

WINNING THE HEARTS AND MINDS...AND WALLETS... OF THE PEOPLE?

Economic Self-Interest and Support For EU Accession in
Candidate States

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Abstract

Scholars on both sides of the Atlantic are increasingly interested in explaining volatility in popular support for the European Union's eastward enlargement. While a rich body of research documents attitudinal trends in existing member states, remarkably less effort has been devoted to integrating what we know about citizen preferences in candidate states into the mainstream political science literature. Despite expectations that the EU's allure would produce strong and steady enthusiasm for accession among central and eastern European publics, considerable cross-national and temporal variation exists. Seeking to explain some of that variation, this article gauges the relationship between egocentric, pocketbook evaluations of economic conditions and support for EU membership. Drawing upon evidence from ten Europe Agreement countries and focusing particular attention on Romania, Hungary, and Estonia, the analysis casts significant new light on the debate between two alternative approaches-the "individual opportunities" and "state guarantees society" perspectives.

Key words: EU, accession support, enlargement, individual opportunity, state guarantees society

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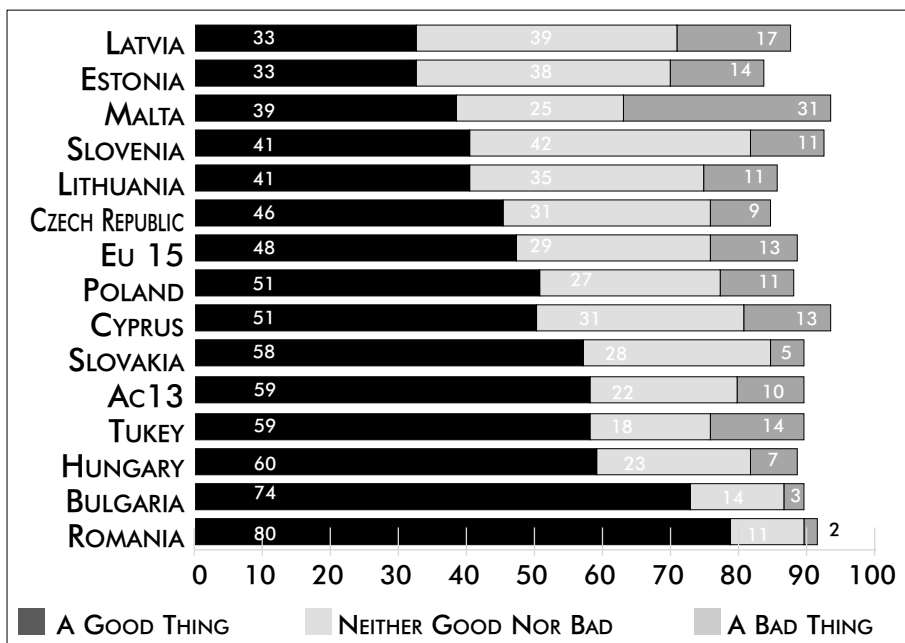
In 1989 Jacques Delors argued that for Europe's experiment in economic and political integration to succeed it would be necessary to "win the hearts and minds of the people."¹ It is unlikely that Delors at that time could have anticipated how his words would resonate more than a decade later, not just in western Europe but throughout the new and consolidating democracies in central and eastern Europe. The thirteen countries now actively negotiating entry into the European Union contain electorates that, at one extreme, are fervently eager to join the EU, and, at the other extreme, are tepid in their support for entering a rich club that may swallow them whole. Far from the heady days of the early 1990s, when newly democratized central and eastern European countries enjoyed a near euphoric public consensus that eventual participation in the EU would be desirable, recent years have witnessed increased volatility.

Although a well-established political science literature addresses attitudinal variation in support for EU membership among western publics, core questions remain unanswered in the accession countries. One such question concerns the explanatory weight of individual-level economic evaluations for understanding support for EU membership-e.g., do personal financial expectations alter preferences for membership? Drawing upon evidence from ten Europe Agreement countries, this study finds clear support for the argument that egocentric, prospective pocketbook evaluations are strongly and positively related to support for EU membership.

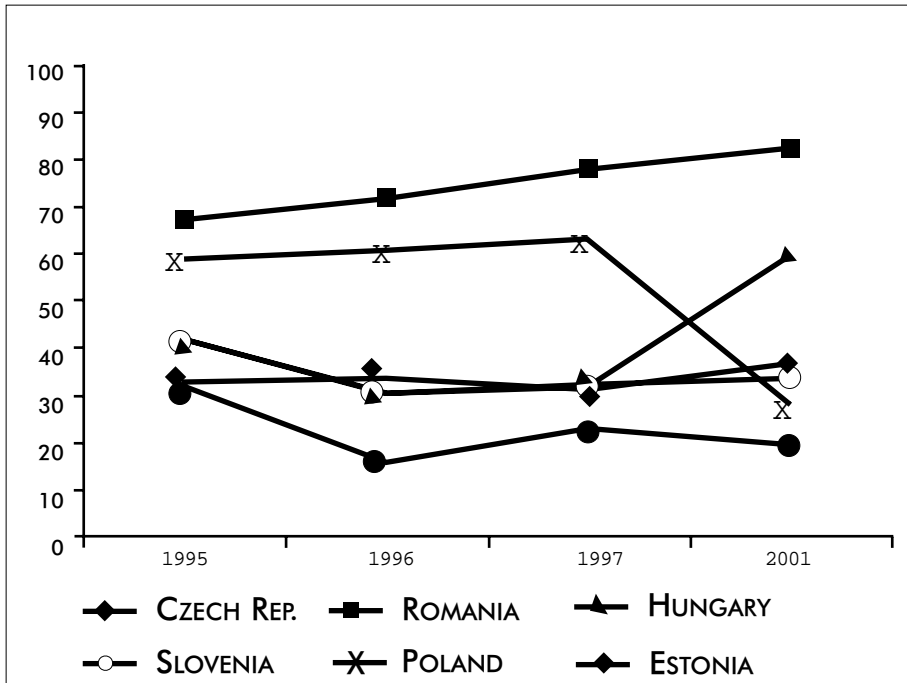
DYNAMICS OF SUPPORT FOR EU MEMBERSHIP IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

A cross-sectional assessment of popular perceptions about potential EU membership reveals the extent of attitudinal variation that currently exists within and across candidate countries. As evidenced by the applicant country Eurobarometer survey data presented in *Figure 1*, in no country case does the number of respondents who believe their country's membership in the EU would be "a bad thing" outnumber those who perceive membership would be "a good thing." Still, although 59% of the entire thirteen-country sample evaluates membership positively (in striking contrast to the 48% in existing Member States), there remains considerable ambivalence as well as a host of countries (Czech Republic, Lithuania, Slovenia, Malta, Estonia, and Latvia) wherein fewer than half the survey populations rated the promise of EU participation as "good." Super-majorities exist in Romania (80%) and Bulgaria (74%), and solid positive perceptions are registered in Poland, Cyprus, Slovakia, Turkey and Hungary. For our present purposes, the most revealing finding from these descriptive data is that the range of average country perceptions is a substantial 47 percentage points. There is, to be sure, considerable cross-national variation worthy of our attention.

¹ Jacques Delors, "A Necessary Union," speech delivered at College of Europe (Bruges, Belgium, 17 October 1989).

Figure 1. Support (%) for EU Membership October 2001

More instructive are longitudinal indicators of attitudinal variation. *Figure 2* provides a measure of net support for entry into the EU (e.g., how respondents would vote in a national referendum) in select countries since 1995. The data reveal the early strength of support for EU membership, not long after nascent democratic governments in numerous central and east European countries first launched bids to become part of the wealthy and stable club to their west. Yet, the trajectories of support have not been uniform since the mid-1990s. In Romania, where support has been high from the outset, the trend has been distinctly upward. Conversely, in Poland preferences for the country's EU accession started high but dropped precipitously. Both Slovenia and the Czech Republic began with much more modest popular enthusiasm for entry into the EU, and each has seen that position maintain the status quo. Hungary, beginning with a similar level of support as Slovenia, has seen that support rise considerably by the end of 2001, thus exemplifying yet another trend. Estonia, finally, has been a consistent laggard. Such variation, it is safe to argue, demands explanation.

Figure 2. Referendum on EU Entry (% in Favor Minus % Against)

The road to a "Europe of the 28" is one along which public opinion will likely play an increasingly significant role in shaping the speed and character of European integration. Those who wonder whether the seeming inertia of integrationist pressures will lead deterministically to some inevitable United States of Europe need only look so far as Denmark, Norway and Switzerland to be reminded that public sentiments can indeed slow down-if not halt-such plans. Denmark has twice been the "mouse that roared" (Downs 2001) rejecting the Maastricht Treaty in June 1992 and then vetoing the government-endorsed proposal to participate in the EU's single currency zone in September 2000. Norwegian voters in 1994 turned down their government's latest bid to gain entry into the EU, and more recently Swiss voters in 2001 rebuffed plans to commence negotiations on EU membership. Given the instability and unpredictability that have seemingly complicated the plans of EU architects in western Europe, it seems reasonable to accord analytical weight to opinion dynamics in the central and eastern European countries (CEECs). Clearly, within the CEECs accession will have to pass the test of popular approval (Kolankiewicz 1994; Cichowski 2000).

EXPLAINING SUPPORT FOR EU ACCESSION

A burgeoning literature seeks to isolate the determinants of individual and mass preferences for EU integration (cf. Anderson 1995; Eichenberg and Dalton 1993; Franklin, Marsh and McLaren 1994; Gabel and Whitten 1997). Despite such efforts, however, "little is known about how citizens in these political member countries (CEEC's) reason and develop preferences about how they view potential membership in the European Union" (Anderson and Tverdova 2000, 3). Much of the extant literature addresses public opinion in the existing member states of the EU; however, findings from studies conducted in these states may not be readily transferable to the CEECs. Beyond the issue of exportability, the existing body of understanding is often fraught with internal inconsistencies and contradictions. Cumulative research findings, in short, are inconclusive (cf. Inglehart, Rabier and Reif, 1991; Hewstone, 1986; Handley, 1981; Feld and Wildgen, 1976; Shephard, 1975). Thus, the state of the art in attitudinal studies derived from data in the EU member states cannot simply be superimposed on the accession states and accepted a priori as an accurate explanation of popular preferences. An emerging literature on support for EU accession in central and eastern Europe reveals the complexity of opinion formation in this region, and it confirms the necessity of empirically testing hypotheses considered conventional in studies of the more established western countries (cf., Phinnemore 1999; Cichowski 2000; Grabbe and Hughes 1999; Kucia 1999). It is to this important new body of literature that the present article seeks to contribute.

No Shortage of Explanatory Factors

Popular support for EU membership can be compared to a Hydra; scholars have argued and attempted to explain such support on the basis of a variety of factors, each of which might appear at first glance to be genuine. Because "public opinion has grown from a relatively minor role in the integration process to a principle focus of political and scholarly attention" (Dalton and Eichenberg 1998, 252), the universe of potential explanatory factors is increasingly crowded. Gabel's (1998b) is perhaps the best and most useful survey of the principal theoretical schools. Among the many rival approaches he identifies is that which stresses the importance of cognitive mobilization-educational achievement and information availability yield citizens well equipped to evaluate (and ultimately endorse) the EU's complexities (Inglehart, Rabier and Reif 1991). According to this thesis, "as a citizen's cognitive mobilization increases, she is more familiar with and less threatened by the topic of European integration" (Gabel 1998, 335). Ideology and political affinities-particularly support for free market principles and democratic governance-also emerge as potent determinants of individual preference formation (Anderson 1998; Cichowski 2000). The CEECs have witnessed considerable instability in left/right ideological attachments over the last decade, and perceptions of the free market and its

competitive pressures have likewise exhibited volatility; as such, this variable is an important one in any explanatory model. Some evidence does indeed exist to suggest that supporters of Left parties are less favorable to European integration than supporters of Right parties (Budge, Robertson and Hearl 1987). There is, moreover, evidence that citizens may see support for the EU as a plebiscite on the performance of their incumbent national government (Franklin, Vander Eijk and Marsh 1995). Further, a sectoral interests approach captures some of the explanatory power of occupational variables in the study of EU support. Immersion into the European Union is likely to hold variable benefits for citizens depending upon their employment in agriculture, commerce, service and other sectors. All told, cognitive, ideological/political and occupational variables are worthy of inclusion in any study of preferences for EU membership, although studies are not always consistent in assessing their impact.

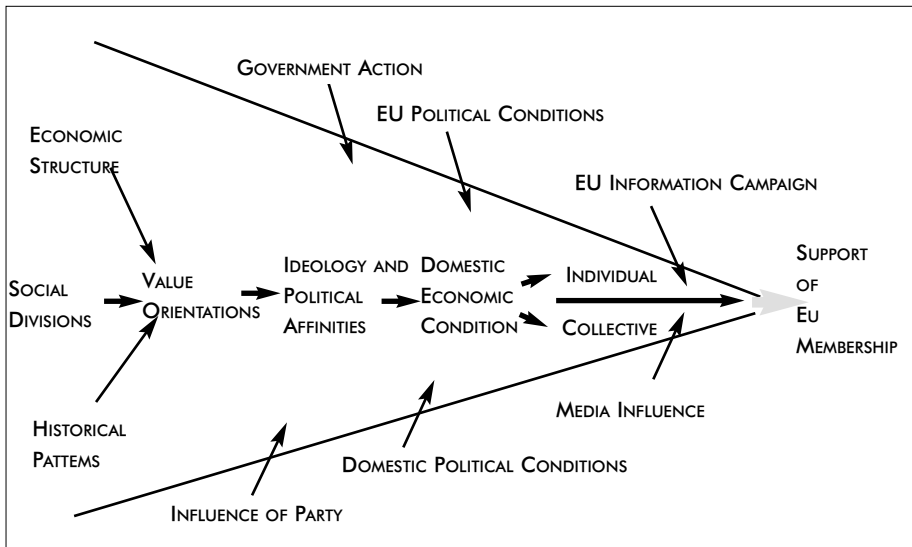
Our interest in this article, however, is in explicitly economic determinants of support for EU membership. After all, according to Preston (1997), EU membership is ultimately associated with economic well being, and as a "rich elite club" (Fagin 1999, 187) the EU is sure to attract the aspirations of eligible neighboring countries. Economic derivatives of support for EU membership have indeed drawn scholarly attention; however, the lion's share of this attention has been devoted to linking aggregate measures (inflation, unemployment, and GDP growth) with opinions about the EU rather than linking evaluations of individual economic conditions to preferences for EU membership. Where individual-level economic evaluations have been considered, they have tended to focus on assessments of the national-rather than the household-economy. The differences between sociotropic and egocentric economic evaluations have not yet been fully explored in this context, which is surprising given Gabel and Whitten's recognition that "individuals, not national publics, perceive economic conditions and form political attitudes" (1997, 82). Gabel is among the few who systematically explore the explanatory potential of individual-level economic assessments, and his work in particular serves as a stepping stone for the present endeavor. Among the existing member states, Gabel finds, there is evidence that citizens base their evaluations of EU membership "on the welfare they personally derive from European integration" (1998a, 11). The expectation of personal financial improvement as "a source of variation in public opinion research" (Gabel 1998a, 123) ties the debate over EU accession to the study of EU enlargement "as a function of people's self interest" (Anderson and Tverdova 2000, 1).

We situate economic influences on preferences for EU membership within a general model (*Figure 3*).² The "funnel of causality" predicting support for EU membership assumes that the society's underlying political divisions--from which individual citizens draw their value orientations--are first a function of socioeconomic conditions: economic structure, social divisions such as

2 This model draws inspiration from the early sociopsychological models of voting (see Campbell et al. 1960, 1966). See also Dalton (2002).

ethnicity or religion, and historical patterns such as regional divisions, urban/rural cleavages, and legacies of the previous regime. These forces, we contend, do structure group loyalties and basic value orientations, but at the mouth of the funnel they are at least somewhat removed from the actual decisions of citizens in accession states over whether or not to support entry into the EU. As the causal funnel narrows these basic values condition individual ideological and political affinities (e.g., left-right self-placement and partisanship), as do the performance and messages offered by political parties and the incumbent government. Whereas conventional voting models would argue that these ideological and political affinities would feed directly into candidate/party choice in elections, for the purpose of explaining preferences for EU membership we suggest that economic factors can have an even more proximate impact. Domestic economic conditions--which are clearly themselves at least partially functions of internal and external political choices--shape citizens' perceptions about their lot, both individually and collectively as a society. These perceptions and evaluations held by myopic voters (and therefore subject to influence by the media and the EU's own publicity campaigns) will determine individual support for EU membership.

Figure 3. The Funnel of Causality Predicting Support for EU Membership



We have suggested that economic evaluations and self-interest should enjoy a privileged place in models seeking to explain support for EU accession. Why, though, should they matter? The underlying logic of economic self-interest can, we contend, be viewed from two perspectives--the "state guarantees society" perspective and the "individual opportunities" perspective.

The "State Guarantees Society" Perspective

According to one line of reasoning, those individuals in the CEECs who perceive their personal financial circumstances to be improving will "vote" for the status quo (i.e., against EU accession), while citizens who feel that their financial standing is declining will support EU membership. This view is advanced by McManus (1998) who maintains that due to the risks involved with an uncertain status in highly competitive EU markets, citizens who already enjoy prosperous and improving pocketbook finances hesitate to support integration into the EU. Entry into the EU, McManus envisions, can threaten prosperity simply because it represents a deviation from the status quo—those privileged by the status quo, it follows, will then be less sanguine about the virtues of joining the EU club. Conversely, people who negatively evaluate their personal pocketbook finances and who anticipate a future reduction in economic standing are likely to view the EU as an opportunity for improvement. The EU, in this vision, is the guarantor of economic salvation and security. Those expecting personal financial downturn prefer state (or, in this case, supranational) guarantees. As such, these persons are more likely to have preferences for their country to join the Union (Franklin, Marsh and McLauren 1994; Franklin, Marsh and Wliezen 1994).

The Individual Opportunities Perspective

An alternative line of reasoning suggests that, rather than turning their backs on the EU, people who evaluate their prospective pocketbook finances positively are likely to support EU membership. Conversely, citizens who perceive that their condition is in decline will prefer to uphold the status quo. Dalton's (1991) work supports this view that those with greater economic comfort tend to be better able to absorb risk. Less dependent upon public authority for their economic security, these persons can turn to opportunities (e.g., EU integration) to parlay their existing prosperity into even greater riches. In EU membership, these economic optimists see "greater investment opportunities provided by more open financial markets" (Gabel 1998b, 337) as well as low inflation. The flip side, according to Dalton, is that "...the more pessimistic one's economic outlook the more likely one is to prefer a 'state guarantees' society" (1991, 12). Inglehart also sustains this posture in his work, which analyzes the individual opportunities/state guarantees society dichotomy (Inglehart 1977; Inglehart 1990).

Our interest in this article is to tease out and test some of the nuances associated with these alternative perspectives. There would appear to be prima facie evidence to support the assertion that people with a favorable financial outlook will support the institutionalization of favorable relations with wealthy neighbors (i.e., they will be inclined to support joining the EU). There already

exists much earlier evidence that citizens from the COMECON countries benefited from trade with the European Community (Ransom 1973). This finding from an earlier era could logically be extended to the post-Communist CEECs where such perceived benefits would be transferred into support for membership in the EU. It is not, moreover, an uncommon layman's observation in these countries that people who anticipate economic hardship will indeed prefer state protection. For many years in these countries, the state has been associated with job security, health benefits, housing, free education and the like. It would be rational for such persons to seek to maintain financial security rather than risking the unknown (e.g. EU membership). Such generalizations, however, deserve systematic empirical investigation-not just anecdotal, if compelling, support.

HYPOTHESIS AND DATA

This article tests the relationship between perceived economic self-interest and support for EU accession. In particular, our interest is in prospective evaluations of individual economic condition and the relationship, if any, these evaluations have for citizen willingness to support entry into the EU. We therefore hypothesize that there should be a direct and positive relationship between anticipated household earnings and support for entry into the EU in a hypothetical national referendum. Citizens in central and eastern European countries who perceive their personal financial situation to be improving are more likely to support EU membership; citizens who perceive their personal financial situation as deteriorating are, thus, less likely to vote for EU membership. We recognize that this hypothesis represents but one piece in a much larger puzzle of how to explain citizen reactions to the prospects of joining one of the world's most ambitious experiments in economic, social, and political cooperation. We find, though, that this piece is pivotal-egocentric, prospective evaluations of the pocketbook economy may constitute a crucial mechanism that triggers citizen choice.

Our empirical investigation focuses on a discrete time period (1995-2001) and on a limited set of illustrative country cases (e.g., Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia). This particular time frame places the inquiry almost squarely in the middle of the region's decade-plus effort to consolidate democratic, market-oriented systems. It is also necessitated in a very practical sense by the fact that 1995 and 1996 represent the only two years in which the Central and Eastern Eurobarometer surveys included the three key questions related to our study-e.g., retrospective economic evaluations, prospective economic evaluations, and vote intention in a hypothetical referendum on EU membership. The ten Europe Agreement countries provide variation on the dependent variable (e.g., support for EU membership) and also represent varying degrees of national readiness to enter the EU (Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Estonia and Slovakia

generally receive high marks from the European Commission for their readiness, while Lithuania, Latvia, Romania, and Bulgaria do not).³ Following our broader empirical analysis, we focus squarely on support for EU membership in three countries-Romania, Hungary, and Estonia-that represent three distinct longitudinal trends. Support for EU membership is operationalized using a key survey item in the Central and Eastern Eurobarometer series: "If there were to be a referendum tomorrow on the question of (our country's) membership of the European Union, would you personally vote for or against membership?" The variable is coded 1 for "vote for membership" and 0 for "vote against membership." We operationalize our principal independent variable-egocentric, prospective evaluations of the economy-using the same Eurobarometer surveys: "And over the next 12 months, do you expect that the financial situation of your household will...get a lot better; get a little better; stay the same; get a little worse; get a lot worse."⁴

DEMOGRAPHICS, IDEOLOGY, AND ECONOMICS: A FIRST-CUT EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

We draw initial inferences about our hypothesized relationship from correlational analysis of our two focal variables as well as additional theoretically relevant survey indicators. The first finding that leaps out immediately from Table 1 is that simple demographic variables provide at best a mixed bag of results-education (the centerpiece of the cognitive mobilization approach to understanding preference formation) is weak and inconsistent; income (by itself a proxy for socioeconomic status) is relatively weak and of marginal statistical significance. Somewhat surprisingly, in eight of the ten countries respondent income level fails to produce a consistent, statistically significant association with support for EU membership across the two survey time points. While sectoral interests (primarily agricultural interests and those of pensioners) as manifested by occupational status yield marginal albeit statistically significant correlations, it would be difficult to contend that occupation should be accorded significant analytical priority in explaining EU support. There is a considerably stronger and more stable association between ideological acceptance of free market principles and support for EU membership across both time points; indeed, this is the single most robust correlation registered in the table. So, too, does democratic satisfaction demonstrate linkage with support for EU membership. Worthy of most note-given the goals of this article-are the correlations linking egocentric (i.e., self-oriented) and sociotropic (i.e., collective or society-oriented) evaluations of the economy with support for EU membership. Respondent anticipation of his/her future financial situation in

³ European Commission, *Agenda 2000*.

⁴ The Central and Eastern Eurobarometer public opinion surveys, conducted from 1990-1997 and then replaced in 2001 with the Applicant Countries surveys, are remarkably inconsistent in administering the same battery of questions on EU membership and economic evaluations.

the coming 12 months, which reveals a modest association with support for EU membership, is statistically significant and greater in magnitude than retrospective economic evaluations and (at least in 1996) sociotropic evaluations as well. Importantly, the direction of this relationship is consistent with our expectations and demonstrates some increasing weight over time. Although not statistically the most important relationship, this initial linkage between the two variables is suggestive of what may be a substantively important and theoretically relevant relationship.

Table 1. Measures of Association with Support for EU Membership (Pearson Correlation Coefficients)

	1996 Support for EU Membership		Support for EU Membership	
	r	N	r	N
Economic Evaluations				
Retrospective	.080**	6716	.093**	6331
Prospective	.093**	6261	.173**	5967
Sociotropic Evaluation				
Country Moving in Right Direction				
	.116**	5951	.157**	5661
Sectoral Interests	.029*	6752	-.007	5889
Private Sector				
State-Owned Enterprise	.028*	6752	.039**	5889
Agriculture	-.052**	6752	-.034**	5889
Civil Service	.009	6752	-.014	5889
Pensioners	-.046**	6752	-.026*	5889
Satisfaction with System Transformation				
Democratic Satisfaction	.148**	6559	.159**	6197
Favor Free Market	.216**	5911	.215**	5632
Cognitive Mobilization				
Education	.052**	6745	.000	6359
Income				
Bulgaria	.106*	588	.107*	493
Czech Republic	.115*	444	.110*	489
Estonia	.038	544	-.049	456
Hungary	.171**	549	.020	549
Latvia	.000	605	.103*	474
Lithuania	.142*	482	-.052	407
Poland	.042	732	.109**	760
Romania	.029	858	.074*	948
Slovakia	.043	514	.028	479
Slovenia	.001	642	.068	609

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Source: Central and Eastern Eurobarometer Nos. 6-7, 1995-1996.

Toward a Model of Support for EU Membership

Given the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable - support for EU membership - we employed a logit model to test the relative explanatory weight of the principal independent variable--prospective economic evaluation--alongside other theoretically relevant rival and control variables. The model is tested using data from the 1996 Central and Eastern Eurobarometer survey, and the results (Table 2) reveal a positive and robust relationship between anticipated pocketbook gains and support for EU membership, even when controlling for the effects of other key factors. Indeed, expectations that household finances will improve in the next 12 months account for one of only four statistically significant relationships in the model. What is important to recognize here is the fundamental message that anticipated gains yield support for entry into the EU; conversely, projected losses diminish support for accession to the EU. These results add further defense to our contention that economic optimists and "winners" interpret EU membership at least partially through the lens of individual opportunity. Had, instead, economic pessimists and "losers" been the ones casting their hypothetical referendum votes in favor of entry into the EU then the explanatory weight of the "state guarantees society" approach would have been enhanced. Given, though, that such is not the case we suggest that the data lend new and meaningful credence to the "individual opportunities" approach.

Table 2. Impact of Egocentric, Prospective Evaluations of the Economy on Support for EU Membership (Logistic Regression Results)

	β	SE	Sig.
Egocentric, Prospective Evaluation of Economy	.270	.043	.000
Democratic Satisfaction	.322	.058	.000
Preference for Free Market	.950	.086	.000
Urban	.066	.083	.426
Agriculture	.102	.103	.326
Private Sector Employee	-.213	.200	.288
State Enterprise Employee	.296	.112	.008
Pensioner	-.250	.162	.121
Constant	-.489	.160	.002

N=4,834 Model Chi Square = 334.015 (sig at .000 Model Accuracy = 84.0%

Source: Central and Eastern Eurobarometer No. 7, 1996. ICPSR Study No. 2296

The results also make clear the potency of generalized support for the free market as a predictor of support for EU membership. Such support, alongside respondent satisfaction with the way democracy is developing in his/her country, is clearly crucial to individual-level preference formation and is consistent with

the expectations of an individual opportunities (and not a welfare oriented) understanding of current opinion dynamics in the CEECs. While many observers draw inferences about support for EU membership based upon occupational status and urban/rural location, these data fail to provide significant fodder for such reasoning. Despite the rich agricultural tradition of many CEECs, citizens engaged in agricultural pursuits do not demonstrate discernibly different preferences for EU accession. Somewhat puzzling is strength of the variable capturing employment in a state enterprise, as this appears superficially to run counter to a market-based, opportunity oriented explanation of EU support. Upon closer inspection, however, there is reason to believe that not all of those laboring in state enterprises see in EU membership the dangers of privatization, salaries eroded by inflation, and even unemployment. To the contrary, as the most consistent targets of EU-sponsored incentives to reform, workers in this sector may slowly be learning that the presumed security of the old system was illusory and that in EU pressures to harmonize productivity and wages lie opportunities for greater prosperity.

DIVERGENT TRENDS IN FOCUS: ROMANIA, ESTONIA, AND HUNGARY

Can our focus on economics, self-interest, and citizen expectations inform an understanding of cross-national variation in support for EU entry? We identify Romania, Hungary, and Estonia as countries representing three distinct national trajectories: Romania--high support and increasing; Hungary--modest support and increasing; Estonia--low support and decreasing. Hampered again by the inconsistency with which Eurobarometer surveys included similar questions over time, we are restricted in our search for answers to comparison of data from the 1996 and 1997 studies (the only two that asked respondents to identify the single-most important reason why they would vote for/against EU membership if a referendum were held tomorrow). These data, nevertheless, prove to be instructive.

Table 3 provides response frequencies for respondents giving both positive and negative preferences for EU membership. These responses are then collapsed into five categories (economic evaluations, system transformation, interests, cognitive, and other). What leaps out immediately is the prominence of economic evaluations relative to issues of system transformation (e.g., democratization). The EU as a boon to the economy appears consistently--and somewhat surprisingly--more salient than the EU as a guarantor of peace, human rights, and democracy. Important, too, is that most respondents are not justifying their support for EU membership based upon the promise of financial aid (i.e., the EU as a crutch); rather the opening of markets, elevation of living standards, and prospects for general progress capture the lion's share of the responses. This diminishes the EU-as-safety-net (i.e., "state guarantees society") approach articulated earlier. Our primary interest here, though, is in cross-national differences, and in this regard it is necessary to note

the dramatic differences between Estonia and Romania in terms of the frequency of respondents who profess that they would vote against EU membership because it would "worsen the economy, be too expensive and bring no benefits." Whereas only slightly more than 1% of the Romanian sample in 1996 cited economic degradation as their primary rationale for casting the hypothetical referendum vote, almost 18% of the Estonian respondents so indicated. Moreover, the decline (by two-thirds) in Hungary of those similarly indicating their economic anxieties is consistent with that country's recent increase in popular support for entry into the EU. Postmaterialist concerns with the scientific, cultural, and educational cooperation that linking with the EU would likely entail are at best marginal for these respondents (as primary preference catalysts), and while Romanians seem little concerned with losing identity upon entering the EU Estonians clearly do (with the Hungarians cutting that characteristic in half by 1997). All told, it is clear (a) that economic considerations carry the greatest weight in preference formation, (b) that expectations of gains-rather than the desire to cushion losses-are the signal characteristic of economic evaluations, and (c) variation across time and across countries can be accounted for by volatility in economic considerations and only less so by political and cognitive factors.

Table 3. Primary Reason for Indicating Vote "For" or "Against" Referendum on EU Membership

	Romania		Estonia		Hungary	
	1996	1997	1996	1997	1996	1997
Economic Evaluations						
Positive						
EU Will Improve Economy/ Open Markets	7.7	9.3	12.9	16.9	16.4	16.2
Financial Aid	4.9	10.3	5.9	7.5	5.6	7.5
Higher Living Standards	19.3	9.1	3.9	6.0	2.7	3.1
General Progress	33.0	36.2	18.8	17.3	30.0	33.2
Total	64.9	64.9	41.5	47.7	54.7	60.0
Negative						
Economy Will Worsen, Too Expensive, Brings No Benefits	1.1	2.9	17.6	14.1	11.4	4.3
System Transformation						
Positive						
Open Borders/Broader World Outlook	4.0	5.4	3.1	3.2	3.4	2.4
Wish for Integration	15.3	9.4	4.5	7.7	3.6	5.7
EU Brings Strength	1.4	1.4	4.5	2.8	4.2	3.9
Will Bring Peace, Human Rights and Democracy	4.2	4.3	8.6	9.3	3.9	6.0
Total	24.9	20.5	20.7	23.0	15.1	18.0
Negative						
EU Brings Instability	0.6	0.5	2.4	3.0	2.8	0.1

	Romania		Estonia		Hungary	
	1996	1997	1996	1997	1996	1997
Interests						
EU Acts in Own Interests	0.4	1.0	1.0	1.0	3.0	1.1
Cognitive						
Positive						
Will Bring Scientific, Cultural, and Educational Cooperation	0.5	1.1	0.6	0.8	-	0.8
Negative						
Loss of Identity	0.4	1.0	7.6	4.8	6.1	2.6
Other						
Positive	0.9	1.0	0.8	0.4	0.8	5.3
Negative	-	0.1	-	1.6	0.5	2.0
N/A	6.3	8.1	7.8	3.6	5.6	8.8
Total	7.2	9.2	8.6	5.6	6.9	16.1

Source: Central and Eastern Eurobarometer Nos. 7-8, 1996-19

Romania

That Romania's citizens are looking to the EU for opportunity rather than a handout is an empirical reality that may startle some. Widely considered (along with Bulgaria) to be among the economic laggards of ex-Communist Europe, Romania "to the ordinary outsider...means little more than street children, rabid dogs, Gypsy beggars and post-communist decay."⁵ With average wages hovering (at best) around \$150 and 40% inflation eroding much of that, it would not be difficult to expect that Romanians would seize upon the prospect of EU financial aid as a welcome bailout. Corruption is endemic. The country's president, the ex-Communist Ion Iliescu, by almost all accounts came up short during his first term in office (1989-96), leaving most Romanians poorer than they had been under the previous regime. Moreover, almost a decade after signing its Association Agreement with the EU and a free trade agreement with the European Free Trade Association, Romania's transition away from a command-style economy draws few laudatory comments from the European Commission: "Romania cannot be considered as a functioning market economy and it is not able to cope with the competitive pressures and market forces within the Union in the medium term."⁶ By March of 2000, Romania had completed negotiations on only six of the 31 chapters of the Acquis Communautaire—the corpus of existing European Union law to which all applicant countries must assent prior to entry. Given such a dire predicament, it is indeed worth noting that the country ranks among the most ardent advocates for entry into the EU but also that Romanians are such economic optimists (35% of Romanian respondents to the 2001 Applicant Countries

5 "The End of the Tunnel, Perhaps," *The Economist* (26 July 2001).

6 European Commission, *2000 Regular Report on Romania's Progress Towards Accession* (Brussels, 2000).

Eurobarometer profess optimism that their household financial situation would improve over the next 12 months—the highest percentage of any of the 13 applicant countries). Rather than lament the possible dislocations that might accompany marketization and Europe-wide competition, those Romanians "who work in the country's burgeoning and surprisingly resilient private sector think the job losses that tend to go with privatisation mean that the government is getting serious about killing off state behemoths that have long been draining public coffers."⁷ Hope is a powerful political motivator, and it is clear that instead of bemoaning their plight or casting a woeful eye toward the EU's largesse, our data suggest Romanians perceive their lengthy journey toward membership in the Union through the lens of opportunity.

Estonia

In many ways Estonia is Romania's antithesis. With impressive economic growth rates averaging 7%, comparatively low inflation (4.2% in 2001), and corruption modest by its neighbors' standards, Estonia certainly ranks among the most successful countries to have emerged from the former Soviet Union. Unlike Romania, Estonia is widely considered a front-runner to join the EU. In its 2000 Regular Report on Estonia's application for membership, the European Commission judged that "Estonia is a functioning market economy and should be able to cope with competitive pressures and market forces within the Union in the near term, provided that it stays with its present reform path."⁸ Given this relative success story, it appears at first blush incongruous that citizens in the small Baltic state would be so consistently tepid in their support for entry into the EU. Indeed, Eurobarometer surveys conducted since the early 1990s repeatedly demonstrate Estonians' generally lukewarm responses to the EU (the 2001 study found 31% of Estonians' "first reactions about the European Union" were negative, while only 4% of Romanians similarly described their initial impressions). In deciphering these discrepancies, it is clear that economics matter—as reported above in Table 3, considerable numbers (17.6% in 1996, 14.1% in 1997) of Estonian respondents reported their primary reason for opting against membership in the EU was that with accession the country's "economy will worsen" and the transition will be "too expensive and bring no benefits." It may be that "For many Estonians, surrendering hard-won sovereignty to another supranational body grates too. 'In some senses we would rather be like Norway: in NATO but not the EU,' admits Tunne Kelam, a leading conservative."⁹ For our present purposes, however, what is critical to note is that despite the lukewarm support for EU membership at the aggregate level, at the individual level our central hypothesis still holds—1995 and 1996 Eurobarometer data yield positive and statistically significant correlations

7 "A Flicker of Hope," *The Economist* (29 November 2001).

8 European Commission, *2000 Regular Report on Estonia's Progress Towards Accession* (Brussels, 2000).

9 "Estonia's Latest Challenge," *The Economist* (11 March 1999).

between egocentric, prospective evaluations of the economy and support for Estonia's membership in the EU. Thus, even in the least hospitable case for testing our theoretical expectations that opportunity-not dependence-drives support for European Union accession we can derive considerable support.

Hungary

Popular support for Hungary's bid to join the EU demonstrates more volatility over the course of the 1990s than does that of either Romania or Estonia. Measured in 1995 at roughly the same level of support as existed in Estonia, popular acceptance of Hungarian entry into the Union has-unlike in Estonia-risen markedly. Indeed, most studies find that Hungary ranks behind only Romania and Bulgaria in terms of mass-level enthusiasm for EU membership. Yet, unlike Romania and Bulgaria, Hungary is not presently in dire economic straits. The country of 10 million enjoys a respectable growth rate of close to 4%, with unemployment tolerable at 5.6% and inflation still manageable at 9.2%. One of the most open economies among the entire set of applicant countries, Hungary sends 75% of its exports to the EU. Much of the economic expansion can be attributed to the ex-communist Socialists who managed the country's market conversion and put the economy back on track between 1994-1998, only to witness it grow even faster under the young conservative Prime Minister Viktor Orban. Already a member of NATO, Hungary enjoys the high priority placed on its early entry into the EU by most existing Member States. The Commission, too, found as early as 1997 that Hungary functioned soundly as a market economy-a viewed that has been upheld in all subsequent Commission reports. The country's aggressive privatization program began to bear fruit after 1995, and much of Hungary's relative prosperity and burgeoning middle class emerged in the latter part of the decade. This transformation over the course of the 1990s corresponds with the survey data we have presented above, indicating that with improvements in domestic prosperity Hungarians-in contrast to Estonians-- have come to associate EU membership with continued economic advancement and general progress. We find, further, that our original hypothesis that individual-level economic optimism yields EU support is also sustained: the bivariate correlation linking egocentric, prospective economic evaluations with a vote in favor of Hungary's EU entry is 0.213 ($p < 0.001$, 1996 Eurobarometer data).

CONCLUSION

Hope is a slippery variable for political scientists. However, the anticipation of better things to come can clearly shape preferences and opinions. As has been well documented in the existing literature on economic voting, citizens in democratic societies render judgments on pressing political issues not simply through some facile reward-punishment mechanism but also based upon the anticipation of things to come. This article's findings support the hypothesis

that citizens in the central and eastern European countries currently seeking entry into the EU make decisions about their future in the EU based in part on egocentric, prospective evaluations of their financial situation. Survey respondents who perceive that their future includes financial improvement are more likely to support the drive for EU membership than are their counterparts with a self-perceived negative financial outlook. We suggest that these data and findings cast important new light on the "individual opportunities" versus "state guarantees society" dichotomy found in the literature. Irrespective of income and education levels, those expecting personal economic downturn prefer state guarantees, while those who expect economic improvement prefer opportunities through EU accession. The task for pro-Europe incumbent governments in candidate countries as well as for the European Union itself, then, is-- to put it crudely--to create hope.

The analogy to American politics is tempting. In 1980 then-President Jimmy Carter looked a wary American public in the eye, informed his citizens in an election year that the United States was in the midst of an "economic malaise," and warned that the only way out of stagnant growth, high inflation, and mounting unemployment would be through sacrifice, austerity, and painful lifestyle changes. Challenger Ronald Reagan, reading the same economic data, disagreed--far from malaise, Reagan contended, it was "Morning in America." Voters, longing for hope, agreed with Reagan. Little more than a decade later and in the throes of an economic downturn, another aspiring presidential candidate, Bill Clinton, made great political use of his origins from the small Arkansas town of Hope and chose as the musical motif of his candidacy the song, "Don't Stop Thinking About Tomorrow." The voters responded. Our intention here is to render no judgment on the merits of the respective approaches of Carter, Reagan, or Clinton. Nor do we make the case that American campaign rhetoric necessarily informs our present concern with EU enlargement. However, it is clear that in politics perception is a crucial intervening variable. If the objective in central and eastern Europe is to mobilize citizens to take "a leap into the unknown" (to recall Robert Schuman and Jean Monet's characterization of the European Coal and Steel Community), then the perception of better things to come--rather than the guarantee of cushioning against those things--is crucial to this end. This attention to the perceptions, attitudes, and preferences of citizens in central and eastern Europe deserves further scrutiny, as a disproportionate amount of scholarly attention has heretofore been devoted only to what publics and governments in existing Member States think about the addition of new members to their club. We contend that if successful enlargement is indeed to occur, it will not only be because applicant countries have satisfied the EU's Copenhagen Criteria for accession; it will, most importantly, because the prospect of EU membership has won the hearts, minds...and wallets...of central and eastern Europe's people.

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