

Maria Heller (ELTE):

Euroscepticism in the European parliamentary elections, June 2009

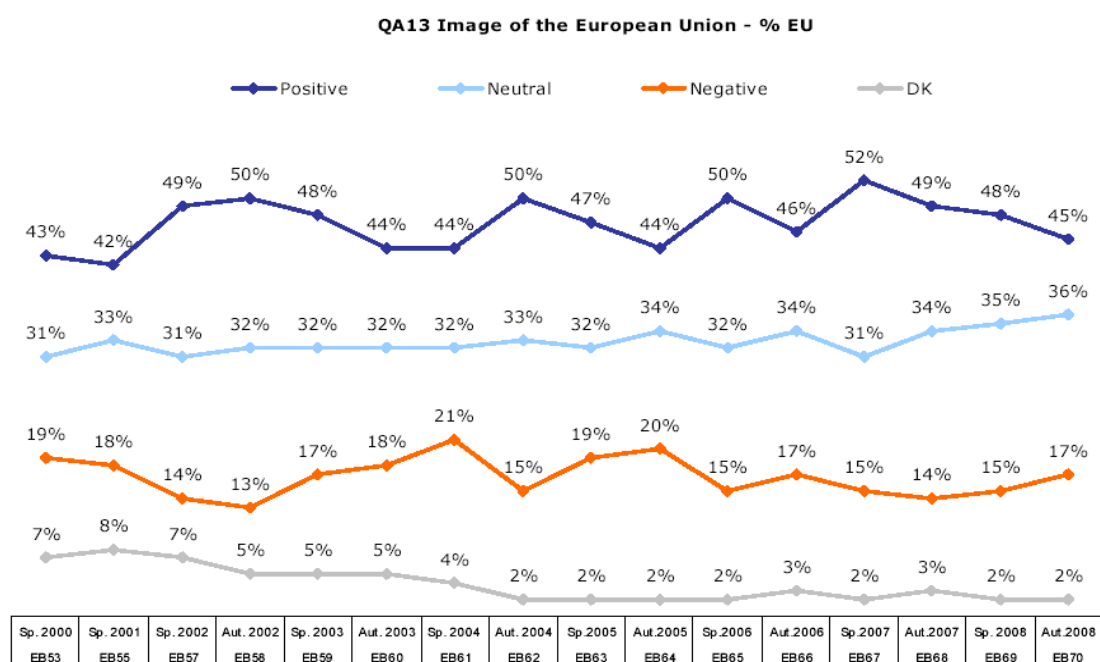
Country report: Hungary

## 1. The EU and its appreciation among EU citizens

The European Union went through very important changes in the last decade with the enlargements in 2004 and 2007 adding 12 more member-states. It has also had to face negative outcomes of planned reforms, the down-turning of the Constitution and the complicated adoption of the Lisbon Treaty. Although European statistics do not testify very clearly a certain palpable increase in uncertainty and hesitation in the general public opinion about the image of the EU (Table 1), or opinions concerning one's own country's membership (Tables 6-9) and its benefits from the EU (Tables 10-11), when closely analysing public discourses and debates, decreasing trends of satisfaction and concern can be detected. Besides public discourse, similar negative currents of opinion can be seized in non-expert communication; lay citizens seem to have lost at least part of their optimism in and attachment to the European development. The trends, however, are dissimilar in various member-states according to diverse social factors. The new member-states, after the initial enthusiasm of the enlargement, show an especially strong decrease in optimism and positive opinion. Quickly after their accession, most of these countries have experienced a strong disillusionment of their former high expectations.

Longitudinal statistics show that the image of the EU has not changed considerably in the last decade even though some ups and downs were measured (Table 1).

Table 1. Image of the EU (2008)



Source: Eurobarometer 70<sup>1</sup> p.47

In these rather stable general results, however, the differences between countries and regions are important, and the surveys clearly show that public opinion was mainly eroded in the new member-states (See Table 2).

**Table 2. Changes in the positive views of public opinion concerning the image of the EU from spring 2008 to autumn 2008 (EB70)**

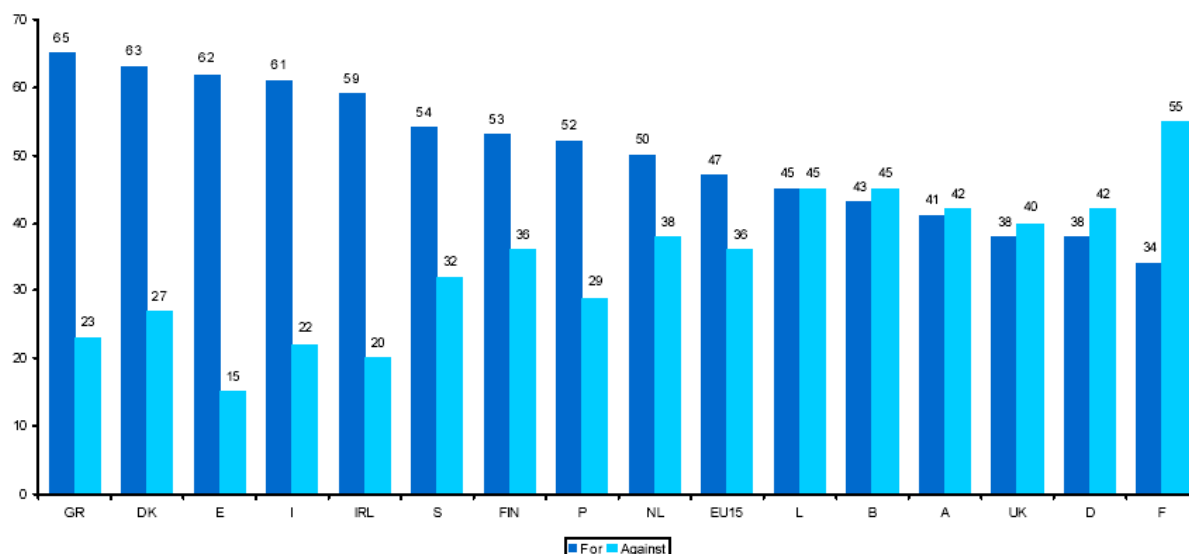
	<b>Autumn 2008 EB70</b>	<b>Change since Spring 2008</b>
<b>EU27</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>-3</b>
NL	52%	+9
DE	48%	+4
...		
RO	63%	-4
PL	54%	-4
DK	42%	-5
HU	34%	-5
IE	59%	-6
FI	28%	-6
BE	51%	-7
LU	46%	-7
EL	41%	-7
PT	48%	-7
ES	51%	-8
CY	50%	-8
MT	49%	-8

Before accession, candidate countries supported the process of enlargement more than EU15 countries. Especially Central European countries had positive expectations. Among citizens of EU15 countries, 47 % supported enlargement and 36 % opposed it in 2003 and 17% did not have an opinion (Eurobarometer 60), (highest proportions of opposition were measured in Germany: 42% and France: 55%). (Table 3)

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70\\_first\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70_first_en.pdf)

**Table 3. Opinions on enlargement before accession (EU15, early 2004)**



Source: Eurobarometer 60<sup>2</sup> p. 10. (2004)

Figures were quickly eroded: according to Eurobarometer 61 (early 2004), the same figures for EU15 were: 42 % for enlargement, 39 % against it and 19% without opinion.

In the CEE accession countries, since the political changes of the early 90s, both political elites and the vast majority of citizens regarded entry to the EU as the most important national goal. Except for the Baltic states, where NATO accession was considered to be the most urgent and safest way to guarantee the region's autonomy from Russia, in the other accession countries, NATO entry, which preceded EU entry, gained a high support in referenda because it was considered to be the first step in the direction of EU accession (Heller – Rényi 2003 a, b). In spite of the general positive tendency, EU-entry met some opposition in the candidate countries, although it was rather divergent. See figures from 2001. (Table 4):

<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb60/eb60\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb60/eb60_en.pdf)

**Table 4. Negative opinion on accession in candidate countries (2001)**

Candidate country	% of population against entry
Hungary	13
Slovakia	14
Czech Republic	25
Slovenia	28
Lithuania	29
Poland	33
Latvia	41
Estonia	41

Source: Eurobarometer: CCEB 2001

In analysing the reasons for anti-accession opinions in candidate countries as early as 2001, several factors can be mentioned: “the scale of wealth distribution” and the expected benefits appeared decreasing, while negotiations were proceeding. Politicians of the region also found negotiations with the EU too lengthy and stiff and claimed that they had not been treated as equal partners. (Szilagyi 2002) There were also differences among candidate countries concerning expectations and concern. The Visegrad countries, especially Hungary, had hoped to enter the EU first: the analyses of public discourses in the case of Hungary show very clearly that accession was constructed as a “narrative of competition” among candidate countries, in which Hungary was about to win. When the step of a 10-country accession was decided, Hungarian official discourse, as well as public opinion were seriously disappointed.

Other countries, being farthest from accession, were the keenest supporters of enlargement: Romania and Bulgaria, left out of the first enlargement, showed 97% and 95 % of pro-EU public opinion in 2001. As a general tendency, it has to be remarked that the positive trends of public opinion in candidate countries were based much more on hope and imagination than on concrete information. Certain analysts (Szilagyi 2002) even affirm that more information available on EU matters results in more wide-spread Eurosceptic views in public opinion. In most countries of the region, EU accession was considered by the population as the path to better life, higher wages and Western welfare and consumption. In some countries, politico-ideological or historical factors also played a non-negligible role: like in Hungary, where the wish to integrate the West, the desire to get compensation for historical grievances, etc. were often cited topics before accession.

A study from 2002 asserts:

“In countries with stronger economies and a better chance of joining the EU soon, support for enlargement is not as strong. According to a study by the European Commission (EC) released in June 2001, citizens of Estonia, Latvia, the Czech Republic, and Poland tend to have a less idealized view of the EU, one that focuses more on the economy. The scepticism in each of those countries, the EC argues, has distinct national characteristics. In this interpretation, Estonians are somewhat "Scandinavian" in their sensibilities, while Latvians blame some of their economic difficulties on "unrealistic" EU requirements and are afraid of the challenges of integration. The Czechs acknowledge the scope of the European larger plan but

believe there is a marked gap between EU promises and reality. The EC believes that the Poles view the EU primarily as a rich men's club.

To the extent that direct experience with the EU has helped form such reservations, **the growing Euroscepticism in the region appears to be an informed choice**<sup>3</sup>. However, very few people --just 2 percent across the region, according to the Eurobarometer survey-- say they feel well informed about enlargement matters. [...] Negotiations go on behind closed doors, media coverage is vague, and membership seems distant. In other words, citizens of the front-running candidates for EU membership seem to have a less idealized view of the enlargement process but feel disconnected -- and **both familiarity and disconnection foster Euroscepticism**<sup>4</sup>." (Szilagyi<sup>5</sup> 2002)

Thus, we can assume that the low level of negative opinions about accession in Hungary and in Slovakia in 2001 might also be a result of nearly no public debate on EU topics in these two countries.

Public opinion about effectively realized enlargement, about one's own country's membership, and about one's own country's benefits from EU membership has become less positive in all member-states (see following Tables). The main reasons for disenchantment and languidity may reside in recent experiences of internal EU difficulties but the global economic crisis and its corollary difficulties must significantly have eroded citizens' expectations, as well.

While opinions about past enlargement are still more positive in the new member-states and the least positive in the oldest member-states (see Tables 5 and 6), the positive opinion about one's own country's membership is the lowest in the accession countries (see Table 7).

Only 48 % of EU citizens think that the enlargement strengthened the Union, while 36 % are of the opposing view (Tables 5 and 6):

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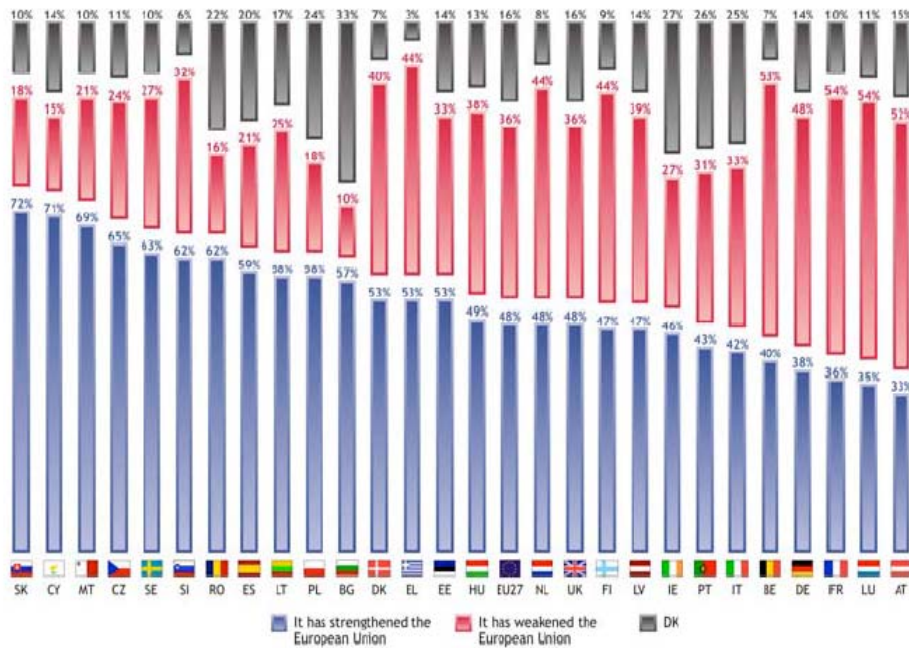
<sup>3</sup> my emphasis: M. Heller

<sup>4</sup> my emphasis: MH

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.soros.org/resources/articles\\_publications/articles/euroscepticism-accession-20020301](http://www.soros.org/resources/articles_publications/articles/euroscepticism-accession-20020301)  
(last access: 19 August 2009)

Table 5. Opinions about past enlargement – 2008

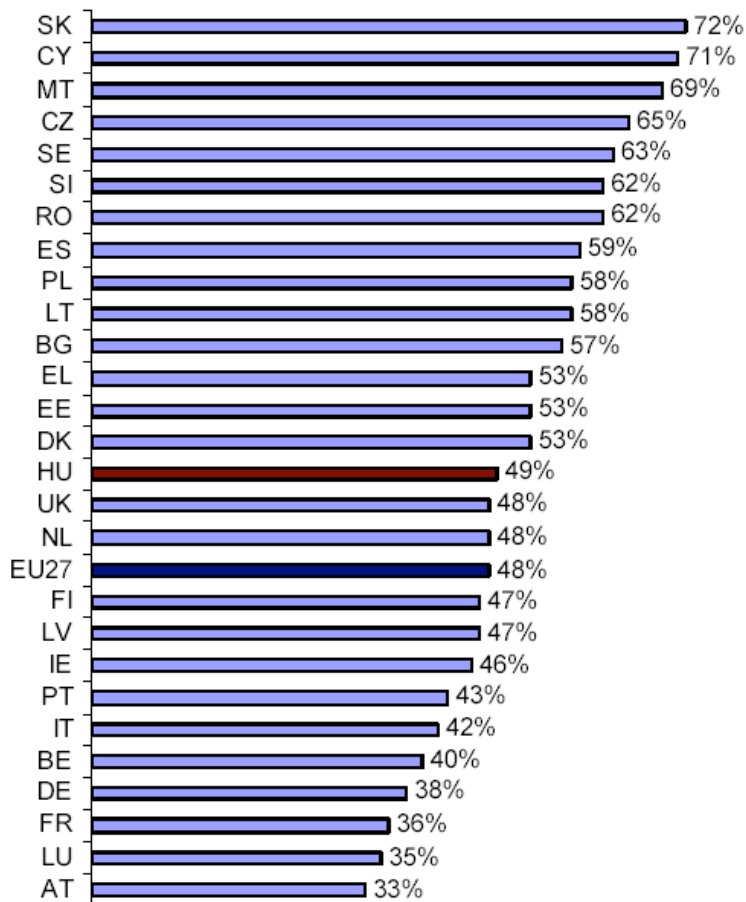
Question: QC2. Since 2004 the European Union enlarged from 15 to 27 countries. Overall, how would you judge this enlargement of the European Union?



Eurobarometer 70<sup>6</sup> – 2008 p. 63.

<sup>6</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70\\_first\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70_first_en.pdf)

**Table 6. Positive opinions about past EU enlargement (2008)**

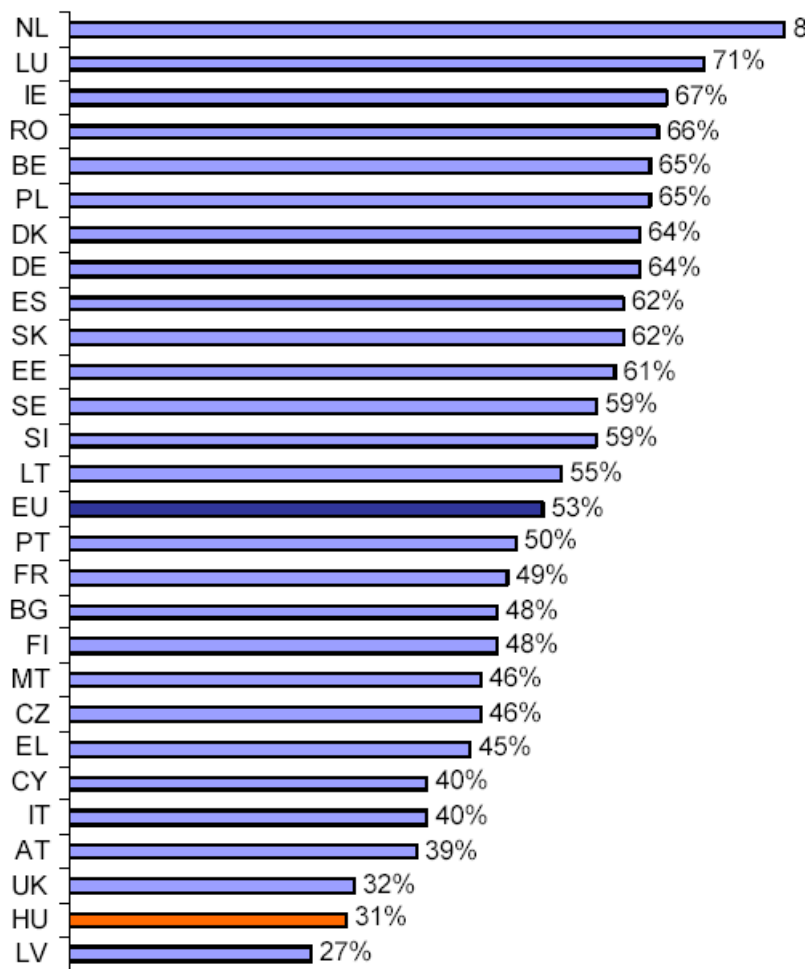


Source: Eurobarometer 70, national results: Hungary<sup>7</sup>, Autumn 2008 p. 16.

Opinions about enlargement do not converge with European citizens' opinion about their own country's membership. In this respect, the oldest member-states prove to have most positive public opinion (Tables 7, 8, 9):

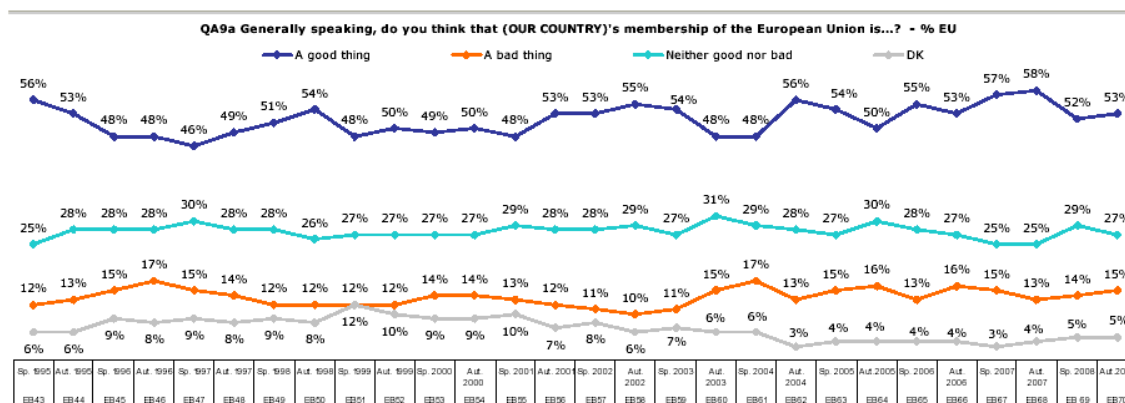
<sup>7</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70\\_hu\\_nat.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70_hu_nat.pdf)

**Table 7. Positive image of the country's EU membership – 2008**



Source: Eurobarometer 70, national results: Hungary<sup>8</sup>, Autumn 2008

**Table 8. Support for own country's membership in EU (2008)**



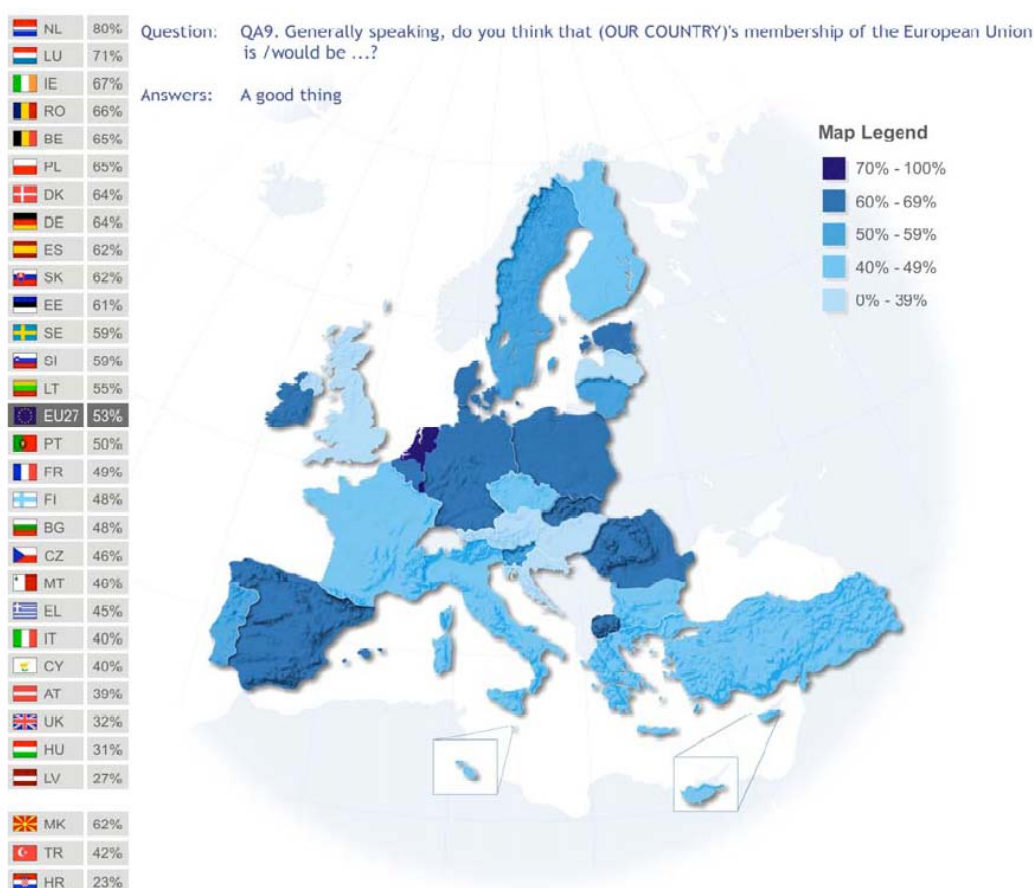
Source: Eurobarometer 70<sup>9</sup> p.31.

<sup>8</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70\\_hu\\_nat.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70_hu_nat.pdf)



The general scores which show some but not very strong fluctuation through the years (Table 8) hide, however, important differences between countries and regions. Table 9 shows that some accession countries are well below the EU average in the consideration of their country's membership: Hungary is one them (Tables 7 and 9).

**Table 9. Distribution of opinions on the country's membership 2008**



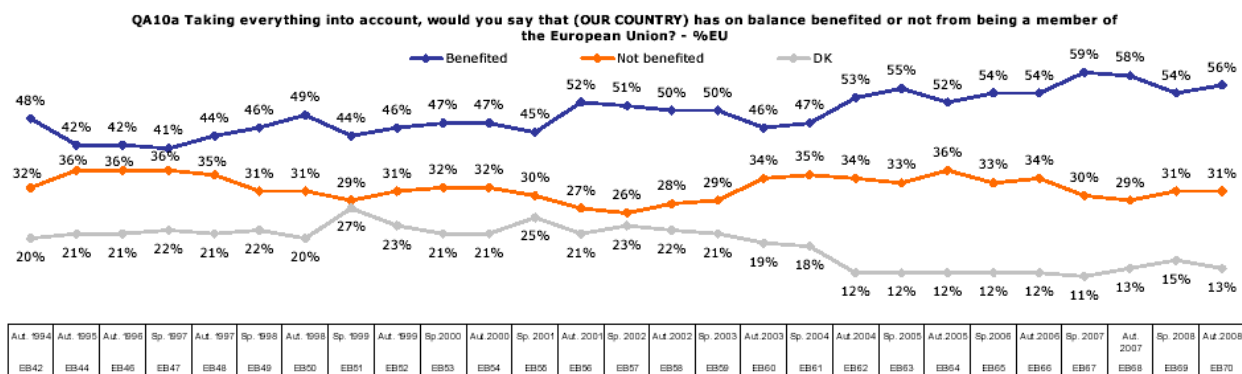
Source: Eurobarometer 70<sup>10</sup>, p.32.

Opinions about one's own country's benefits from EU membership show again a very diverse picture, different from the two previous distributions (about enlargement and about own country's membership). Although as a general trend, it can be pointed out that positive opinions concerning benefit have increased through the years and while there was no real modification in the negative judgements, the proportion of those having no opinion has significantly decreased (Table 10).

<sup>9</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70\\_first\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70_first_en.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70\\_first\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70_first_en.pdf)

**Table 10. Opinions about own country's benefits from the EU (2008)**

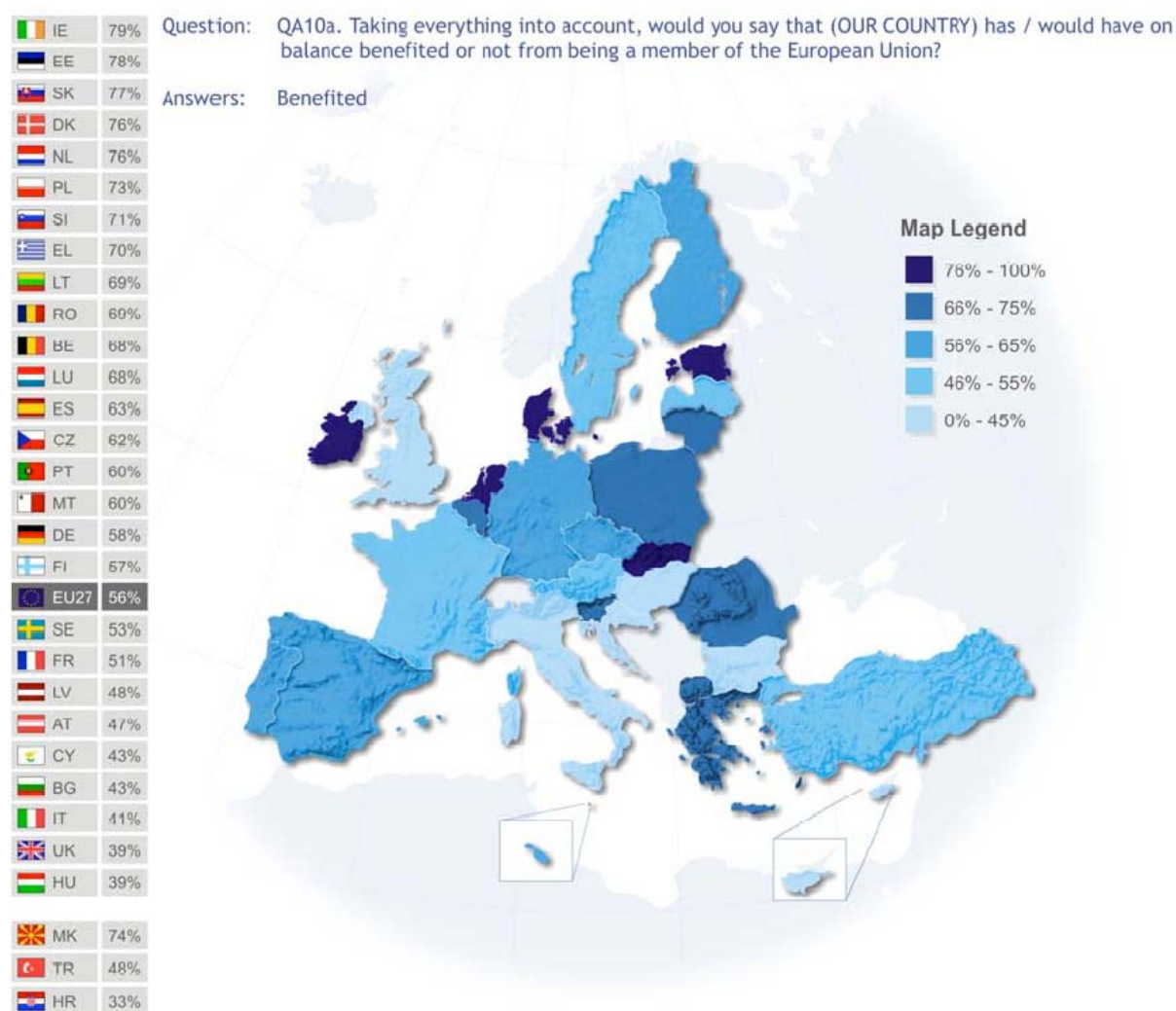


Source: Eurobarometer 70<sup>11</sup> – 2008 p. 35.

The regional and national distribution of the above average, however, shows again a very diverse image, especially with Hungary holding the least positive public opinion about own country's benefits (Table 11).

<sup>11</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70\\_first\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70_first_en.pdf)

**Table 11. Opinion on own country's benefits from EU - 2008**



Source: Eurobarometer 70<sup>12</sup> – 2008 p. 36.

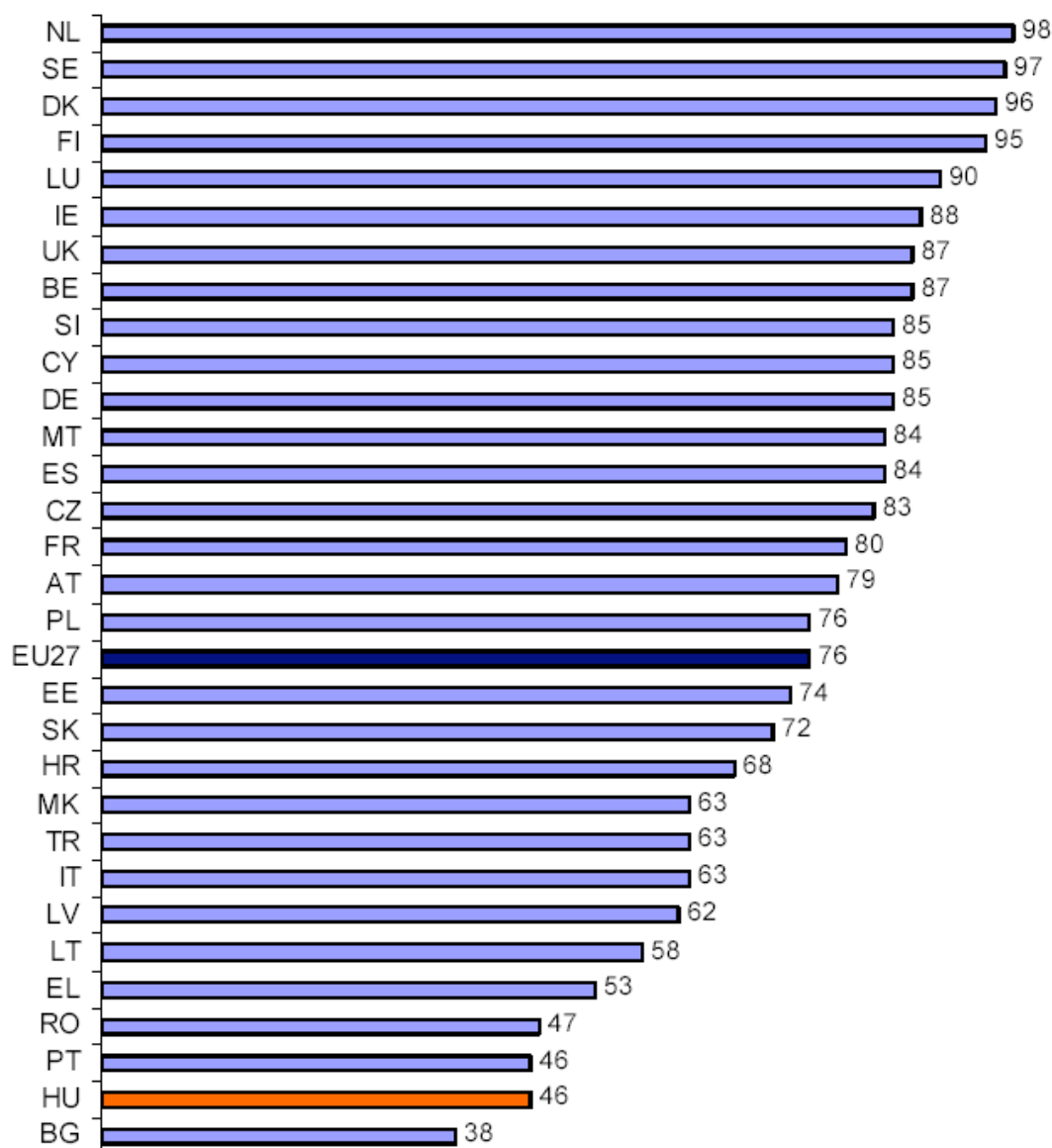
It is an interesting question to scrutinize why Hungary from one of the leading positions among candidate countries (before, as well as after the political turnover) has become one of the file-closers of all member-states. Since 2004 when Hungary entered the European Union together with nine other countries, negative considerations and opinions have not ceased to increase. This fact, however, has to be contextualised in the case of Hungary, a country which has excelled, since long, in all international and national surveys with pessimism and negative public feelings and opinion about nearly any topic. Indeed, the surveys justify the strong stereotypes, frequent and popular among the population but also in social scientific literature<sup>13</sup> about this “national” characteristic trait. Results of subsequent Eurobarometer surveys show that the ambiance of the Hungarian population is among the worst in the EU. The phenomenon of growing Euroscepticism matches well

<sup>12</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70\\_first\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70_first_en.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Bibó 1986, Hanák 1992

with this general negative thinking of the Hungarian population. Eurobarometer 70<sup>14</sup> (Autumn 2008) testifies about this general trend (Table 12). (It should be noted that according to statistics, satisfaction with one's own economic situation is even worse).

**Table 12. Satisfaction with life (%) (2008)**



Source: Eurobarometer 70<sup>15</sup> National Report: Hungary: p.4.

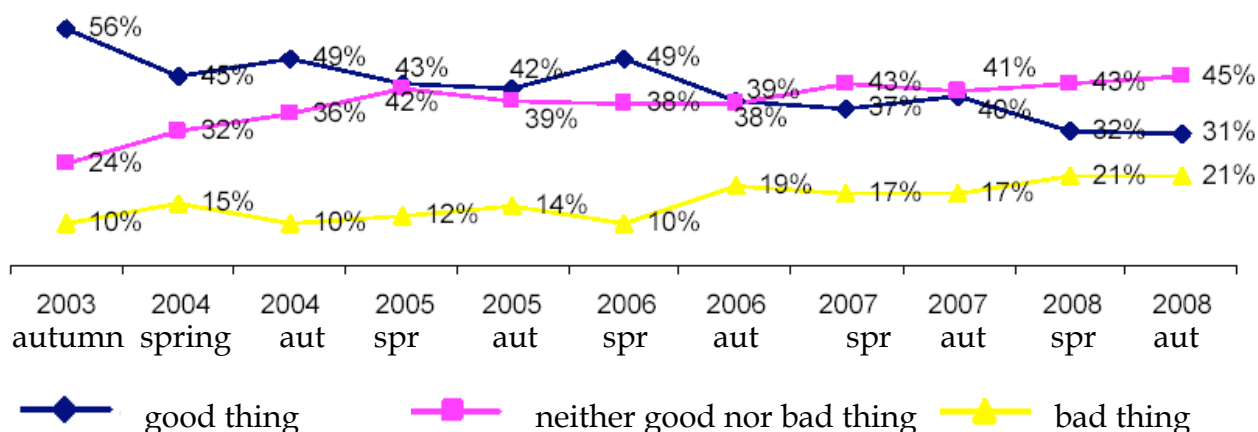
Before accession, the opinion of Hungarians was much more positive and their expectations high (see e.g. Tables 4 and 6). The date of accession approaching expectations started to vacillate, but still in autumn 2003 56% of the Hungarian population agreed that

<sup>14</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70\\_hu\\_nat.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70_hu_nat.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70\\_hu\\_nat.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70_hu_nat.pdf)

membership in the EU was a positive thing. Since the 2004 enlargement, the positive opinion of Hungarians about EU-membership has gradually decreased (pushing the country to the last but one place among EU countries). And not only negative opinions have increased but neither-nor ambivalent opinions have doubled from 24 to 45 %, surpassing positive judgements (Table 13):

**Table 13. Modifications of opinions about EU membership in Hungary (2008)**



Source: Eurobarometer 70<sup>16</sup> National Report: Hungary: p.11.

## 2. Hungary and the EU

In the new millennium, observers of Hungary have had to acknowledge that the country was titting on a peculiar path, in many ways different in its direction from its fellow post-communist neighbours. Compared to its special situation among other East and Central Eastern European countries before the political changes, the country gradually lost its advance in most domains of political, economic or social life after the political change-over. The once so envied label of "*the happiest barrack of the camp*" no longer applies to Hungary. Its interior political and social development, its economic results are lagging behind the neighbours' and even more behind the expectations of the population. Global and European statistics about public opinion rank the country in the worse places concerning expectations, optimism both in the public and private domains. Hungarian citizens do not trust national institutions and while their trust in European institutions was high in the first years after accession, it started to decline in the recent past, especially as a result of public debates concerning European institutions and the Constitution. (Gallup<sup>17</sup>)

<sup>16</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70\\_hu\\_nat.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70_hu_nat.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.gallup.hu/Gallup/release/zimbabwe\\_090605.htm](http://www.gallup.hu/Gallup/release/zimbabwe_090605.htm) and [http://www.gallup.hu/Gallup/release/table\\_090605.html](http://www.gallup.hu/Gallup/release/table_090605.html) (last access: 12. 05. 2010)

This general grouch also affects the Hungarian populations' relationship to the EU, their image of the Union and their expectations and commitments. Although in most new member-states, public opinion about the EU and one's own country's membership has decreased since accession, there are, however, important differences between countries and regions. Some accession countries are well below the EU average in the consideration of their country's membership: Hungary is one of them. While Romania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia are significantly above the EU average (53%) in considering their own country's membership as a positive thing (66%, 65%, 62% and 59%, respectively), Hungary (31%) is in the lowest position with Latvia (27%) (see Table 3, Eurobarometer 70: 32<sup>18</sup>). Surveys show that public opinion about the EU was mainly eroded in the new member-states, in Hungary the change between autumn 2008 and spring 2009 was -5%. (Eurobarometer 71<sup>19</sup>)

Before accession in Hungary, both political elites and the vast majority of citizens regarded entry to the EU as the most important national goal and that for several reasons. Even NATO-entry was strongly supported because it was considered to be the first step in the much hoped for EU accession (Heller – Rényi 2003 a, b). During the campaign for NATO-referendum, one of the most often repeated pro-NATO arguments said *"we cannot refuse entering NATO because then "they" will not accept us in the EU"*. Opposition to EU accession was rather limited and scattered: Eurosceptic discourse was not very salient in the public sphere. In 2001, among candidate countries, Hungary showed the least support for Euroscepticism: 13% of the population were against membership (See Table 4 and Eurobarometer: CCEB 2001<sup>20</sup>).

There were some scattered signs of objection to EU membership before accession among citizens: such arguments mentioned the burden of European bureaucracy and expressed fears of uneven treatment between member-states. The most discussed topic of objection concerned agricultural land in the country, especially political representatives of the agricultural population, small farmers and village dwellers expressed their anguish that wealthy foreign investors would buy up cheap Hungarian agricultural land. Dragging negotiations and the always further gliding date of the expected accession also eroded the earlier enthusiasm of the public. Public opinion was highly uninformed about the conditions and the process of accession, as well as the possible outcomes and costs of membership. Negotiations were not made transparent for the public, either.

One of Hungary's main deceptions occurred when the decision of a 10-country accession had been decided because Hungarians hoped to enter the EU first, or at least in a first, limited set of countries: the analyses of public discourses show very clearly that the topic of accession was constructed as a "narrative of competition" among candidate countries, in which Hungary was always depicted as the best candidate, the one which is about to win. In another frequent and salient scenario Hungary was shown as the "best pupil in the classroom" of candidate countries, an eager beaver, complying with all tryouts and fulfilling all the requests of the severe jury (the EU negotiators). Yet another scenario

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<sup>18</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70\\_first\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70_first_en.pdf), Autumn 2008.

<sup>19</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb71/eb71\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb71/eb71_en.htm) (2009)

<sup>20</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/cceb/2001/cceb20011\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/cceb/2001/cceb20011_en.pdf)



followed the well-known structure of folk-tales in which Hungary had the role of the king's youngest but most cunning son who surmounting all the obstacles and tryouts wins the kingdom and the daughter of the neighbour king. This widely spread expectation forerunning the first deception about EU accession is strongly underpinned by the Hungarian population's complex problem of self-evaluation, namely that inferiority complex goes in pair with a high self-esteem that often entails the disdain of the others (neighbours, fellow nations sharing similar fate, etc.) and the cherishing of unrealistic hopes.

The general positive expectations of the Hungarian population about EU membership can be explained by the fact that accession was mainly considered as the direct path to better life, Western welfare or life standards. Hungarian public discourse often cited "*the Austrian brothers-in-law*" and their high salaries. But, in the case of Hungary, as mentioned earlier, the political, ideological and historical factors were also important: the wish to integrate or "reintegrate" the West, the desire to get compensation for historical grievances, or to constitute the "*bridge between East and West*" were often cited topics before accession. (Hungarians have always considered the country as the "*defending bastion of the West*" against aggression and attacks coming from the East: Tartars, Turks, etc.)

The process that pushed Hungary from one of the most accession-ready countries to a marooned position has several reasons ranging in various fields, as already mentioned above. Thus, Hungary is not only holding the least positive opinion among EU member-states concerning the country's benefits from membership (39 % compared to 56 % EU average) (Eurobarometer 70: 36), it also sticks out concerning the low satisfaction with life (46%) among EU countries (EU27 average being 76%).

Since accession, sentiment about the EU and the country's membership is firmly decreasing. Eurobarometer 70 (Autumn 2008) shows that 22% of Hungarians have a definitely negative image of the EU and this negative consideration shows a strong increase, because 6 months earlier it was only 16 %. As in other neighbouring countries, the reasons for decreasing trust and concern in EU affairs might be explained by internal reasons of EU negotiations, slow decision-making, the sudden emergence of a global economic crisis or just the fact that the functioning of the EU is hardly palpable in peoples' everyday experience.

The main reason, however, for citizens' pessimism in Hungary should be attributed to the very negative interior political and ideological development of the country: growing animosities among political parties and their followers fighting for power. The roughening ideological and political struggles have cut deep cleavages between political parties, but have also cleft the whole population. Nationwide communication and collaboration among politicians in ruling and opposition parties has seized. These coarse fights among political groups have become so crude that a state of non-communication has emerged for the last few years, pushing the country into a sterile warfare which prevents progress either in the economy or in public life. The struggle for political influence hardly hides a fierce struggle for economic resources, relationships and advantages because the problem of party financing has not been resolved for the last 20 years, so the current regulations do not permit the normal and smooth functioning of the parties and their election campaigns. The problem of party financing has introduced unlawful methods while party nomenclature and the political clients of the different parties are also insolently avid.

The ruthless struggles have generated a very pugnacious public life with escalating hate-speech, xenophobia and anti-Semitism. The consequent intensifying street violence and a series of mortal attacks on Gypsies have pushed the country into a kind of interior cold war. The country has gradually become totally divided among contentious political parties and their henchmen, making public arena into a battlefield. As a general remark, it can be stated that the degree of democracy is certainly more fragile in the country than it was in the early 90s, after the change-over. These proceedings have contributed to deepen negative expectations and pessimism of an already disillusioned and frustrated population. The level of trust in institutions, in political parties or even politics and public life in general has continued to decrease while extremist public discourse, as well as emerging extremist political groups keep on provoking and eroding the democratic establishment and public life. The problem goes beyond the borders and has grown into a general institutional problem: can the EU tackle the problem of “democratic deficit” inside one or several of its member-states. This also raises a more theoretical question: while, in general terms, more democracy is being expected by a more actively participating civil society, Hungarian recent developments show that certain uncivil political projects can successfully mobilize dissatisfied layers of the society and organise themselves into violent, uncivil groups relying on democratic provisions granted to civil society and movements.

### **The Hungarian political context**

In the following, we will try to find the roots of the current mistrust, pessimism and lack of interest in national and European politics in the main developments of recent Hungarian history as well as social history.

The most recent surveys (Századvég – Foresense, July 2009<sup>21</sup>), as well as the European Parliamentary elections in June 2009 show that in Hungary, political affinity and party affiliation are the main decisive factors in opinion formation about the EU. As a matter of fact, the country has known strong ideological cleavages for several decades. Especially two politico-ideological intellectual orientations had opposed each other since the 19<sup>th</sup> century about the necessary steps to make for the modernization and development of the country. The struggle between “Westernizers” and “Nationalist-Populists” was later widened by a third, “Socialist” alternative but subsequent political situations and various dominations never permitted a publicly elaborated consensus or even a rationalizing debate over these alternatives. Democratic traditions did not have the opportunity to be developed and spread in the population. The country had to endure various interior and foreign political dominations in the last few hundred years, radical turns in political loyalty had to be demonstrated to often changing powers and thus a certain “political culture” of “manoeuvring”, of disguising and jockeying has developed throughout the society. Private and public life and discourse have been strongly separated and people learned to use “double speech”, or “read and write between the lines”.

The East and Central Eastern European political changes in 1989-1990 certainly did affect the Hungarian population but not in the same way as in the neighbouring countries. While the Prague events were rightly called “Velvet Revolution”, the Hungarian situation

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.szazadvég.hu/kutatas/archivum/kozvelemen-y-kutatas-es-partreferencia-elemzes/atalakuloban-a-politikai-eroter-128.html> (last viewing: 12.05.2010)



was better labelled "*melancholic revolution*". Indeed, the Hungarian population had more to lose: the Kádár-regime, especially after the mid-60s was able to create a certain political, social and economic stability. The population got accustomed to a certain "*gulyás-communism*" or "*Frigidaire-socialism*" (as it was ironically called then, hinting to a higher standard of consumption than in fellow socialist countries), in return, certain important but taboo topics were not thematised (1956 revolution, the presence of Soviet troops, etc.). The most important unsettled problems, however, quickly burst out after the political turnover in 1990. Among these, the unsolved problems of the nation, the undiscussed Trianon-trauma, the situation of national minorities living in neighbouring countries, the defeated 1956 revolution and its unsettled goals, diverse heritages of past political regimes created a strongly divided political arena. In this heated situation the former opposing ideological intellectual orientations have been turned into squabbling political parties. The suddenly emptied political field enhanced strong rivalry among freshly founded parties, and their attempts to position themselves created very deep political cleavages causing strong struggles not only in the political arena and the public sphere but also in various other domains of life (private circles: workplaces, families, friendships, etc.).

Although in the 90s, during the first coalition (1990-1994) led by right-wing MDF (Forum of Hungarian Democrats) and the second, a coalition between MSZP, the Hungarian Socialist Party and liberal SZDSZ, the Alliance of Free Democrats (1994-1998) Hungary was in a leading position among post-communist countries, this advantage started to erode at the turning of the century during the right-wing coalition government of FIDESZ and FKGP (Hungarian Smallholders' Party) due to high state expenditure. After the large right wing party, FIDESZ lost the elections to a socialist-liberal coalition (MSZP - SZDSZ) in 2002, the imprudent economic policy caused by the ever growing bid among contending parties for public support continued during the next two electoral periods (2002-2010) of the socialist-liberal coalition. The country lost its leading position among post-communist countries because of the quickly growing financial deficit due to premature welfare regulations but also to political corruption and the still unsolved problem of party financing. The technocratic political elite of the left government was not only late in reacting to the economic crisis and the non negligible crisis in legitimacy but it has also been extremely clumsy in communication not being able to inform the citizens about the necessary steps to be taken and its planned reforms were successfully attacked and swept away by the populist discourse of the opposition which managed to mobilize the dissatisfied layers of the population.

Thus the political arena has gradually become more and more undermined with merciless political contentions since 2002, the struggles ascending to an even higher degree after 2006, the second defeat of FIDESZ. Since 2002, FIDESZ elaborated a complex behaviour and discourse, trying to collect voices from every possible layer of the population: from disillusioned lower and middle classes, nostalgic of the security and social order of the Kádár regime, in agricultural milieux, that were losing ground in the ever growing global competition, from traditional, Christian right wing electors, nostalgic of the once glorious past. They also tried to incorporate the most nationalist groups fighting for the reestablishment of "Greater-Hungary" but after some common manifestations these extremist groups were able to organise themselves and managed to mobilize important parts of the society with xenophobic, racist, chauvinist, irredentist extreme right wing discourses, nostalgic of and using symbols of fascist Hungary. The attempts of FIDESZ after 2002 to gather all these unsatisfied parts of the population can well be grasped in their slogans, some borrowed from football fans (similarly to Forza Italia): "Ria, ria,

Hungaria", "Hurray, Hungary" or more symbolic ones: "One flag, one camp" symbolising that every faction of the society dissatisfied with the ruling coalition has to support and vote for FIDESZ.

The long yearning of FIDESZ for power and its tendency of leering at the extreme right wing has resulted in strong radicalisation in every domain. Political positions became frozen permitting not even slight steps towards the opposing side without having to endure severe retribution or even dismissal from the party. In order to gather the largest possible opposition against the government, the main protagonists of FIDESZ constructed an extremely cynical dual discourse with regular concessions to the extreme-right wing. This "dance choreography"-like discursive strategy well known for Western analysts from extreme right-wing discourses of e.g. Jean-Marie Le Pen of Front National in France, can well be traced in discourses held by the main speakers of FIDESZ since 2002. This strategy consists of thematizing extreme-right wing topics and using radical extremist language from time to time in a consecutive series of discourses, the degree of radicalism of which varies in a carefully concocted manner while other speeches in the same sequence being less radical help to hush the occurrent objections thus providing possibilities to withdraw the radical positions in case reactions get too strong. This discursive strategy aims at preserving the regular electors of the party but opening a breach for the extremist right wing by sending to them allusions of common topics, values or sentiments. As a result of this cunning technique of enlarging the masses behind FIDESZ and encouraging all dissatisfied electors to join the opposition, political behaviour, as well as public discourse have become extremely violent. Since their defeat in 2002, FIDESZ started to organize "civil" political circles ("*polgári körök*"), with more or less radical programmes ensuring thus a large civil background of the party. In order to keep the otherwise passive and unconcerned layers of the population active, the discourses aimed at keeping a high level of mobilization all the time. The strategy of fattening up the opposition, which was used by FIDESZ from 2002 until the extreme right became too strong and autonomous, has introduced more and more unruly public behaviour and discourse. Some "civil" activists in the halo of FIDESZ managed to build up - unnoticed - a net of radical right-wing groups, including para-military (neo-fascist) organizations ("*Magyar Gárda*"). Jobbik, the far-right extremist party grew out of the opposition-enlarging choreography of FIDESZ. In coalition with the other extreme-right party, MIÉP, Jobbik was yet too weak to gain seats in the Hungarian Parliament in 2006, but it became more and more visible by adopting a strategy of continuous provocation and harassment of the Hungarian democratic system and institutions. As a result of their strategy, heated debates, racial argumentation and hate-speech have become everyday experience of the Hungarian population. The gradually more customary violence in public discourse has lead to more and more violent actions, as well. Not only mobilization and politicized street violence became frequent (extreme right-wing attack of the national television's headquarters, street riots at every national holiday, etc.) after September 2006, after the leaking out of the Prime Minister's impetuous soul-stirring speech addressed to socialist politicians in order to activate them, but racial menaces against minorities (e.g. publishing private personal data of presumed Jewish judges or politicians on the internet) and a series of murders against Gipsy population in small villages have become recurring and uncontrolled by an extremely destabilized police and judiciary.

Jobbik, the extreme-right wing radical party owing its emergence to the nurturing "civil" circles of FIDESZ and the growing frustration of the population, was able to attain 15% at

the 2009 EP elections, gaining 3 seats out of 22 with a clearly anti-EU discourse<sup>22</sup>. The far-right party was able to strengthen its positions and reach important masses of the population, especially in the economically most disadvantaged regions of the country where – tragically enough – the Gypsy population is the highest, living in conditions of great necessity, nearly total unemployment and growing social segregation. The increasing general strife in the political arena and the undeniable gliding to the right caused that so far publicly unpronounceable opinions and discourses appeared more and more often in the mainstream media and in various layers of the public sphere. Neo-Nazi symbols are widely used in public spaces, like the flag of the former “Árpád-ház”, the first Hungarian royal dynasty (early Middle-Ages): during the fascist period of the country, this flag was reintroduced as a Nazi symbol of the then extreme-right wing fascist movement (“Arrow-cross”). Stickers of Greater-Hungary appear massively on cars and Anti-Semitic, Anti-Gypsy discourse has become frequent both in Internet fora and even in mainstream right-wing newspapers (some of these articles are written by journalists, members of FIDESZ or close friends of its leaders).

Before the 2009 EP elections, FIDESZ politicians realized that their over-enveloping strategy aiming at attracting the most right-wing population was being menaced by the growing popularity of Jobbik. As a consequence, FIDESZ EP campaign strategy was changed: political discourses refrained from former extremist allusions, the symbols of the extreme-right (like the flag of the “Árpád-ház”) disappeared from FIDESZ public manifestations and the speakers of FIDESZ clearly demarcated themselves from the radical extremist party.

Before the EP elections, the highly divided political arena and the unmerciful struggles among political forces resulted in a total lack of not only consensus but even communication among political actors, parties and even layers of the population. This situation strongly defines public opinion and the feelings and sentiments of the population.

## **EU accession**

The way the EU has been seen in Hungary since the political turnover, is strongly affected and shaped by the deep divisions in public life and the inner political developments of the country. From 1989 to 2002 the political elite (all political parties represented in the national Parliament) shared the consensus of the goal of EU accession. (Lakner 2004) At that time, only small parties on the edges of the political arena (extreme-right MIEP, small communist Munkáspárt), as well as some peripheral civil movements took an anti-EU position. The tendency to follow Western models for catching up with Western Europe was strong and expectations of a subsequent quick development were high, although public opinion was very little informed: there were only vague ideas and a hazy positive anticipation among the citizens. The topic of EU accession and the preceding negotiations were rather randomly treated in public discourse. Media coverage was very poor and started to tackle the question only before the 2003 referendum when negotiations were nearly completed and the political establishment all of a sudden, feared that public opinion would not support accession. Thus, before the referendum, a public debate was

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<sup>22</sup> Since 2009 Jobbik has been able to reinforce its popularity. In the 2010 national parliamentary elections, they attained 47 seats in the 386-seat Hungarian Parliament.

launched. This pro-EU official campaign dealt with rather petty problems: the strongest public debates focused around the dreaded ban of the EU on old Hungarian traditions, like traditional village pig sticking, the use of poppy in traditional pastry or the permitted pitch of cucumbers. The campaign attempted to reassure the population that the EU was not going to intervene in their everyday customs but will bring development by assuring financial support for modernization. In this early period, anti-EU opinion was scarce in the country but the proportion of those not having opinion was high. Pro-EU discourse was built on technocratic arguments concerning EU financial aid in reconstruction and Europeanization of certain fields of the economy, institutions and infrastructure but emotional and cultural arguments were also widely used, hinting at the common European culture and civilization, as well as the common European heritage and past without mentioning national grievances (long foreign (Austrian) rule, the injustice of the Versailles-Trianon-Treaty, Yalta, the vainly awaited help in 1956, etc.)

But the two stunning defeats of FIDESZ (2002 and 2006) quickly undermined the former consensus of the political elite and strongly affected the public. In its attempt to cramp the functioning of the government, every issue became an occasion for political conflict and the country's relations with EU did not constitute an exception. EU issues have become subtopics of more and more heated and alienated debate with internal political stakes. The most disturbing topic has been formed around the situation of ethnic Hungarians living in neighbouring countries and the FIDESZ even forced an unsuccessful referendum about providing official Hungarian nationality to all of them (2004). This bitter debate, fuelled by the extreme right, completed the deep division of the country, irritating fellow candidate countries and offending Hungarian minorities on the other side of the borders. Moreover, the strong thematization of the problem of Hungarian ethnic minorities (and the strong ties of this topic with Trianon: Greater-Hungary and the lost territories) served as a symbolic depreciation of the EU: it meant that the sublimation of borders as an EU project is not "enough", and that it is not taken seriously by the right wing political parties – whether extremist or not.

Thus, since 2002 and with the deterioration of the political arena, the topic of the EU, its image and the country's relation to it have become part of the interior political struggle, and the political cleavages strongly govern people's opinion about the EU, as well.

### Turnout - Definitive<sup>23</sup>

Election year	National turnout (%)	European turnout (%)
2004	38.5	45.47
2009	36.31	43

Source: TNS opinion in collaboration with the EP.

Momentary political preferences of the population clearly governed the voting activities during the 2009 EP elections. This tendency was strongly reinforced by the fact that the main topics of the debate were almost exclusively interior political problems and

<sup>23</sup> [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/hungary\\_en\\_txt.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/hungary_en_txt.html)

discourses during the campaign mainly aimed at conveying distrust in the adversary political forces.

### Results by national party<sup>24</sup> - Definitive results of 2009 EP elections<sup>25</sup>

Political party	Percentage %
FIDESZ-KDNP	56.36
MSZP	17.37
JOBBIK	14.77
MDF	5.31
LMP-HP	2.61
SZDSZ	2.16
Munkáspárt	0.96
MCF ROMA Ö	0.46
Others	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: TNS opinion in collaboration with the EP.

### Seats by political group<sup>26</sup> - 08 July 2009 at 09:20 CEST<sup>27</sup>

Political group	Number of seats
EPP	14
S&D	4

<sup>24</sup> FIDESZ - KDNP : FIDESZ - Magyar Polgári Szövetség, Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt (Coalition of FIDESZ Hungarian Civic Union and Christian-Democratic People's Party), MSZP : Magyar Szocialista Párt (Hungarian Socialist Party), JOBBIK : Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom (Movement for a Better Hungary), SZDSZ : Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége (Alliance of Free Democrats), MDF : MAGYAR DEMOKRATA FÓRUM (Hungarian Democratic Forum), MUNKÁSPÁRT : MAGYAR KOMMUNISTA MUNKÁSPÁRT (Hungarian Communist Workers Party), LMP-HP : LEHET MÁΣ A POLITIKA - HUMANISTA PÁRT (Politics Can Be Different +Humanist Party coalition), MCF ROMA Ö. : MCF ROMA ÖSSZEFOGÁS PÁRT (Forum of Hungarian Gipsy Organisations – Roma Coalition)

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/hungary\\_en\\_txt.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/hungary_en_txt.html) (2009)

<sup>26</sup> EPP : Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats), S&D : Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament , ALDE : Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, GREENS/ EFA : Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, ECR : European Conservatives and Reformists Group, GUE/ NGL : Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left, EFD : Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group, NA : Non-attached

<sup>27</sup> [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/hungary\\_en\\_txt.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/hungary_en_txt.html) (2009)

ALDE	0
GREENS/EFA	0
ECR	1
GUE/NGL	0
EFD	0
NA	3

Source: TNS opinion in collaboration with the EP.

### Summary table - 08 July 2009 at 09:21 CEST<sup>28</sup>

Parties	%	Seats	EPP	S&D	ALDE	GREEN S/ EFA	ECR	GUE/ NGL	EFD	NA
FIDESZ-KDNP	56.36	14	14							
MSZP	17.37	4		4						
JOBBIK	14.77	3								3
MDF	5.31	1					1			
LMP-HP	2.61	0								
SZDSZ	2.16	0								
Munkáspárt	0.96	0								
MCF ROMA Ö	0.46	0								
Others	0	0								
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>

Source: TNS opinion in collaboration with the EP.

The 2009 July survey (Századvég – Foresense<sup>29</sup>, July 2009) indicates that opinions concerning the EU differ in the various political parties: thus 87 % of electors of the Socialist Party (MSZP) have a positive opinion about the country's EU membership, against 74 % in FIDESZ and 69 % in Jobbik. National Eurobarometer 71 measured that 45% of those declaring themselves left wing voters think it is good to be in the EU against 28% of right wing voters. Those positioning themselves in the middle agree to 35%<sup>30</sup>. It is an interesting contradiction, that more people think that the country has profited from EU membership (39%) than those who agree with the country's membership (31%)! Some months later, at the end of 2009, the majority of the population (51%) think that Hungary did not profit from its EU membership!

<sup>28</sup> [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/hungary\\_en\\_txt.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/hungary_en_txt.html) (2009)

<sup>29</sup> Századvég – Foresense <http://www.szazadveg.hu/kutatas/archivum/kozvelemeney-kutatas-es-partreferencia-elemzes/atalakuloban-a-politikai-eroter-128.html> (last viewing: 12.05.2010)

<sup>30</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70\\_hu\\_nat.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70_hu_nat.pdf)

There are, however, important differences in different parts of the country. Big towns and, especially Budapest, have more urban traditions, and the population is more inclined to Western-type way of life and public discourse. Thus the positive opinion of the population of Budapest concerning the EU surpasses the national average by 20%. In the same way, high income and high education strongly increase agreement with EU membership. There are, however, certain issues that are crucial factors of the opinion of the population: in 2007, 49 % of the Hungarian population thought that the country's EU membership did wrong to Hungarian agriculture and this proportion increased to 66 % in 2009. Many people think that EU membership negatively affected unemployment and the country's economic situation (36 % in 2007, 45 % in 2009). The only clearly positively evaluated domains are culture and the possibility of working abroad. The best supported EU policies are common defence and security policy, common foreign policy and the EMU, and the least supported one is future enlargement.

In comparison to 45% of EU27, who affirm that their country became more stable economically by its EU membership, in Hungary this score is only 29 % although it may have been distorted by the global economic crisis which is strongly felt throughout the country. Hungarian public opinion is also similarly divided concerning the way people judge how things in the EU progress: 29 % think in a good direction, 31 % in a bad direction and 29% think it is neither good nor bad.

### **Key actors of Eurosceptic discourse in Hungary**

The analysis of both media and party campaign materials (leaflets, ads, posters, etc.), as well as online webpages demonstrate that the Hungarian EP campaign was mainly dominated by domestic issues. EU topics were seldom thematized or discussed and, if they were, the main stakes were still domestic. Main actors in the EP campaign were Hungarian party politicians and the analyses show that the debates interpreted the stakes and the outcomes of the elections as domestic party political stakes. Thus very few European actors appeared in the campaign either as active speakers or as authorities whose opinions or activities would have been cited. The main European figures having had a voice during the campaign were José Manuel Barroso and László Kovács, the Hungarian member of the Commission (Socialist).

As a general tendency, it can be affirmed that in a kind of "cynical political strategy", most political parties make use of pro- or anti-EU arguments according to their momentary political interests. Eurosceptic views could be found in each political group although to very different degree, but Eurosceptic voices were mainly concentrated on the political edges. Small political parties, not being able to achieve 5 % of voices at parliamentary elections and thus not present in the Parliament, as well as civil society movements of various ideologies are the main actors expressing various discursive constructions of Eurosceptic, Euro-critic or plainly anti-EU discourses. It has to be mentioned, however, that the more a party is at the edges of the actual political arena, the more its speakers expressed Eurosceptic views. This was the case both on the left and right edges: MKMP (the Hungarian Communist Workers Party) or Munkáspárt (Workers Party) professed Eurosceptic or Eurocritical views mainly on ideological, anti-capitalist grounds, while MIÉP, a small extreme right wing party, or Jobbik, the quickly growing far-right radical party on nationalist grounds. The relative success of Jobbik at the 2009 EP elections promptly illustrates the gliding effect that characterises the Hungarian political arena and

public sphere since the regime change. Extremist and exclusionist opinions and discourse generally appear first on the edges and are gradually introduced into the middle of the public arena and public speech by authorised actors. This very choreography could be detected several times in the last 20 years, starting with the debate on national affiliation in 1990 (Heller – Rényi 1996).

The main party in opposition, right wing FIDESZ, played a double game backing and rejecting European integration in various discourses but sometimes even in the same discourse. It is also significant of the double-discourse of FIDESZ that on the party's webpage among news concerning the EU, a great number of news items are negative or tackle problems of the EU. This discursive strategy is constituted of gathering and thus accentuating negative opinions and arguments without committing oneself openly to the negative contents.

Examples of Eurosceptic discourse in various parties:

*"We like Europe but we would like to have a different Europe"* Gyula Thürmer (leader of MKMP-list: Communist Party)

*"I have to grow up in a world where only money counts. People wade over each other in order to get further. There is no trustable workplace, no future, nothing is in Hungarian hands and the 'multis' exploit us"* (MKMP TV clip)

*"Our EU membership has no sense, unless we can better enforce our national interests. The system of colonisation should be eliminated."* Gábor Sütő (leader of MIÉP-list: extreme right wing party)

*"...so far Hungary's EU membership only brought about impoverishment and social belatedness..."* Tímea Szabó (leader of LMP+HP list: Politics Can Be Different +Humanist Party coalition)

*"Hungary for Hungarians"* (Poster of Jobbik: extra right-wing party)

### **Categorization of standpoints and discourses**

The Hungarian Eurosceptic arena does not seem to justify categorizations done by political scientists. Taggart and Szczarbiak (2003) make a differentiation between hard and soft Eurosceptics, claiming that "hard" groups reject EU integration at all, while among the "soft" groups they see a difference between "policy Eurosceptics who only oppose a deeper integration and "national-interest Eurosceptics" who are not against the integration but want to strengthen national interests in common European projects. It is true that in Hungary, all these variants of Eurosceptic groups exist but their degree and scope of Euroscepticism is different from the above mentioned definitions. Most Eurosceptic affirmations have to be interpreted according to momentary political and communicative context in order to understand their precise meaning in the complex political struggle.

One of the strongest dividing lines between various standpoints towards the European Union can be attributed to whether their main focus is on values or on interests. Although



most of the important universalistic values have been depreciated in the aftermath of the regime-change, among the Hungarian political orientations there are groups that emphasise their agreement with European values contained by the political philosophy of the EU treaties: values like democracy, freedom, human rights, equality, etc. are the most important ones. Actors holding Eurosceptic positions in this classification either reject these values (the extreme right wing Jobbik and other extremist groups) or relativize them in two different ways.

A) Value-centred discourses criticize the EU for not following strictly these commonly accepted and highly evaluated values. In a way, these discourses can be said to criticize the actual functioning of the EU and its institutions but not negating the founding values.

B) Another Eurosceptic position, however, consists of relegating these founding values in the background and putting the emphasis on interests. Interest-based positions and discourses can be pro-EU or anti-EU, depending on how they evaluate interest-preferences but in a certain sense, interest-based standpoints are in general more in favour of a loosely connected EU (Recon model 1 and to a lesser degree Recon model 2).

When interests are in the focus of the evaluation of the EU, the question always arises: whose interests are being observed or put in the first place. Pro-EU discourse in this category can still be divided into two main types:

A) The first one observes the EU as a “common good”, thus affirming that EU members have a number of common interests and that by securing these interests, everybody, all the members will be on the winning side. In this conception, the EU constitutes a higher, more complex structure, a new phase in development, especially in the context of globalization, strengthening economic competition or global economic crisis. The EU then protects common interests of its members whether they be economic, political or social interests.

B) Another interest-based pro-EU standpoint concentrates on the common interests of a lesser group: most often the nation-state. These discourses aim at serving and preserving national interests and assert that the EU can and does promote these interests (Recon model 1 and 2 are relevant in these cases).

Interest-based standpoints, however, most often belong to the Eurosceptic side, because they do not see any satisfactory way of conjugating national and European interests. Their criticism might be a milder or a tougher one, depending on the aims and goals they attribute to EU actors on different levels and in different institutions.

A) The milder Eurosceptic discourse claims that national or regional etc. interests are not evaluated in the same way, they are not attributed the same weight, so the criticism points at the non-satisfactory mechanisms of equating demands and requests. These opinions also express their anxiety because they see strong imbalance between interests of various actors and entities.

B) Strong Eurosceptic discourse centring on interests clearly affirm that the EU more or less openly serves the interests of the “others”. Discourse analyses found that the “others” may mean – according to various discourses and speakers - countries of Western Europe, the first EU member-states or simply foreign interests, multinational groups, global capitalism. The narrative construction of these discourses aims to demonstrate that “our”

national interests are turned down because the EU protects the interest of the “others”. In general, the most often expressed fears concern the unequal treatment of Western / Eastern member-states, big / small countries, old / new member-states, neighbouring countries / Hungary, etc.

Discourse analyses conducted on a large sample of various campaign materials of the 2009 EP elections led to the identification of a wide set of Eurosceptic arguments of the above mentioned types. These arguments can well be classified according to actors, topics, political standpoints and discursive methods.

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