were the pockets of opposition to membership.

The less advantaged from membership were also more likely to be undecided on the subject. 55% of housewives felt in this category in 1997 and 29% in 2003. Similarly, 54% of pensioners and 44% of the unemployed in 1997 were unsure on how to vote in referenda and 29% and 26% respectively remained in this position in 2003.

On a comparative note the most striking observations from contrasting occupational data from Bulgaria and Central and Eastern Europe is that support for Europe in Bulgaria appears to be much higher in certain occupations than the regional average while opposition to the idea is lower than in other countries. On the first point the Eurobarometer data from 1997 indicates that for example 85% of public sector employees in Bulgaria are supportive of EU membership compared to 62% from CEE. Another case in point is the group of self employed respondents. 96% of them supported Bulgaria's integration with the EU while only 66% of Central Europeans were in the same position in respect of their countries' membership. Time seems to not have had an effect on this pattern. In 2003, 88% of Bulgarian students were in favour of membership but just 78% of European students felt into the same category. Even the unskilled manual workers were enthusiastic supporters of Europe in the Bulgarian case with 89% of them being in favour of Bulgaria's membership compared to 65% from Central Europe.

Moreover, the high levels of support for Europe in Bulgaria are enhanced by low opposition to the idea across all occupational sectors which stand in visible contrast to clusters of scepticism in other countries. In 1997 12% of self employed people in CEE were against Europe while there was no opposition from them in Bulgaria. Similarly, 13% of farmers and 10% of housewives were against the EU in CEE while in

Bulgaria these groups expressed no concerns. Finally, in 2003 4% of the unemployed were dissatisfied with European membership which is below the CEE average of 15% for this group.

Apart from occupation, age and education seem to be factors that correlate with support for Europe. Two patterns are obvious in this respect. Firstly, support for European membership decreases with age and increases with education. Secondly, support for Europe in Bulgaria has increased across both categories between 1997 and 2003.

Looking at the Eurobarometer data from 1997 67% of the under 29 years of age and 70% of those between 30 and 44 years were in favour of Bulgaria's membership to the EU. Thereafter, the percentage of supporters steadily decreases to 62% in the age group 45-59, 41% of the 60-74 year olds and 29% of the over 75s. The same trend persists in 2003. 82% of those under 29 and 80% of the 30-44 year olds were in favour of EU membership. Then the support rate goes down to 78% in the age group 45-59, 69% among the 60-74 years olds and 53% of those over 75.

In respect of education people with primary education or less are least likely to support membership. 47% of those in this category said they would vote in favour of Bulgaria's application in referenda in 1997 and 55% gave the same response in 2003. Of those who had secondary education 78% were positive about membership in 1997 and 84% in 2003. The biggest supporters appear to be respondents with higher education – 83 and 89% respectively.

Across both years opposition to European membership has remained minimal at 4%. Expectedly, the relationship between opposition to EU membership and age/education is reversed to the described ones. Basically, the opposition rate to membership increases with age. In 1997 less than 1 % of respondents less than 29 years were against membership but about 4% of the plus 75 were of the same opinion. Equally, about 2% of the under 29 group in 2003 would vote against integration compared to 10% of those over 75 years of age.

On the topic of education the opposition to membership decreases with the respondent's level of education. Therefore, in 1997 8% of those with primary education were against membership compared to 5% of the university graduates. Likewise, in 2003 6% of the primary educated respondents were negative about Bulgaria's bid, while only 2% of those with degrees shared the same doubts.

Finally, one notices that the share of undecided respondents goes up with age and goes down with education. The data from Eurobarometer supports this observation. In 1997 35% of the 45-59 age group were undecided on their position on membership while 67% of the over 75s were of the same opinion. Also, in 2003 39% of respondents with primary education or less were unsure about how to vote on membership, while 9% of the people with degrees were in the same position.

The data on age and education from Bulgaria shows that support for Europe is higher among all educational categories and age groups than in the rest of the region. For instance according to 1997 CEEB 78% of people with secondary education in Bulgaria were in favour of Europe in contrast to 63% from Central Europe. Similarly,

83% of graduates were pro-European in Bulgaria which is matched by 68% of degree holders from other countries. In 2003 84% with secondary education were positive about membership while 71% from the region were of the same opinion. Also, 89% with university degrees were enthusiastic about Europe in Bulgaria while the regional average for this group is 79%.

In terms of age similar patterns emerge from the cross country data. In 1997 of those between 15 and 29 years of age 67% were in favour of Europe in Bulgaria compared to 57% from the region. Of the 30-44 year olds 70% were positive about membership in Bulgaria and 59% in Central Europe. Analogously, in 2003 80% of the 30-44 years olds were pro-European in BG but only 69% of the same category were of identical opinion from the rest of the region. Likewise, 78% of those between 45-59 years of age were supportive of Bulgaria's membership compared to 68% of Central Europeans.

Apart from the higher levels of support in Bulgaria one notices that there are lower levels of opposition to membership than in the rest of Europe across all educational and age groups of respondents. In 1997 only 2% of people with secondary education were against membership in Bulgaria in contrast to 9% from the rest of the region. Also in the same year 4% of university graduates were opposed to the Bulgarian accession while the average for the region is 12%. In the same manner in 2003 6% of the 60 to 74 year olds were against membership in Bulgaria compared to 15% of Central Europeans. Similarly, 1% of the 30 to 44 years of age were opposed to integration in Bulgaria while the figure for the whole of Europe is 14%.

Table 7 Occupational Sector , Age, Education and Attitudes to EU Membership in Bulgaria

	Vote for EU Membership		Vote against EU Membership		Undecided		Total	
	BG	CEE	BG	CEE	BG	CEE	BG	CEE
Occupational Sector								
Public sector	85%	62%	0%	11%	15%	27%	100%	100%
State owned enterprise	66%	61%	5%	9%	29%	29%	100%	100%
Self employed	96%	66%	0%	12%	4%	22%	100%	100%
Private sector	77%	57%	4%	11%	20%	32%	100%	100%
Agricultural sector	65%	45%	0%	13%	35%	41%	100%	100%
Pensioner	40%	49%	6%	9%	54%	42%	100%	100%
Student	71%	57%	0%	7%	29%	36%	100%	100%
Housewife	45%	48%	0%	10%	55%	43%	100%	100%
Temporary Not working	54%	53%	3%	7%	44%	40%	100%	100%
Other	64%	56%	0%	9%	36%	35%	100%	100%
Total	58%	55%	4%	9%	38%	36%	100%	100%
Age								
29 years and younger	67%	57%	0%	9%	33%	35%	100%	100%
30 - 44	70%	59%	4%	9%	25%	32%	100%	100%
45 - 59	62%	57%	3%	10%	35%	33%	100%	100%
60 - 74	41%	48%	7%	10%	52%	42%	100%	100%
75 years and older	29%	44%	4%	7%	67%	49%	100%	100%
Total	58%	55%	4%	9%	38%	36%	100%	100%
Education								
Primary or less	47%	48%	8%	10%	46%	42%	100%	100%
Secondary Uncompleted	-	61%	-	10%	-	29%	-	100%
Secondary completed	78%	63%	2%	9%	20%	27%	100%	100%
Higher Education/ University/ College	83%	68%	4%	12%	12%	20%	100%	100%
Total	68%	60%	4%	10%	27%	30%	100%	100%

Source: Calculated from CEEB Survey (raw data) files, November 1997

Table 8 Occupational Sector, Age, Education and Attitudes to EU Membership

	Vote for EU Membership		Vote against EU Membership		Undecided		Total	
	BG	CEE	BG	CEE	BG	CEE	BG	CEE
Occupational Sector								
Responsible for ordinary shopping	71%	64%	0%	14%	29%	22%	100%	100%
Student	88%	78%	0%	9%	12%	13%	100%	100%
Unemployed	70%	64%	4%	15%	26%	21%	100%	100%
Retired	64%	63%	6%	14%	29%	23%	100%	100%
Farmer	60%	58%	0%	16%	40%	25%	100%	100%
Fisherman	-	67%	-	33%	-	0%	-	100%
Professional	60%	79%	20%	12%	20%	9%	100%	100%
Owner of a shop	79%	73%	0%	11%	21%	16%	100%	100%
Business proprietors	90%	78%	0%	9%	10%	13%	100%	100%
Employed professional	90%	74%	0%	12%	10%	14%	100%	100%
General management	100%	85%	0%	7%	0%	9%	100%	100%
Middle management	92%	82%	3%	8%	5%	10%	100%	100%
Employed at desk	83%	72%	4%	14%	13%	13%	100%	100%
Employed but travelling	90%	69%	0%	14%	10%	17%	100%	100%
Service job	89%	70%	0%	14%	11%	16%	100%	100%
Supervisor	100%	69%	0%	10%	0%	21%	100%	100%
Skilled manual worker	89%	65%	2%	19%	9%	16%	100%	100%
Other (unskilled) manual worker, servant	76%	57%	4%	17%	20%	26%	100%	100%
Total	75%	68%	4%	14%	21%	18%	100%	100%
Age								
29 years and younger	82%	74%	2%	12%	16%	14%	100%	100%
30 - 44	80%	69%	1%	14%	19%	17%	100%	100%
45 - 59	78%	68%	4%	15%	18%	18%	100%	100%
60 - 74	69%	63%	6%	15%	26%	22%	100%	100%
75 years and older	53%	59%	10%	12%	37%	29%	100%	100%
Total	75%	68%	4%	14%	21%	18%	100%	100%
Education								
Primary or less	55%	58%	6%	13%	39%	29%	100%	100%
Secondary Uncompleted	-	61%	-	17%	-	21%	-	100%
Secondary Completed	84%	71%	3%	14%	13%	15%	100%	100%
Higher Education/ University/ College	89%	79%	2%	10%	9%	11%	100%	100%
Total	75%	68%	4%	14%	21%	18%	100%	100%

Source: Calculated from CCEB Survey (raw data) files, 2003.2

3.4 KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE EU AND SUPPORT

The degree to which people are informed about the EU in Bulgaria also influences their positions on membership. Simply put the more people know about Europe in

general the more likely they are to support Bulgaria's membership³¹. Unfortunately, this observation cannot be tested over time on the basis of the Eurobarometer data as information about knowledge is not directly contested prior to 2001.

Nevertheless, the positive relationship between knowledge and support is easy to deduct from the 2003 CCEB survey. When asked where they place themselves on the scale of 1 to 10 in regards to knowledge of the EU, (with 10 being the highest value) 96% of respondents that gave themselves a score of 10 were prepared to vote in favour of membership in referenda. Of those that achieved 9 points virtually all (100%) were supportive of membership. From then on the support rate decreases as peoples' confidence in their knowledge of Europe plummets. Between 90 to 96% of respondents that measure their knowledge to be between the 8th and 5th mark on the scale were positive about Bulgaria's application while 89% and 80% of those positioned at the 4th and 3rd level shared the same views. In contrast, respondents with limited (score 2) or no knowledge (score 1) about Europe were the least optimistic about membership with 61% and 30% supporting it, respectively.

The second trend that one notices looking at the figures from table nine is that the less people know about Europe the more likely it is for them to be either undecided on membership or opposed to it altogether (although opposition levels are very low). About 7% and 8% of those who know nothing (score 1) or very little (score 2) about Europe were against Bulgaria's membership compared to 0% opposition of the better informed (scores 9, 8, 7 and 6). Similarly, between 17% and 63% of respondents from the bottom end of the scale (scores 3, 2, and 1) were undecided on the topic of membership, while those from the top end were rarely so (scores 10, 9, 8).

When comparing the data from Bulgaria and CEE on the topic of knowledge in all cases Central Europeans appear to be less supportive of Europe than Bulgarians. For instance 96% of Bulgarians that define their level of knowledge to be at level 10 on the scale were supportive of membership in contrast to 86% from CEE. At the opposite end of the scale 80% of Bulgarian respondents with knowledge level 3 were in favour of accession, which parallels 59% from the rest of the region.

In relation to opposition to the EU the reverse pattern is true: in all cases Bulgarians are less anti-Europe than their regional counterparts. Of those Bulgarians that mark their knowledge as 4 and 5 on the scale only 2% are prepared to vote against membership which is matched by 13% and 16% respectively from Central Europe. Even among better informed voters the same relationship forms. 4% of respondents that know a great deal about Europe (level 10) in Bulgaria said they would oppose the country's application. This is in contrast to 12% from CEE.

Moving the analysis one step forward it is tempting to probe what factors might contribute to the forming of the relationship between knowledge and support for EU in Bulgaria. At this point it is a good guess to suggest that education might be the *driver* behind this pattern, for the correlation between knowledge and support is distinctively similar to that of education and support outlined in the previous section.

³¹ See table 9

To test this proposition attention turns to table 10 which portrays how knowledge about the EU is affected by levels of education of EU supporters. It is easy to spot that in the case of Bulgaria as well as Central and Eastern Europe the more educated strata of the populations appear to be better informed about the EU. As the level of education decreases so does knowledge about the Union. For example, the largest share of Bulgarians (44%) and Central Europeans (40%) that know a great deal about the EU (level 10) are those with degrees. At around the middle of the scale on knowledge (levels 4 and 5) 60% and 53% of Bulgarians and 45% from the CEE have secondary education. At the lower end, which incorporates respondents that know nothing about the Union, the biggest group are those with primary level of education or less – 64% in the case of Bulgaria and 49% from CEE. Therefore, education indeed is the variable that holds the key to high levels of support for Europe.

Table 9 Knowledge of the EU and Attitudes to EU Membership

	Vote for EU Membership		Vote against EU Membership		Undecided		Total	
	BG	CEE	BG	CEE	BG	CEE	BG	CEE
Knowledge and the EU								
Knows nothing at all	30%	34%	7%	16%	63%	50%	100%	100%
2	61%	50%	8%	17%	31%	33%	100%	100%
3	80%	59%	3%	17%	17%	24%	100%	100%
4	89%	68%	2%	16%	9%	17%	100%	100%
5	90%	76%	2%	13%	8%	12%	100%	100%
6	93%	82%	0%	10%	7%	8%	100%	100%
7	96%	86%	0%	9%	4%	5%	100%	100%
8	94%	89%	3%	6%	3%	5%	100%	100%
9	100%	86%	0%	9%	0%	6%	100%	100%
Knows a great deal	96%	86%	4%	12%	0%	2%	100%	100%
Undecided	60%	54%	4%	13%	36%	33%	100%	100%
Total	75%	68%	4%	14%	21%	18%	100%	100%

Question: 'Using this scale, how much do you feel you know about the EU, its policies, its institutions?'

Source: Calculated from CCEB Survey (raw data) files, 2003.2

Table 10 Knowledge of the EU and Educational level of EU supporters

	Primary or Less		Secondary Uncompleted		Secondary Completed		Uni/College		Total	
	BG	CEE	BG	CEE	BG	CEE	BG	CEE	BG	CEE
Knows nothing at all										
Knows nothing at all	64%	49%	-	15%	31%	29%	5%	7%	100%	100%
2	51%	37%	-	17%	42%	37%	8%	9%	100%	100%
3	31%	24%	-	14%	55%	45%	14%	17%	100%	100%
4	20%	18%	-	17%	60%	45%	20%	20%	100%	100%
5	13%	14%	-	17%	53%	45%	33%	24%	100%	100%
6	11%	15%	-	15%	46%	43%	43%	27%	100%	100%
7	10%	11%	-	12%	50%	43%	40%	34%	100%	100%
8	12%	10%	-	11%	38%	42%	50%	37%	100%	100%
9	0%	11%	-	8%	27%	42%	73%	40%	100%	100%
Knows a great deal	15%	15%	-	14%	41%	31%	44%	40%	100%	100%
Undecided	53%	24%	-	12%	27%	46%	20%	18%	100%	100%
Total	27%	19%	-	15%	49%	43%	25%	24%	100%	100%

Source: CCEB 2003.2

Questions: 'How much do you feel you know about the EU, its policies, its institutions?'
'What is your level of education?'

3.5 PARTY AFFILIATION AND SUPPORT FOR EUROPE

The last relationship that this article describes is between party affiliation and support for Europe in Bulgaria³². This is an intriguing relation for it is indicative of the extent to which political parties have an effect on public opinion. In this context, *Eurobarometer* data for 1997 and 2003 leads to the observation that supporters of major parties in Bulgaria are significantly more likely to vote for European membership than those who are politically indifferent. In 1997 68% of those who said they would vote for a major party were prepared to support European membership in referenda compared to a bare 42% of European supporters among the politically non-aligned. Analogously, in 2003 77% of party supporters were enthusiastic about Europe in contrast to 69% of the politically neutral.

Moreover, people with party affiliation are less likely to be undecided on the topic of membership than those without a specific political orientation. In 1997, 29% of party supporters were undecided on their position in regards to the EU which parallels 54% of the voters without political preferences. The same pattern repeats for 2003: 18% of party supporters were undecided on membership but the figure grows to 26% among the politically unbiased.

Lastly, opposition to European membership does not appear to be politically motivated in the Bulgarian case as people are equally likely to oppose membership irrespective of whether they support a political party or not. In 1997, the percentage of

³² See table 11

those against membership was 4% across both groups and in 2003 it paused at the 5% mark.

As in other cases support for Europe in Bulgaria across both categories is always higher than the average for CEE. In 1997 68% of main party supporters in Bulgaria were in favour of membership in contrast to 64% from Central Europe. Of those that would not vote 42% were positive about Europe in Bulgaria compared to 41% from the region. Over time this pattern is sustained. In 2003 77% of Bulgarian voters affiliated with a main party were willing to support Bulgaria's application while the figure for CEE is 74%. Of those that would not vote in an election 69% were pro-Europe in Bulgaria compared to 54% from the other countries.

The opposite relationship holds in relation to opposition to membership between Bulgaria and the rest of CEE with levels of opposition in Bulgaria being always lower than those for the region. In 1997 only 4% of Bulgarians that would or would not support a main party were against Europe which parallels by 9% and 13% respectively of Central Europeans. Similarly, in 2003 5% of Bulgarians were sceptical of membership while 13% of European voters that would vote for a main party and 16% of those who would not cast a vote were of the same opinion in CEE.

Table 11 Voting Intentions and Attitudes to EU Membership

	Vote for EU Membership				Vote Against EU Membership				Undecided			
	1997		2003		1997		2003		1997		2003	
	BG	CEE	BG	CEE	BG	CEE	BG	CEE	BG	CEE	BG	CEE
Voting Intentions												
Vote for Main Party	68%	64%	77%	74%	4%	9%	5%	13%	29%	27%	18%	13%
Would not Vote	42%	41%	69%	54%	4%	13%	5%	16%	54%	47%	26%	30%

Question: 'If there were a General Election tomorrow, which party would you vote for, or might you be inclined to vote for?'

Source: Calculated from CEEB Survey (raw data) files, November 1997.

Calculated from CCEB Survey (raw data) files, 2003.2.

4. EXPLAINING PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR EUROPEAN MEMBERSHIP

The most fertile approach of uncovering the causes for public support of European membership in Bulgaria is by determining what patterns 'support' forms with other variables and how these relationships are rationalized in the Bulgarian environment. The previous section went some way into unwrapping patterns of EU support, while this part of the article aims to deliver their explanation.

Pattern One: Respondents with positive images of the EU are more supportive of EU membership and less likely to be undecided on the topic than those with negative impressions

From the previous section it is visible that support for European membership in Bulgaria is high among those who have positive impressions of the European Union. This stimulates the logic that support for the EU is possible to understand by discovering the components which make up the European image in the country.

The question therefore is: on the basis of what have Bulgarians built up their positive impressions of Europe? The first piece of the puzzle goes back to the moment of regime change from communism to democracy that took place in Bulgaria in 1989. After the initial euphoria of dismantling the communist regime the public attention turned to contemplating their future and searching for a direction to go. At this point in time for many the idea of turning towards Europe was not understood in the present framework of enlargement but rather it was a security mechanism that Bulgaria will not lapse back to a totalitarian leadership and a guarantee that key reforms will be overseen by an outside entity until the political elite managed to regain the public trust.

Coming from this perspective in many senses the EU initially assumed the role of a protector of the Bulgarian public which intensified in the following years. As early as 1990 the EU launched the PHARE programme in Bulgaria through which it engaged in the reconstruction and stabilization of the infrastructure network and some of the industry sectors. Outside the economy the EU has always encouraged political activism, respect for justice and human rights and observance of democratic principles. In addition, it has twice intervened in Bulgaria to ensure political stability: once as an observer of the Roundtable talks between BSP and UDF in 1990 and again in 1996 when it advised the Videnov (BSP) administration to resign to calm public protests against his government. The argument therefore is that primarily through such initiatives the public impressions of the EU were developed in Bulgaria and as time went by they remained in stark contrast to the impotence of Bulgarian parties to introduce change.

The dichotomy between political stagnation and European activism in Bulgaria is the quintessential reason for the positive public image of Europe and ultimately support for it. While BSP and UDF were exhausting their chances to move forward with the transition for nearly a decade and instead preferred to entertain bi-polar relations on ideological grounds, voters were becoming more convinced that the only way to achieve improvement was through involvement with Europe which appeared active, stable and democratic. This willingness of the Bulgarian public to transfer their trust from the governing parties to the European Union explains why in the Bulgarian context it is difficult to construct the usual anti-EU arguments based on “sovereignty/national identity” that in some countries have proved popular with the electorates. As far as the Bulgarian public was concerned it was a clear choice between domestic political authority and stagnation or European integration and reforms.

Pattern Two: Support for Europe is strongly motivated by expectations for national and personal benefits arising from membership with those optimistic about their ability to gain less likely to be undecided.

The positive image of the EU is only one of the dimensions of support for membership in Bulgaria. More importantly, perhaps it is the expected benefits from integration at national and personal levels that determine the high levels of support for Europe.

The relationship between benefits and support for the EU has a number of origins. For a start there has been virtually no informative and realistic debate in Bulgaria on the topic of membership and the public is by and large unfamiliar of the costs and benefits that membership entails.

When debate has occurred it has usually been emotionally charged and geared towards the “reinvention of a progressive identity” which trades on the uncertainty of Bulgarians of where they culturally belong. This is because the Bulgarian identity per se is a mixture of Balkan and European influences that has built up throughout the centuries. To most Bulgarians it is the Balkan part of their culture that they feel in tune with but which in their own admission is associated with negative qualities such as laziness and backwardness that makes them feel second rate Europeans.

Therefore, most present arguments about European membership in Bulgaria have used this identity crisis by suggesting that the Bulgarians have a historic, one-off opportunity to reinforce their progressiveness through showing support for the European project. This has placed many people in the position in which even if they do not believe that European membership is right for Bulgaria they feel they could not waste away their chances. Similarly, it has led respondents to overestimate the benefits arising from European membership for Bulgaria and underestimating the costs.

The second reason for the positive correlation between support for Europe and expected gains is that people in occupations that would normally oppose the European

membership are the same people that have been negatively affected by the transition process and to them Europe presents an alternative to their current situation. A case in point is the Bulgarian farmers. As part of the EU they expect to receive substantial subsidies for farming. Outside the EU they have had to bear the costs of the land reform (introduced and withheld by various governments on a number of occasions) which resulted in farmers having plots of land at different locations and having to change their farming methods to suit the new conditions. Also, apart from household farming most other categories of farmers have found it difficult to make a profit of their produce due to the low buy-out prices that the governments recommend.

Similarly, new regulation from the EU has made it compulsory for Bulgaria to recognize the occupation “housewife” and women in this position can since 2004 receive a minimum wage and accrue points on a pension plan. Without the EU most of these respondents would have been classes as unemployed and received no financial reward for their work at home.

This leads us to the conclusion that effectively in the Bulgarian case there are no disadvantaged groups from EU membership which will account for the high levels of support for the EU in the country. On this point for reasons of clarity it has to be noted that in recent years a small group (of 1000 members at most) of people with anti-EU views has formed around the issue of closing down the nuclear reactors in Kozloduy because it will lead to job cuts and higher energy prices. The publicity that this group has generated has in some cases (particularly in front of European institutions) given the impression that there is a lack of consensus at public level on membership while the reality is that the closure of the power plants remains very much a local issue and not substantial enough to raise concerns for integration.

Pattern Three: Support for Europe increases with education

Pattern Four: Support for the Europe decreases with age

Pattern Five: Support for Europe increases with knowledge about the EU

The discussion so far has recognized that most Bulgarians expect to gain from EU membership and this is a main reason why they are willing to support it. However, looking at the support levels on the basis of age and education of the respondents, two patterns clearly emerge: 1) support for Europe increases with education and 2) support for Europe decreases with age.

The most straightforward way of explaining these patterns is through the utilitarian model of Gable and Palmer which predicts that young people and those with better education stand more to gain from EU membership. This is because people that are better educated have the skills to be competitive in a European market and similarly those of young age can expect to live long enough to enjoy all the benefits of

integration such as visa-free travel and common currency, which may materialize gradually rather than straight away.

In addition, knowledge about the EU has a positive effect on support for Europe but as the previous section illustrated this pattern occurs primarily as a by-product of the relationship between knowledge and education. One generic explanation in this respect is that the better educated people believe they know more about Europe because of their educational levels but in fact that may not always be the case. It is also true that those with education are more likely to experience EU policies in the work place prior to accession, to get involved in public discussions or seminars on membership or gain insights about the EU in other similar ways which would raise their levels of awareness.

Pattern Six: Supporters of main parties are more likely to be supportive of EU membership than those without political preferences

Pattern Seven: Higher than average support, lower than average opposition to EU membership in Bulgaria

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