

# UACES 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference

Krakow, 4-6 September 2017

Copyright of the papers remains with the author. Conference papers are works-in-progress - they should not be cited without the author's permission. The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author(s).

[www.uaces.org](http://www.uaces.org)



# Returning to Europe and Turning Away From 'Europe'?

## Post-Accession Attitudes in Central and Eastern Europe

*Paper to be presented at the UACES Conference in Kraków, 4-6 September 2017*

Joakim Ekman, Södertörn University

Kjetil Duvold, Dalarna University

The preparation for membership in the European Union played an immensely important role for the consolidation of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe. Instead of implementing rather particularistic 'national solutions' to specific problems during the transition, they were compelled to look to the European Union for answers. It may seem trivial, but the transition from communist rule would undoubtedly have proceeded rather differently if it had not been for the wholesale adaptation to the Union's legal, economical and political framework. Well over a decade after entering the EU, there are clear signs of opposition to several core principles of the Union among several recent members. Moreover, some of the former communist states have experienced a backlash against core components of liberal democracy as such, most clearly articulated in a speech by the Hungarian PM. This article addresses the recent backlash against 'European values' in a post-communist setting, i.e. the manifold instances of populist attacks on or challenges to not only European integration but also what the European Union represents: tolerance, liberal democracy, respect for human rights and the protection of minority rights. We will use a theoretical model developed by Norris (1999) to discuss popular support for democracy and other regime forms. Drawing on Easton (1965), a crucial distinction is made between the *principle* and the *performance* level. In terms of support for a democratic political system, this corresponds to the difference between support for democracy as a principle or an ideal, i.e. as the best form of government, and support for the way democracy works in practice, in a particular country at a given point in time. We will also include a theoretical discussion on euroscepticism. Based on a framework developed by Taggart and Szczerbak (2002), we will distinguish between soft and hard euroscepticism, but unlike the two authors we will shift the attention from party based opposition to the EU to public opinion and levels of political support. The article also serves as a presentation of the public opinion survey *Central and Eastern Europe – A Post-Migrant Crisis Barometer* within the research project *Returning to Europe and Turning Away From "Europe"? Post-Accession Attitudes in Central and Eastern Europe* headed by Ekman (project leader), Duvold and Berglund.

*Note: Please keep in mind that this is more of a presentation of a project and a survey than a fully-fledged article*

## **Introduction**

Following the 2004 and 2007 eastern enlargements of the EU – sometimes described as a ‘return to Europe’ following decades of communist rule – we have throughout the post-communist region witnessed what has been labelled “backsliding” (Agh 2010), ‘euroscepticism’ (cf. Berglund et al. 2009), the rise of radical right populism (Pirro 2014), the spread of corruption (Ganev 2013), an authoritarian ‘backlash’ (Fuchs and Klingemann 2011; Krastev 2007) and the rise of xenophobia and chauvinism (Rupnik 2007; Bútorá 2007). It is likely that the recent financial crisis as well as the EU institutional crisis have added further a continued East/West divide in the EU (Epstein and Jacoby 2014; Agh 2010; Caporaso and Kim 2009; Berglund et al. 2009). More recently, the authoritarian development in Russia and the 2014 crisis in Ukraine have further emphasised the notion of a new East/West divide in Europe.

At the same time, this development has not followed a singular course and not everybody agrees that we should talk about a backlash or backsliding (Levitz and Pop-Echeles 2010; Haughton 2011). To some extent, the post-accession setback was to be anticipated (cf. Berglund et al. 2006; 2009; Fuchs and Klingemann 2011). Still, the troublesome development in a number of countries justifies a closer look at popular opinion in the new EU member states and questions about democratic regime support in times of great social, political and economic change.

In the following section, we will outline the survey at hand and put it in context. We will then turn our attention to the question of ‘democratic backsliding’ and, first, give a short overview of the field of research and then inspect the development of democracy in the region according to Freedom House’s ranking. In the last two sections, we will first present descriptive data on preference for regime type, comparing figures from 2004 and 2016. We will look at retrospective regime evaluation, as well as alternatives to democracy and support for democracy as a regime form and satisfaction with democracy. In a second data section, we will consider attitudes to the European Union by presenting recent figures of support for and shades of opposition to the European integration project.

## **Project background**

In order to analyse post-accession popular support for democracy and liberal values, the authors sought to undertake a study on public opinion in Central and Eastern Europe. More specifically, the idea was to follow up on a series of opinion surveys conducted in the region in the 1990s up until the first EU enlargement. We are referring to the *New Europe Barometer* (NEB) and the *New Baltic Barometer* (NBB), originally administered by Richard Rose and associates at the Centre for the Study of Public Policy (CSPP), University of Strathclyde (cf. Rose, Berglund and Munro 2004). The most recent wave of surveys initiated by CSPP was launched in 2004, in cooperation with a Swedish research team including the authors of this article.

Much has happened in the region since 2004 and there is thus a built-in demand for a new wave of East European surveys. Within the framework of a research project sponsored by the Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies, the present authors first conducted the *Baltic Barometer – Ten Years after EU Enlargement* in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the Spring of 2014, followed up with a *Post-Crimea Barometer* in Latvia, Hungary and Bulgaria in the autumn of 2015, and continued with the *Central and Eastern Europe – A Post-Migrant Crisis Barometer* in eight countries in Central and Eastern Europe in the Spring of 2016. The NBB questionnaire has been modified in order to address the possible backlash against what we refer to here as European values – tolerance, support for liberal democracy, and respect for human rights and minority rights – but also keeps the emphasis on regime preferences and system support familiar from the original NEB and NBB surveys.

The question of a possible backlash against the values promoted by the EU is of obvious relevance also beyond the Baltic states; and the questionnaire we used in the 2014 Baltic survey could be adapted to cover other country-specific settings as well. Our preference was to include all remaining East European enlargement countries – Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia. The first five became full members of the EU in 2004, along with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Bulgaria and Romania joined the club in 2007. These countries have been included in CSPP barometers since the early 1990s; and it thus makes eminent sense to include all of them. Croatia – the most recent EU member (2013) – has not been systematically included in the CSPP barometers, but the picture of the enlargement countries would not be complete without it.

The present authors are well familiar with opinion survey research. In 2000–2001, the *Conditions of European Democracy* project (funded by the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation, RJ 1999-5057:01, and headed by Professor Sten Berglund, Örebro University) teamed up with Professor Richard Rose at the Centre for the Study of Public Policy (CSPP). In collaboration with Rose and associates, we conducted a new cross-national public opinion survey in ten countries in Central and Eastern Europe, called the *New Europe Barometer* (NEB). The NEB was based on the established *New Democracies Barometer* (from the 1990s), but included new survey items and a different set of participating countries.

Furthermore, in 2004–2005 the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation funded another project jointly headed by professors Berglund and Rose – *Baltic Peoples in Transition*. The project launched a new round of the CSPP *New Baltic Barometer* (NBB) in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, covering both titular citizens and the Russian speaking minorities (Rose, Berglund and Munro 2004, Duvold 2006).

Using similar or identical sets of questions, the different surveys (NEB/NBB and forerunners) constitute a large-scale cross-national study, allowing for comparisons across time and space in the post-communist region (1991–2004). Each survey asks a common core of questions, and thus offers a unique source for monitoring trends within countries as well as comparisons across nations. Each survey uses a questionnaire with indicators of particular relevance in transitional societies (e.g. support for democracy and non-democratic alternatives; assessments of corruption; attitudes towards the eastward enlargement of the EU; economic issues) as well as standard socioeconomic and demographic indicators: age, education, gender and urban/rural residence. The samples are of the nationally representative variety with at least 1000 respondents in each country, and are based on face-to-face interviews conducted by established national institutes in the region. The application of sampling principles varies with the national context.

The 2016 data set at hand to some extent replicates the 2004 (and also 2014 and 2015) surveys in eight Central and East European countries in order to create a single follow-up dataset. Put together, the database provides a unique material of post-communist public opinion, covering a quarter of a century.

It should also be noted that several new items have been added to the *Central and Easter Europe – A Post-Migrant Crisis Barometer*. They include 1) the financial crisis of 2008, 2) migration from inside and outside the EU, 3) preference for expert rule and

presidentialism, admiration for Putin's presidential style and orientation towards the EU versus Russia, 3) populism ('people versus elites'), 4) winners versus losers of the transition, 5) the role of media, 6) importance of various components of democracy, 7) European integration, 8) society, including perceptions of various minorities, women in society, morality, and child-rearing. Apart from EU integration, we will not use these items in this article.

### **Survey of the field: Research on the post-accession crisis**

The EU appears to be at a major crossroads. Since the enlargement in 2004, we have seen failed referendums on deepening integration, Eurosceptic parties gaining ground throughout the EU, the rise of intolerance in many places, and social unrest brought about by the Euro crisis (cf. Caporaso and Kim 2009; Thomassen 2009; Berglund et al. 2006; 2009). All of this indicates a relative lack of public support for the EU, and some scholars have argued that we are in fact witnessing a backlash against European integration. In the face of growing cultural, religious and economic diversity, the notion of a common European political community is being challenged. While the EU has faced similar opposition in the past, recent developments have been interpreted as indicators of a more deep-seated backlash against the values and norms on which the EU is based, including democracy, human rights, tolerance, and respect for minority rights (Fuchs and Klingemann 2011; Risse 2010; Taylor 2008; Byrnes and Katzenstein 2006).

Backlash symptoms may be found all over Europe. In the well-functioning democracies in Northern Europe, rightwing populist parties have had unprecedented electoral success in recent elections, with the anti-immigration Sweden Democrats entering parliament in 2010, and the Eurosceptic True Finns in 2011. In Denmark, throughout the first decade of the 21st century, the Danish People's Party successfully cooperated with the government parties on most issues, in return for acceptance of their anti-immigration and anti-EU political stance (Widfeldt 2010).

In Western Europe, we have seen parties of similar kinds in e.g. the Netherlands (Party for Freedom), Belgium (Vlaams Belang), France (National Front), Italy (the Northern League) and Austria (Freedom Party). In Eastern Europe, the Hungarian radical nationalist Jobbik is perhaps the most notorious example of a homophobic and anti-multiculturalism party. However, there have been a number of instances in recent years of political parties trying to

capitalize on popular resentment against mainstream political elites, e.g. in Slovenia, Bulgaria and, notably, Poland. Chauvinism, xenophobia, extreme nationalism and anti-Semitism are seemingly on the rise throughout the post-communist region (cf. Krastev 2007; Rupnik 2007; Bútorá 2007; Smith 2008).

What all these parties have in common is a populist approach rather than a common agenda. Indeed, populism in Europe is a diverse phenomenon, being at the same time anti-establishment, anti-EU, anti-Muslim, anti-multiculturalism and anti-globalisation. While all of these voices arguably advocate intolerant views of some variety, they differ in terms of targeted “others”. Some are outright neo-fascist, focusing on immigration or ethnic minorities, while other support e.g. gay rights, as a way of pointing out Muslims as the true enemies of liberal values (cf. Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008; Taggart 2000). There are some common traits, however: all of them claim to represent ordinary people, in stark contrast to the corrupt elites. The political establishment is considered to be dishonest and self-interested. To mainstream politicians, this remains a serious challenge. Being unable to totally dismiss the populists as illegitimate, mainstream politicians have to varying degrees failed to stop the populist agendas from making an impact on the public debates. While this need not necessarily be a crisis of democracy, it nevertheless entails political polarization and the rejection of consensual politics (Krastev 2007: 57–58), and as such, a possible threat to societal integration and European cooperation. On top of this comes the shrinking influence of the EU. EU tutelage works until you get in, it would seem; and once a member, you can relax about further reforms and observance of democratic norms (Rupnik 2007: 22; Tismaneanu 2007).

This development is reflected in the research literature. In 2007, in a special edition of *Journal of Democracy* on the democratic backsliding of Central and Eastern Europe, Ivan Krastev noted bluntly: “The liberal era that began in Central Europe in 1989 has come to an end. Populism and illiberalism are tearing the region apart” (Krastev 2007: 56; cf. Bugarić 2008). Contrary to hopes and actual progress in the early 2000s, what we have seen in many places in Central and Eastern Europe since the EU expansions in 2004 and 2007 indicate that the health of democracy in the region is not necessarily assured (cf. Epstein and Jacoby 2014; Rupnik and Zielonka 2013; Møller and Skaaning 2010). Some scholars have pointed to a communist legacy in order to explain the resilience of non-liberal orientations among citizens in the region (Berend 2007); others have identified performance-related

explanations (like corruption) for the emergence of low trust societies, where populist parties may thrive (Pirro 2014; Ganev 2013; Spendzharova and Vachudova 2012). In two recent contributions, warnings against *democratic deconsolidation* have been raised (Foa and Mounk 2016 and 2017). Based on public opinion data, the authors point to eroding support for democratic governance in long-term, Western democracies. It is particularly among the younger cohorts that this decline can be detected, according to the two authors. The findings have nevertheless been criticized on empirical and conceptual grounds: from an empirical perspective, it has been argued that Foa and Mounk overstate the generational differences. Moreover, it has been argued that generation differences boil down to lifecycle differences and that older and younger individuals have different expectations towards democracy. Finally, it has been claimed that younger people are more inclined to emphasize liberal values, while older cohorts have a more illiberal notion of democracy understanding (Alexander and Welzel 2017; Norris 2017). These questions might be echoed in the debate on democratic consolidation and euroscepticism in Central and Eastern Europe and it appears that in order to understand the challenges that lie ahead, we need a better understanding of public attitudes in the region as a whole. To put it a bit pointedly, have post-communist citizens, after having ‘returned to Europe’, more recently turned away from ‘Europe’?

### **Democracy ranking of Central and Eastern Europe**

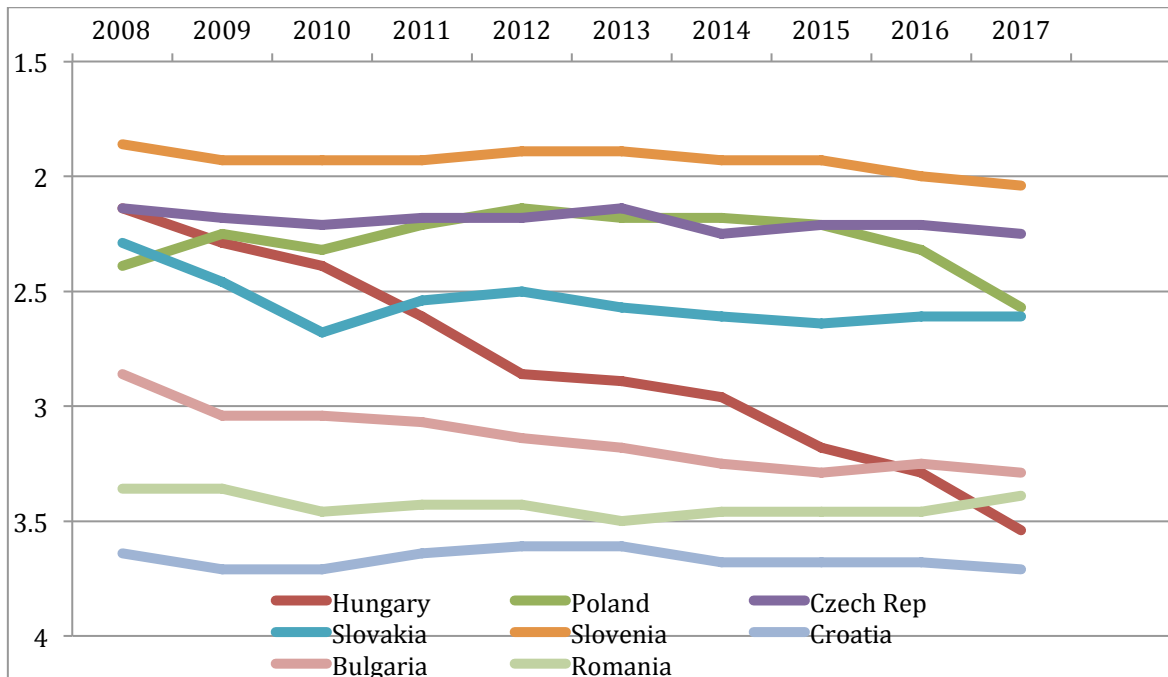
The eight enlargement countries included in this project constitute a more heterogeneous group than the three Baltic countries (already covered by the 2014 data collection). In the East European EU context, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are small countries, comparable to Slovenia and Croatia and quite different from larger players like Poland and Romania. Hungary and Poland have a long and uninterrupted record of statehood, while Slovenia, Slovakia, Croatia and, for that matter, the three Baltic countries are more recent arrivals to state- and nationhood (cf. Berglund et al. 2013; Rose et al. 2004). The Baltic countries are ethnically more heterogeneous than their East European partners in the EU; but Slovakia and Romania have sizeable Hungarian minority groups; and Bulgaria has a large group of ethnic Turks. These and other differences between the countries may serve us well in accounting for how successfully they meet the challenges of EU membership. We can expect to find distinct regional patterns when it comes to public attitudes towards the



kind of 'European values' we are interested in – respect for human rights and minority rights, support for liberal democracy, and support for European integration (cf. Berglund et al. 2006; 2009).

The challenges largely revolve around democracy. This may seem to be a provocative statement, considering that applicant countries have to fulfil the political criteria – defined by the European Council at its meeting in Copenhagen in 1993 – in order to qualify for status as candidate countries. The Copenhagen criteria may thus be seen as the EU's definition of democracy. It postulates that democratic institutions must be in place, the rule of law upheld, human rights respected and (national) minorities respected as well as protected. The first three points are familiar from other democracy definitions (Linz and Stepan 1996); while protection of minorities is something of a newcomer in this context. It overlaps with the notion of equal treatment of all citizens regardless of political orientation, religious beliefs and ethnic background presumed by the rule of law; and protection of (national) minorities was presumably added to the democracy criteria to encourage the majority population of the various East European countries to work out mutually acceptable arrangements with their respective national minorities. All members since 1993 have gone through this litmus test and, on top of that, the so-called *acquis communautaire* – an often drawn-out negotiation process – designed make domestic legislation comply with European standards. Democracy is therefore frequently taken for granted in the EU context.

Figure 1: Nations in Transit scores, 2008-2017



Source: Freedom House (<https://freedomhouse.org/report-types/nations-transit>)

This is also the message conveyed by *Freedom House* and other providers of democracy ratings. *Freedom House* thus rates all current East European enlargement countries as ‘free’, but they are not interchangeable. Four of the cases – Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia – are classified as ‘consolidated democracies’ in the *Nations in Transit* reports from 2017. These four countries are ranked around the 2.0 – 2.5 mark, where 1 means ‘most democratic’ and 7 ‘most autocratic’. Overall, their score has declined somewhat since 2008, most notably in Poland between 2016 and 2017. The other four cases – Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Croatia – are classified as ‘semi-consolidated democracies’, with scores near the 3.5 mark. Romania and Croatia have held relatively ‘stable’ positions in this respect, while Bulgaria has seen a sharper decline. Meanwhile, Hungary has experienced a rapid decline from ‘consolidated’ to ‘semi-consolidated’ democracy since 2011.

### Support for democracy and its alternatives

Since the late 1980s, there has been a sharp rise of formal democracies globally (Diamond 1999, Blanton and Kegley 2017). However, many of them stop short of being liberal democracies. In fact, the number of liberal democracies has been in decline over the

last few years, replaced by different shades of semi-democracy (Diamond and Plattner 2015). These regimes may be classified as formal democracies due to constitutional arrangements and because they hold regular elections, which in some cases even may be considered fairly 'free' and 'fair'. The problem is that lack of accountability and weak representation make the democratic framework rather hollow. Access to information may be limited and important media outlets in the hands of governments and interests close to it, far-reaching presidential decrees will in some countries undermine the legislature, while the judiciary often lacks real autonomy. Guillermo O'Donnell has coined the term *delegative democracy* to describe this sort of 'democracy'. He emphasises the lack of horizontal accountability in many formal democracies in for instance Latin America (O'Donnell 1994, 1996, 1998). Other scholars have used terms like *competitive authoritarianism* (Levitsky and Way 2002), *illiberal democracies* (Zakaria 1997), *pseudo-democracies* (Diamond 1999) – or *partly free regimes*, as the Freedom House labels them.

A viable democracy requires not only institutions and elite commitment, but also active support from its citizens. But how can we best assess the nature of support for a particular political system? David Easton (1965) has presented what remains perhaps the most persuasive classification of political support. Vitaly, Easton separates between three arenas, namely (i) the political community, (ii) the regime, and (iii) the authorities. This threefold classification puts us in a good position to differentiate between rather fluctuating attitudes to a temporary government or its leaders, via more stable convictions about principles of government (primarily between liberal democracy and authoritarian alternatives), and more deep-seated attachments to the country and the nation as a whole. One problem with Easton's model, however, is that it is not particularly precise as far as the middle category is concerned: *regime support*. This is where an update of Easton, provided by Pippa Norris (1999), turns out to be a very handy tool. Norris expands on Easton's classification by introducing finer distinctions. More specifically, she divides public support into five distinct, but interrelated, aspects of the political system: (a) *actors*; (b) *institutions*; (c) *performance*; (d) *principles*; and (e) *belonging*. Together these five aspects form a 'ladder' of some sort. In this section, we will mainly concentrate on democracy as a form of government, i.e. regime principles.

Many citizens in Central and Eastern Europe have lived with communism, which puts them in an excellent position to express their opinions about the current system in relation

to another system they happen to know. The totalitarian past makes it possible to test Winston’s Churchill’s hypothesis of democracy as the ‘lesser evil’ in a way not open to most West European citizens – a quite unique asset for comparative research. The *New Europe Barometer* and *Central and Easter Europe – A Post-Migrant Crisis Barometer* were designed to take advantage of this opportunity (Rose et. al. 1998). The opportunity here lays in people’s evaluation of ‘regimes at work’, not just their perceptions of how things ‘should’ be ruled. ‘Democracy’ is a loaded term with a multitude of connotations. Most people are likely to claim that they prefer ‘democracy’ in some form or another (Simon 1996). But if they are asked what they think of two different regimes they happen to know, without any references to ‘democracy’, we might get a more honest impression of how the new democratic institutions measure up against the ‘real existing socialism’, which many of them are well acquainted with. To what extent they can still envisage a contemporary *alternative to democracy* is an issue we will return to shortly.

*Table 1: Retrospective and contemporary regime evaluation (%)*

	Poland		Croatia		Romania		Bulgaria		Slovenia		Slovakia		Czech Rep		Hungary	
Year	04	16	04	16	04	16	04	16	04	16	04	16	04	16	04	16
<i>Democrat</i>	30	64	22	33	30	19	21	25	22	13	30	22	52	49	28	19
<i>Sceptic</i>	18	10	8	10	25	10	11	7	8	8	17	8	17	9	13	9
<i>Compliant</i>	23	22	48	33	21	33	31	29	48	43	21	43	18	31	36	49
<i>Reactionary</i>	29	5	22	20	24	38	38	38	22	27	32	27	14	23	23	23

Note: The exact questions reads: “Where on this scale would you put the former Communist regime?” and “Where on this scale would you put our current political system of governing with free elections and many parties”? The intervals –100 to – 1 are collapsed into ‘negative’; 0 is ‘neutral’; and ‘ 1 to 100 is ‘positive’. Positive and negative answers have been collapsed and recoded as Democrats = Negative evaluation of former communist regime and positive evaluation of current regime. Compliant = Positive evaluation of former communist regime and positive evaluation of current regime. Sceptics = Negative evaluation of former communist regime and negative evaluation of current regime. Reactionary = Positive evaluation of former communist regime and negative evaluation of current regime. Neutrals, don’t knows, non-responses have been excluded. Source: *Central and Easter Europe – A Post-Migrant Crisis Barometer* (2016).

In Table 1, we have combined two variables. The first asks the respondents to evaluate the socialist system of the past on a scale from -100 to +100. The second asks them to evaluate the current political system along an identical scale. We have excluded those who

do not respond as well as those who are neutral (i.e. zero) and made the following categories: *democrats* are positive about the present system and negative about the past; *sceptics* are negative about both; *compliant* respondents are positive about both; while those who are negative about the present and positive about the past are called *reactionaries*.

There are several striking figures in the table. Polish citizens stand out in the sense that they are most prone to embrace the current system and reject the past. These figures also stand in contrast to the Polish patterns from 2004. Conversely, many Slovenians, Hungarians and Romanians seem less positive about the current system than they were at the eve of EU membership. In other cases, the changes are smaller.

When people are asked to evaluate regimes retrospectively, we ought to be careful with our interpretations. Quite naturally, many people have fond memories of the past. Like the kind of nostalgia that prevails in most societies, many East Europeans are likely to paint rosy images of their own past and, conversely, be more realistic about the present (cf. Rose et. al. 1998; Ekman and Linde 2005, Duvold and Ekman 2016). Another point is that to evaluate the communist past more than 25 years after the collapse of the system is qualitatively different than asking them 12 years earlier, when greater shares of them had first-hand experience with the system.

*Table 2: Support for democracy and its alternatives (%)*

	Poland		Croatia		Romania		Bulgaria		Slovenia		Slovakia		Czech Rep		Hungary	
Year	04	16	04	16	04	16	04	16	04	16	04	16	04	16	04	16
<i>Return to communism</i>	24	20	-	28	16	35	22	26	18	35	28	27	15	21	14	32
<i>Strongman rule</i>	48	29	-	44	26	55	38	39	17	48	21	30	16	29	21	35
<i>Democracy always preferable</i>	37	51	-	48	59	45	50	49	59	45	47	44	54	42	60	52
<i>Satisfied with democracy</i>	37	54	-	41	39	16	20	25	71	24	31	34	40	40	54	31

Note: The two first items read: "Our present system of government is not the only one that this country had. Some people say that we would be better off if the country was governed differently. What do you think? For each point please say whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree. (We should return to Communist rule /Best to get rid of parliament and elections and have a strong leader who can quickly decide everything)' Only 'agree' (strongly and somewhat) answers are included in the table. The third item reads as: "With which of the following statements do you agree most: (a) Democracy is preferable to any other forms of government, (b) Under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one, and (c) For people like me, it makes no difference whether we have a democratic or a non-democratic regime". Only the first alternative is included. The fourth item reads: "On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works (in our country)?" Only "very satisfied" and "rather satisfied" are included. Source: *Central and Easter Europe – A Post-Migrant Crisis Barometer* (2016).

Communism is a complex issue for most post-communist citizens and we have seen that many of them rate the communist system favourably. The *New Europe Barometer* and Central and the *Central and Easter Europe – A Post-Migrant Crisis Barometer* ask the respondents if they would prefer to abolish democracy in favour of a number of non-democratic alternatives, including communist rule and strongman rule.

Table 2 makes it clear that there are fewer citizens in the region who want to return to communist rule than there are citizens who rate the system of the past favourably. An important message from this apparent contradiction is that many of them draw a clear distinction between their personal, or their country's, experiences with communism, on the one hand, and what they perceive as relevant regime options today, on the other. Hence, it seems perfectly possible for many people to appreciate communism as they remember it (or have been told), while rejecting it as a relevant alternative today. Communism may simply not appear to be a particularly relevant regime alternative any longer. On the other hand, there has been a noticeable increase in support for a communist alternative in Romania, Slovenia and Hungary, where around one-third of the respondents can envisage a return to it. This is more than twice as many compared with the 2004 study. Moreover, only in the case of Poland is there a decline in support for a return to communism.

Furthermore, a brief inspection discloses surprisingly high support for 'strongman' rule. In countries like Croatia, Slovenia and, most strikingly of all, Romania close to or even more than half of the respondents disclose that they would prefer to abolish parliament and elections altogether, and install a powerful leader. In the *New Democracies Barometers* from the 1990s, support for strongman rule was also high, but seemed to be fading in the new century (*New Democracies Barometers*, 1991-98). To that extent, the latest surge might be

worrisome for advocates of democracy, although the case of Poland appears to contradict this trend.

But quite conceivably, not all of those who support strongman rule actually call for full-fledged dictatorship. Democracy cannot always be reduced to a question of 'either-or'; there are sub-categories that do not easily qualify as either democracy or dictatorship. We might cautiously suggest that the idea of 'strongman rule' can have other connotations than outright dictatorship. The point here is that many citizens in Central and Eastern Europe may prefer something that neither qualifies as 'liberal democracy' nor as 'authoritarianism'. Strongman rule could arguably be interpreted as formal democracy with a strong executive power and weak checks and balances, possibly in line with Viktor Orbán's notion of 'illiberal democracy'.

Table 2 also suggests that around half the citizens in Central and Eastern Europe believe that democracy is always preferable to any alternatives. This is the case in most of the countries and the figures remain fairly stable compared with 2004. However, it also shows a marked increase in support for democracy in Poland, but also a slight decline in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia and Romania.

Satisfaction with democracy is not a measure of democratic beliefs. It has been demonstrated – empirically and theoretically – that this item is, above all, performance-related (Diamond 1999, Klingemann 1999, Linde and Ekman 2003). It makes good theoretical sense to classify it as an indicator of democratic performance: obviously, people who are dissatisfied with the way democracy works may very well be wholly committed to democratic principles. In fact, they might be dissatisfied simply because they feel that democracy has not extended as far as they would prefer. On the other hand, performance affects beliefs and continuous disappointment may turn some people away from democratic principles. In short, this oft-used question remains a rather *ambiguous* indicator for democracy support and the truth may well be that 'satisfaction with democracy' is principle-oriented in certain contexts, but performance-related under certain conditions.

The anger felt by many Hungarian citizens in the aftermath of the government scandals in 2006 – when Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány admitted that *'Evidently, we lied throughout the last year-and-a-half, two years. It was totally clear that what we are saying is not true'* – arguably paved the way for a different form of democracy taking shape in that country over the years that followed. Similarly, the financial crisis and the subsequent European bank

crisis, which evolved after the bankruptcy of the Lehman Brothers in the autumn of 2008, affected several countries in the region severely and may also have undermined many people's belief in democracy. We can detect lower satisfaction with democracy in countries like Romania, Hungary and, to a shockingly high degree, in Slovenia in 2016 compared with 2004. In other countries, there are small differences – with the exception of Poland, which once again appear to be an outlier in terms of democracy trends.

### **Turning away from Europe?**

The preparation for membership in the European Union played an immensely important role for the consolidation of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe. Instead of implementing rather particularistic 'national solutions' to specific problems during the transition, they were compelled to look to the European Union for answers. It may seem trivial, but the transition from communist rule would undoubtedly have proceeded rather differently if it had not been for the prospect of EU membership and the wholesale adaptation to the Union's legal, economical and political framework.

Euroscepticism may tentatively be understood as (public) resistance or opposition to European political and economic integration. Opposition may be manifested in different, sometimes seemingly inconsistent ways. For example, a supporter of the idea of 'Europe', of ever-closer cooperation between the European countries, may feel infuriated with reports of fraud and mismanagement which may even spill over to (a temporary) rejection of not only the specific EU institutions but also the whole project of European integration. Euroscepticism thus comes in different varieties. One way of distinguishing between different kinds of euroscepticism has been suggested by Taggart and Szczerbiak (Taggart 1998; Szczerbiak and Taggart 2000; Taggart and Szczerbiak 2002; 2008). In a series of works, the two scholars have analysed party-based euroscepticism in the EU member states and the candidate countries, making a distinction between 'soft' and 'hard' euroscepticism. The *hard variety of euroscepticism* 'appears in countries where there is a principled opposition to the EU and European integration. It may be found in parties thinking that their countries should withdraw from membership, or whose policies towards the EU are tantamount to rejection of the whole project of European integration, as it is currently perceived.' The *soft variety of euroscepticism* 'appears in countries where there is *not* a principled objection to European integration or EU membership, but where concerns on one or a number of policy areas lead



to the expression of qualified opposition to the EU, or where there is a sense that national interests are currently at odds with the EU's trajectory' (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2000, 6–7; Taggart and Szczerbiak 2002).

This distinction is certainly not unproblematic. For example, the two categories in the dichotomy are not necessarily exhaustive and mutually exclusive. On the contrary, it may be argued that the border between hard and soft euroscepticism becomes unavoidably blurred, for all practical purposes, when turning to empirical analysis. Modern parties are complex organisations, which may speak with many voices. Even parties that are officially pro-EU may have strong eurosceptic factions – and the other way around. A more serious problem that needs to be addressed is the problem of *salience*. The issue of European integration is not equally salient all the time; the political agendas in the member states change constantly, and a hard Eurosceptic party may at times be classified as a soft Eurosceptic party (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2000, 7–8). Furthermore, Taggart and Szczerbiak (2002) maintain that there is a significant misfit between popular levels of euroscepticism and support for parties expressing euroscepticism. Thus, they argue, it is necessary to include parties in any evaluation of the impact of euroscepticism on the EU integration project. Taggart and Szczerbiak certainly have a point. At the same time, there are some limitations attached to any analysis of euroscepticism that draws exclusively on party positions. Aside from the issue of salience, it is indeed tricky to correctly assess the potential impact of euroscepticism simply by looking at the electoral strength of parties that may at some point in time be classified as 'hard' or 'soft' eurosceptics. Such figures do not necessarily accurately represent the size of a eurosceptical electorate. Many of the parties that Taggart and Szczerbiak identify as eurosceptics are protest parties, Green parties, and more or less extreme right-wing or left-wing parties. To these parties – and their voters – the issue of European integration may be secondary to other concerns. Well aware of this, Taggart and Szczerbiak note that they are in fact analysing voters who are not put off by voting for parties that are, *among other things*, eurosceptical. This is obviously not the same thing as analysing citizens who explicitly state that they are either for or against EU membership for their own country. Arguably, mapping public opinion gives us a more *direct* idea of the political potential of euroscepticism, as an obstacle to further integration, like in a referendum or in the elections to the European Parliament (EP).

In this paper, the focus is on *public* euroscepticism; on public opinion surveys rather than party platforms and the electoral strength of anti-EU parties. The 'hard' and 'soft' distinction thus needs to be redefined. The difference between hard and soft public euroscepticism should not be understood as two poles on a continuum. For analytical purposes, it is better make a distinction between public opposition to European integration on a principal level, on the one hand, and different types of 'performance driven' euroscepticism, on the other (Norris 1999). In terms of different types of euroscepticism, 'hard' euroscepticism may be described as principled opposition to European political and economic integration. This could be found, for example, among nationalists opposing all forms of supra-national structures, or citizens who oppose the idea of a 'united Europe'. This is what Kopecký and Mudde (2002, 316) refer to as a 'Europhobe' position. Indicators of this kind of public euroscepticism would be opposition to basically all kinds of integration, as far as the own country is concerned, anyway. Hard eurosceptics would in no uncertain terms advocate the withdrawal of the own country's membership from the Union. For instance, the Norwegian rejection of EC membership in 1972 and EU membership in 1994 and the Swiss 1992 rejection of membership in the European Economic Area could be classified as expressions of hard public euroscepticism among significant numbers of citizens.

Soft public euroscepticism – on the other hand – corresponds to anti-EU sentiments motivated not by principled opposition to European integration as such, but rather by dissatisfaction with the way the EU actually works, at a particular point in time. Soft eurosceptics are sometimes also referred to as 'euro-realists' or 'euro-critics'. The common denominator is the acceptance of EU membership in combination with dissatisfaction with some aspect of the EU, as it currently functions. In practise, soft Euroscepticism has manifested itself as public rejection of specific extensions of EC/EU competencies. The Danish rejection of the Maastrich Treaty in 1992; the Irish rejection of the Nice Treaty in 2001 and the Lisbon Treaty in 2008; and the 2005 Constitution referenda in France and the Netherlands may be classified as expressions of not only 'hard' Euroscepticism, but also the 'soft' variety.<sup>2</sup>

Soft euroscepticism may come in at least two different forms. Some argue that the EU institutions are too strong and that they impose their rules and regulations on member states, while others argue that the EU institutions are not strong enough, thus paving the way for the forces of the free market at the expense of the democratic institutions and

welfare arrangements of the member states (cf. Szczerbiak and Taggart 2000). Both arguments are put forward in most member states, since they are to some extent related to leftwing and rightwing ideologies (cf. Berglund et al. 2006). Soft euroscepticism thus seems to be an evasive phenomenon, and rather difficult to pinpoint by using public opinion surveys. As Henderson (2002) notes, it is something of a catch-all category

In order to discern traces of euroscepticism, we have several measures at our disposal. In this paper, we concentrate on two items. The first reads as follows: *'Taking everything into consideration, would you say that (your country) has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the European Union?'* This question taps an instrumental view on EU membership and it seems reasonable that many citizens in the region would acknowledge that their country has benefitted from membership in a material sense: post-communist member states have been on the receiving end of the EU's structural funds and have often managed to put the money to good use. Meanwhile, the mean standards of living has increased and many individuals have taken advantage of the opportunity to travel, study abroad, or take up work in other, more prosperous member states. On the other hand, the financial crisis in 2008-09 hit several of the economies hard and might have shattered people's belief in not only their own authorities, but also the European Union.

The second item we have included deals with perceptions of European integration versus national sovereignty: *'To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: the EU tends to interfere too much in our domestic affairs?'* Here the respondents asked about their principled view on European integration more generally and to what extent the balance between national sovereignty and EU powers is right. This question is particularly relevant in light of the recent spat between Brussels and several governments in the region regarding EU refugee quotas. Similarly, the EU has attacked some of the governments in the regions for constitutional amendments that are seen as contradictory to the rule of law or illiberal practises in fields such as single-sex marriage. Finally, Bulgaria and Romania have been closely monitored by Brussels ever since they joined the EU in 2007 and are yet to be members of the Schengen cooperation. Quite possibly, the intense spotlight on the two countries has caused resentment among many ordinary citizens.

By combining the two dimensions, we can generate four distinct types of attitudes towards the EU: those who believe the country has benefitted from the EU and disagree that EU interferes too much domestically could be described as *euromphiles*; those who think the

country has not benefitted but also disagree that the EU interferes too much hold a somewhat contradictory position and could be described as *disillusioned*; people who agree that the country has benefitted but at the same time think that the EU interferes too much in domestic affairs could be described as *soft eurosceptics*; and those who simultaneously think the country has not benefitted and that the EU interferes too much could be described as *hard eurosceptics*.

Table 3: Support for and opposition to the European Union (%)

	Poland	Croatia	Romania	Bulgaria	Slovenia	Slovakia	Czech Republic	Hungary
<b>Europhiles</b>	32	18	18	29	25	13	12	12
<b>Disillusioned</b>	4	8	5	5	7	7	5	4
<b>Soft eurosceptics</b>	55	48	54	32	40	54	54	59
<b>Hard eurosceptics</b>	9	27	23	34	29	29	29	25

Note: The first item reads: “Taking everything into consideration, would you say that (your country) has on balance benefitted or not from being a member of the European Union?” The respondents could choose ‘yes’ or ‘no’. The second item reads: “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: the EU tends to interfere too much in our domestic affairs”. The answers were “strongly” or “somewhat” agree and “strongly” and “somewhat” disagree and dichotomised in the table. Europhiles = Benefitted + Disagree; Disillusioned = Not benefitted + Disagree; Soft eurosceptics = Benefitted + Agree; Hard eurosceptics = Not benefitted + Agree. Source: Central and Eastern Europe – A Post-Migrant Crisis Barometer (2016).

Table 3 suggests that a majority of citizens in Central and Eastern Europe are *soft eurosceptics*, i.e. they believe that the EU interferes too much in domestic affairs, but that their country has benefitted from membership. But one-third could be described as *hard eurosceptics*, in the sense that they do not even think their country has benefitted from membership. Meanwhile, only between one and two out of ten can be described as *europhiles*. An exception in this respect is Poland, where as many as one-third take a clear pro-EU position. Bulgaria is another exception, where almost one-third hold a pro-EU position but where even larger shares take a hard eurosceptic position.

### **Concluding remarks**

Throughout the 1990s and the first decade of the new century, the issue of European integration was not seriously questioned in Central and Eastern Europe – neither among elites nor citizens. It has subsequently become readily apparent that European integration has some costs attached to it; and Eastern Europe now provides much more fertile ground for euroscepticism. Democracy as a principle may still not be an issue of contention, or issue of difference between East and West in the European Union, but the implications of the general call for liberal values are definitely contested. East European member states are, on the whole, much less inclined to for instance tolerate homosexuality and the issue of same-sex marriages has turned out to be particularly contentious. For example, a vast majority of Croatians ruled out this option in a constitutional referendum. This has been interpreted as part of an East European conservative backlash, but it is probably more accurate to describe it as a reconfirmation of well-established conservative values in Eastern Europe (cf. Rupnik 2007). The EU is clearly a thorn in the eye to the bearers of traditional values, including religion and nationalism, throughout the Union (cf. Byrnes and Katzenstein 2006); and more recently, welfare nationalists across Europe have mobilised against the call to contribute to the bail-out funds for Greece. Moreover, we have recently witnessed a backlash against ‘Brussels’ in the form of strong opposition to a common EU asylum policy. Unfamiliar with the patterns of immigration that have been part and parcel of most West European democracies since the 1970s, several governments in Central and Eastern Europe have vehemently opposed the idea of refugee quotas, decided by the EU Commission. There can be little doubt that the governments have the backing of many ordinary citizens on these matters.

But all things considered, if Central and Eastern Europe has recently started to ‘turn away from Europe’, it is above all the work of parties and leaders, who have invested political capital in whipping up chauvinism, xenophobia and latent resentment against liberal values – sentiments that never quite washed away, but remained largely untapped for years after the fall of communism.

## References

- Agh, A (2010) *Post-Accession Crisis in the New Member States: Progressing or Backsliding in the EU?* Studies of Transition States and Societies Vol 2 (2010).
- Albertazzi, D & D McDonnell (2008) *Twenty-First Century Populism*, Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Alexander AC & C Welzel (2017) 'The Myth of Deconsolidation: Rising Liberalism and the Populist Reaction', Online Exchange on "Democratic Deconsolidation" (<http://journalofdemocracy.org/online-exchange-%E2%80%9Cdemocratic-deconsolidation%E2%80%9D>, accessed 28 August 2017).
- Berend, I (2007) Social Shock in Transforming Central and Eastern Europe, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 40, 269–280.
- Berglund, S et al., eds (2013) *Handbook of Political Change in Eastern Europe. Third Edition*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Berglund, S et al. (2006) *The Making of the European Union*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Berglund, S et al. (2009) *Where Does Europe End?* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Blanton, S and C. W. Kegley (2017) *World Politics: Trend and Transformation, 2016 – 2017*, Cengage.
- Bugaric, B (2008) Populism, Liberal Democracy, and the Rule of Law in Central and Eastern Europe, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 41, 191–203.
- Bútorá, M (2007) 'Nightmares From the Past, Dreams of the Future', *Journal of Democracy* 18 (4), 47–55.
- Byrnes, T & P. Katzenstein, eds (2006) *Religion in an Expanding Europe*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Caporaso, J & M Kim (2009) The Dual Nature of European Identity: Subjective Awareness and Coherence, *Journal of European Public Policy* 16 (1), 19–42.
- Diamond, Larry (1999) *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Diamond, L and M F Plattner (2015) (eds.) *Democracy in Decline?* John Hopkins University Pres.
- Duvold, K (2006) *Making Sense of Baltic Democracy*. Örebro University.
- Duvold, Kjetil and Joakim Ekman (2016) 'Nationality-driven Soviet Nostalgia Determinants of Retrospective Regime Evaluation in the Baltic States'. *Twentieth Century Communism*.
- Easton, David (1965) *A Framework for Political Analysis*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- Ekman, J (2015) Systemstöd och demokratiattityder i Baltikum, *Nordisk Östforum*, nr 2, May 2015.
- Ekman, Joakim and Jonas Linde (2005) 'Communist Nostalgia and the Consolidation of Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe', *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, June 2005 issue
- Epstein, R & Jacoby, W (2014) Eastern Enlargement Ten Years On: Transcending the East–West Divide? *Journal of Common Market Studies* 52 (1), 1–16.
- Foa, RS & Y Mounk (2016) 'The Danger of Deconsolidation', *Journal of Democracy*, Vo. 27, No. 3.
- Foa, RS & Y Mounk (2017) 'The Signs of Deconsolidation', *Journal of Democracy*, Vo. 28, No. 1.
- Fuchs, D & H-D Klingemann, eds (2011) *Cultural Diversity, the Legitimacy of the EU, and European Identity*. Cheltenham: Edgar Elgar.
- Ganev, V (2013) Post-Accession Hooliganism: Democratic Governance in Bulgaria and Romania after 2007, *East European Politics and Societies* 27.
- Haughton, T (2011) Half Full but also Half Empty: Conditionality, Compliance and the Quality of Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe, *Political Studies Review* 9, 323–333.

- Henderson, K (2002) "Exceptionalism or Convergence? Euroscepticism and Party Systems in Central and Eastern Europe". *ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops*, Turin, 22–27 mars 2002.
- Klingemann, Hans-Dieter (1999) 'Mapping Support in the 1990s: A Global Analysis' in Norris, Pippa, ed. *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kopecký, P & C Mudde (2002) "Two Sides of Euroscepticism: Party Positions on European Integration in East Central Europe", *European Union Politics* 3(3), s 297–323.
- Krastev, I (2007) The Strange Death of the Liberal Consensus, *Journal of Democracy* 18 (4), 56–63.
- Levitz, P & Pop-Eleches, G (2010) Why No Backsliding? The European Union's Impact on Democracy and Governance Before and After Accession, *Comparative Political Studies* 43 (4), 457–485
- Levitsky, Steven and Lucan A. Way (2002) 'The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism', *Journal of Democracy* vol. 13 (2): 51-65
- Linz, J & A Stepan (1996) *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Møller, J & Skaaning, S-E (2010) Post-Communist Regime Types: Hierarchies Across Attributes and Space, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 43, 51–71.
- Norris, P (2017) 'Is Western Democracy Backsliding? Diagnosing the Risks', Online Exchange on "Democratic Deconsolidation" (<http://journalofdemocracy.org/online-exchange-%E2%80%9Cdemocratic-deconsolidation%E2%80%9D>, accessed 28 August 2017)
- O'Donnell, Guillermo (1994) Delegative Democracy," *Journal of Democracy*, 5, pp. 55-69.
- O'Donnell, Guillermo (1996) 'Illusions about Consolidation', *Journal of Democracy* vol. 7 (2): 34-51
- O'Donnell, Guillermo (1998) 'Horizontal Accountability in New Democracies', *Journal of Democracy* vol. 9 (3): 112-126
- Pirro, A (2014) Digging Into the Breeding Ground: Insights Into the Electoral Performance of Populist Radical Right Parties in Central and Eastern Europe, *East European Politics* (online early view).
- Risse, T (2010) *A Community of Europeans? Transnational Identities and Public Spheres*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Rose, Richard, William Mishler, and Christian Haerpfer (1998) *Democracy and its Alternatives: Understanding Post-communist Societies*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Rose, R, S Berglund & N Munro (2004) Nation-States with Multi-National Populations: Cross-Cutting Cleavages in the Baltic States, Centre for the Study of Public Policy, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow.
- Rupnik, J (2007) From Democracy Fatigue to Populist Backlash, *Journal of Democracy* 18 (4), 17–25.
- Rupnik, J & Zielonka, J (2013) The State of Democracy 20 Years on: Domestic and External Factors, *East European Politics and Societies* 27 (3).
- Simon, Janos (1996), 'Popular Concepts of Democracy in Post-Communist Europe', Glasgow: University of Strathclyde, *Studies in Public Policy*, no. 273
- Smith, D (2008): 'Woe from Stones: Commemoration, Identity Politics and Estonia's 'War of Monuments'', *Journal of Baltic Studies* 39 (4), 419–430.
- Spendzharova, A & Vachudova, M (2012) Catching Up? Consolidating Liberal Democracy in Bulgaria and Romania after EU Accession, *West European Politics* 35 (1), 39–58.
- Szczerbiak, Aleks & Taggart, Paul (2000) "Opposing Europe: Party Systems and Opposition to the Union, the Euro and Europeanisation", *SEI Working Paper 36/Opposing Europe Research Network Working Paper 1*. Sussex European Institute: University of Sussex.
- Taggart, P (2000) *Populism*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

- Taggart, P & A Szczerbiak (2002.) "The Party Politics of Euroscepticism in EU Member and Candidate States", *SEI Working Paper 51/Opposing Europe Research Network Working Paper 6*. Sussex European Institute: University of Sussex.
- Taggart, P & A Szczerbiak (eds), (2008) *Opposing Europe? The Comparative Party Politics of Euroscepticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Taylor, P (2008) *The End of European Integration: Anti-Europeanism Examined*. New York: Routledge.
- Thomassen, J (2009) *The Legitimacy of the European Union after Enlargement*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tismaneanu, V (2007) Leninist Legacies, Pluralist Dilemmas, *Journal of Democracy* 18 (4), 34–39.
- Widfeldt, A (2010) Högerpopulismen: ett växande politiskt fenomen, i J Ekman & J Linde, eds, *Politik, protest, populism*. Stockholm: Liber.
- Zakaria, Fareed (1997) 'The Rise of Illiberal Democracy', *Foreign Affairs* 76 (November-December): 22-43